

The disorder — often called PTSD — can bring nightmares, withdrawal, irritability and difficulty with intimacy.

The U.S. Veteran Affairs Department has a National Center for PTSD that [offers information for caregivers](#).

Things to consider:

It's not just for young veterans: PTSD can be cyclical. Someone who saw action in Vietnam, for instance, may not experience symptoms while busy with a career.

“With our aging veteran population, we do get new cases,” said Leslie Morland, a psychologist with the National Center for PTSD and a University of California San Diego psychiatry and psychology associate professor.

“Work is a coping mechanism that allowed them to stay focused. All of a sudden they retire, and for the first time some of these symptoms can come up.”

Also, PTSD has been discussed more widely in the past 15 years in regard to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. That has prompted some older veterans to realize what their symptoms are.

“Their partner says, ‘Wait a minute, you have that, you do that.’ And all of a sudden there’s a label they can put on something they’ve been doing for a very long time,” Morland said.

Treatment is available: The VA offers two gold-standard therapies that have been proven to relieve symptoms.

They are cognitive-processing therapy and prolonged-exposure therapy. The treatment involves 12 to 15 sessions with a counselor, in individual or group settings. Anti-depressant medication is commonly prescribed, as well.

“Does that mean someone is cured? It’s a tricky question. In many cases, symptoms can improve to where they no longer have a diagnosis,” Morland said.

Caregivers make a difference: Social support plays a large role in recovery, resilience and prevention of symptoms.

“In the Defense Department, the idea is that if your family system is strong, the soldier is strong,” Morland said.

“In the VA, we are trying to make sure we are not just working with the individual veteran, but really acknowledging the family system.”

The VA is in the middle of a study looking at the effectiveness of treating PTSD in the context of a couple. It’s a four-year study at the San Diego VA that will include up to 180 couples.

More resources: [Coaching Into Care](#) is a national VA telephone service that aims to educate, support and empower family members and friends who are seeking care or services for a veteran. Call (888) 823-7458.

[Help for family and friends:](#) When someone you care about has PTSD, it affects you, too. Even if your partner, family member or friend with PTSD is getting treatment and getting better, you may still feel drained, worried or even frustrated. This VA webpage offers many resources.

Caregiving tips by diagnosis: [This link offers advice](#) specific to PTSD.

The [Vet Center Combat Call Center](#) is a 24-hour telephone line for combat veterans and their families to talk about their military experience or issues about readjustment to civilian life. Call (877) WAR-VETS.

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Testing spiritual therapy for Veterans with PTSD



Dr. Harold Koenig heads the Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health at Duke University. *(Photo courtesy of Duke)*

In recent years, researchers have examined the impact of moral injury on the health of Veterans with PTSD, including those who fought in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. But few studies have tried to gauge the effectiveness of religion in treating PTSD-stricken Veterans who are experiencing moral injury.

An ambitious one based on the spiritual model will soon begin at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. It will include about 60 Veterans who indicate that religion is important in their lives. They must have significant PTSD symptoms.

“The efficacy of current therapies for moral injury and PTSD is limited,” says Dr. Donna Ames, a psychiatrist at VA Greater Los Angeles who is leading the trial. “Many Veterans may be seeking an alternative approach to their distress from moral injury. An approach that incorporates their religious beliefs may be something Veterans for whom faith is important are seeking.”

One of the trial’s core elements is [cognitive processing therapy](#) (CPT), a popular trauma-based psychotherapy that has helped many Veterans with PTSD overcome troubling experiences. It features a 12-session treatment plan that teaches people to evaluate upsetting thoughts that have existed since trauma, with a focus on changing the way they look at themselves and the world. Therapists teach skills that help a person decide whether there are better ways to think about trauma.

Study will compare three approaches

The participants will be randomized into three groups that receive either secular CPT; a spiritual form of CPT administered by psychologists and other certified health professionals; or a form of pastoral care administered by chaplains.

Dr. Michelle Pearce, a University of Maryland psychologist who specializes in spirituality and healthcare, led creation of the [psychologist-driven spiritual CPT](#), which differs from standard CPT in several ways. For one, it targets moral injury as a barrier to recovering from PTSD; standard CPT targets PTSD. Also, spiritual CPT integrates a patient's religious resources, such as beliefs, practices, sacred writings, values, and motivations, into a standard secular psychotherapy.

Dr. Harold Koenig, a professor of psychiatry at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, assisted Pearce in creating the spiritual therapy. The two are co-investigators in the randomized clinical trial.

In a spinoff of the spiritual CPT model, Koenig and a nationwide group of chaplains created a more religion-specific, chaplain-centered approach that is divided into the teachings of five major religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The Veterans randomized to the chaplain group can choose the version of pastoral care they want based on their religious faith.

Prior to receiving the therapy, participants will answer a questionnaire that is based on a scale created by Koenig and his colleagues to assess the severity of their moral injury symptoms (see main article). The scale consists of 10 indicators of moral injury: guilt, shame, betrayal, moral concerns, religious struggles, loss or religious faith and hope, loss of meaning and purpose, difficulty forgiving, loss of trust, and self-condemnation.

The scale comes in two forms: a 10-question version that is best suited for clinicians because of its brevity, and a 45-question version that is tailored for researchers because of its depth in assessing the details of moral injury.

