

Veterans Treatment Court: Impacts of PTSD, TBI and Co-Occurring Disorders

Abstract:

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a set of mental health symptoms (resulting from a traumatic event) that can greatly influence how a person is able to function in his or her daily life. Often, these symptoms are greatly misunderstood by the person with PTSD as well as those around them, further complicating relationships, academic functioning, and occupational functioning, leading to severely reduced quality of life.

Military service, and combat in particular, can uniquely contribute to posttraumatic stress, with traumatic brain injury (TBI, a signature wound of the recent wars) also leading to impairment and reduced quality of life. Alcohol and drug use is a common means of coping with these aversive experiences, but substance use often exacerbates symptoms and can increase likelihood of significant problems, including legal issues.

This presentation will describe PTSD and TBI and the interplay with substance use in Veterans, with the primary objective of helping attendees formulate a better understanding of how military experiences and trauma symptoms intersect with substance use and legal problems.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will:

- 1) gain an understanding of the core features of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and resulting impact on daily functioning
- 2) understand some of the unique contributions of combat military service to PTSD presentation in Veterans
- 3) explore the interplay between PTSD and substance use concerns in Veterans

Faculty Bio:

Dr. Erica Simon is a licensed clinical psychologist working at the National Center for PTSD in the Dissemination and Training Division in Menlo Park, California. She has worked in a variety of treatment settings within the VA Healthcare System serving Veterans with PTSD and other mental health concerns. She is currently working on research projects aimed at reducing relationship distress through low-intensity interventions in couples where PTSD is present, increasing patient engagement in treatment, increasing clinician implementation of best practices for PTSD, and re-imagining how mental health care is conducted within healthcare systems. Dr. Simon believes that the interests of Veterans should be at the heart of VA healthcare and she is particularly interested in improving mental health care access through human-centered innovations.