Gender Differences in Civilian Stigma of Combat-related and Military Sexual Trauma-related PTSD

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Gender Differences in Civilian Stigma Associated with Combat-related and Military Sexual Trauma-related PTSD

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Abstract

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a debilitating mental disorder often associated with servicemembers, can be associated with trauma such as combat and Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Stigma, or the negative social identity attributed to a feature or characteristics of an individual, is a factor associated with PTSD. In the current study, participants read vignettes and responded to measures of attitude, stigma, and devaluing and discrimination. ANOVA analyses revealed an overall pattern of greater stigma associated with the male character and greater stigma associated with PTSD than a physical injury, but minimal differences between combat-related and MST-related PTSD.

Method

- **Participants:** 428 U.S. microwavers recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk
- **Measures:** Mental Illness Attitude Scale (MIAS; Kobau et al., 2010); Mental Illness Stigma Scale (MISS; Day et al., 2007); Perceived Devaluation Discrimination Scale (PDDS; Link, 1982)
- **Vignette:** Michael/Velicia is a service member in the United States Armed Forces. She was directly involved in combat in the Middle East and was involved in an explosion/sexually assaulted by another member in his/her unit. She was recently medically discharged to receive care for combat-related PTSD/rape-related PTSD referred to her/his service.

Figures

- **Figure 1:** Interaction and Main Effects of MIAS Stigma Rating
- **Figure 2:** Significant Gender Main Effects
- **Figure 3:** Significant Trauma Main Effects

Hypotheses

- **Civilian ratings will differ significantly on stigma towards the character in the vignette and will be measured using ANOVA.**
- **Hypothesis 1a:** An effect of a more negative attitudes, greater stigma, and greater perceived devaluation and discrimination will be associated with a male servicemember versus a female servicemember across type of trauma.
- **Hypothesis 1b:** A main effect of more negative attitudes, greater stigma, and greater perceived devaluation and discrimination will be associated with MST-related PTSD than combat-related PTSD across gender, and these will both be higher than the control condition across gender.

Table 1: Significant Interactions and Main Effects for All ANOVAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Effect</th>
<th>Gender Main Effect</th>
<th>Trauma Main Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MIAS</strong></td>
<td>7.499*** .001 .038</td>
<td>8.450** .004 .022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISS Tre.</strong></td>
<td>5.552* .019 .014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISS RD</strong></td>
<td>8.402** .004 .022</td>
<td>4.109* .017 .021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISS Hyg.</strong></td>
<td>7.228** .007 .019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISS Anx.</strong></td>
<td>5.994* .015 .016</td>
<td>3.890* .021 .020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISS Rec.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.894** .002 .025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISS Prof.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PDDS</strong></td>
<td>9.646*** .000 .048</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

- **Civilian ratings of stigma towards the character in the vignette will be measured using ANOVA.**
- **Hypothesis 1a:** Supported
  - There was greater stigma associated with the male character than the female character across DVs.
- **Hypothesis 1b:** Not supported
  - There was not a significant difference between combat-related and rape-related stigma. MIAS and some factors of MISS partially supported the hypothesis because there was greater stigma towards both PTSD conditions than the physical injury conditions. LDDS results were the opposite of what was predicted: greater stigma was associated with the physical injury condition than the PTSD conditions.

Implications

- **Reduce barriers to treatment by civilian providers**
- **Inform “Green Zone” training program on college campuses**
- **Inform civilian involvement in the Department of Defense’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office “Lines of Effort” (Prevention, Investigation, Accountability, Advocacy/Victim Assistance, and Assessment)**

Takeaway: Civilian stigma exists, but may not be as bad as servicemembers believe it to be, particularly in regards to MST.