The Veterans will complete the 10-item version before each of the 12 sessions to see which symptoms on the scale most need to be addressed by the therapist or chaplain.

They'll fill out the 45-item version at baseline, six weeks, at the end of the clinical trial at 12 weeks, and at the 18-week mark to see if moral injury symptoms are persisting.

‘Using the best of both worlds to attack the problem’

“Among those in the spiritual CPT or chaplain-delivered groups, we’ll first identify the religious beliefs that are important to them,” Koenig says. “We’ll then use those beliefs to counteract some of the negative thoughts and fears that are associated with moral injury in the setting of PTSD. We’re targeting moral injury, so we’re going to use the person’s religious beliefs and scriptures to help heal those wounds. We think that by addressing the 10 aspects of moral injury, PTSD conditions are going to perhaps improve or at least be a lot easier to treat.”

He adds: “PTSD is very difficult to treat, especially when it becomes chronic. A lot of Veterans have difficulty complying with drugs and psychotherapy because it’s not ingrained in the belief system that they grew up with, especially religious Veterans. So if we can relieve some of those moral injury symptoms, we think their PTSD may also get better. We’ll see.”

Koenig and his colleagues hypothesize that the spiritual CPT administered by psychologists will outperform the secular CPT and the chaplain approach in reducing moral injury symptoms.

“That’s because you’re using the best of both worlds to attack the problem,” he says. “It involves powerful tools used by mental health professionals, along with a person’s religious and spiritual beliefs, to process the thoughts and behaviors that are destroying someone’s well-being and relationships with others. But we could be surprised. A pastoral care intervention delivered by chaplains hasn’t been tested for treating moral injury or PTSD, so we don’t know how it’s going to affect the participants. Maybe some Veterans don’t always need a psychologist or licensed mental health professional to help with these problems. This is such a fascinating and exciting study because of the many things we may learn from it.”

--- *Mike Richman*

Talking about Sexual Abuse

In the last year, many women and men have spoken up publicly about being sexually assaulted or sexually harassed.

Many Veterans of all backgrounds have had unwanted sexual experiences during their military service or at other times. Because of this, public discussions about these topics may bring up painful memories and feelings. Even if you think the public discussion is a good thing, it may still be difficult.



Common Reactions to the Public Discussion

You may notice more sudden, strong emotions; images of your own sexual assault or sexual harassment experiences; trouble concentrating; poor sleep or nightmares; feeling helpless, anxious, or depressed; or other changes. This is normal, and it does not mean there has been a setback in your recovery.

Remind yourself it is okay to feel upset.

It is very normal to have more struggles than usual, and you may need to spend more time doing things that help you support and care for yourself. You might consider downloading a smartphone app that teaches coping strategies. See examples at the LINK VA App Store.

Limit exposure to media.

Notice how the news or social media stories are affecting you, and if need be, limit how much you look at them. You can also focus on reading the stories that give you hope or make you feel supported, and avoid the rest.

Get support.

Spend time with people you enjoy. This helps everyone get through tough times. Even if you do not tell others about your own experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment, it can still help to be with others. You can say, “I’m having a rough time right now,” without sharing details if that feels right. Or, you can spend time with someone without telling them that you are struggling.

Get Help.

There are many resources available to you:

- [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network* \(RAINN\)](#) carries out programs to prevent sexual assault, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.
- [DoD Safe Helpline](#). provides confidential one-on-one assistance for individuals who have experienced military sexual trauma, rape, or domestic violence. Call or text 1-877-995-5247 to talk with someone 24/7.
- Free VA Services for [Veterans who have experienced MST](#)(regardless of whether they have a VA disability rating).
- [Every VA health care facility](#) has a MST Coordinator who can answer any questions Veterans might have about VA's MST-related issues and help Veterans access VA services and programs.
- Find VA PTSD Treatment programs with our [PTSD Program Locator](#).

Letter from Susan Edmonds Robins Commissary Director 406 926-3714

Our next On-Site Sale in Marietta will be held 17-19 May 2018. Times for the sale are Thursday and Friday - 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM and Saturday 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM.

The address is 1901 Terrell Mill Rd., Suite 200 Marietta, GA 30067. Take I-75 and turn onto Windy Hill Rd. Turn toward Smyrna and travel approximately 2-3 miles. You will turn right onto Cobb Parkway. Stay in the far right hand lane. You will travel approximately 1/4 mile and will turn right into Marietta Plaza. We are located next door to Burlington.

If you would like to place a special order for pick up at the sale, please send your order by email to susan.edmonds2@deca.mil no later than Monday, 7 May 2018. This will allow enough time to get the items you want and to get them ready for shipment up to the sale. Any orders received after this date will not be able to be filled for the May sale. Remember, you will need to purchase the entire case on dry items. If you want special cuts of meats, special packaging, etc. just let us know. Meat items do not have to be ordered by the case.

I have attached a flyer with future dates of the sales. I have also included a flyer from the Cobb Chamber of Commerce on agencies that will be at the sale to provide additional information for our veterans. I have also attached a flyer with authorized ID cards that will allow you to shop.

Thank everyone that sent in suggestions on items they would like to see at the sales. This will help us in getting the right item mix and providing our patrons with what they want.

Please pass this information on to everyone you know that has commissary privileges. We need to keep the numbers of shoppers high so we can continue this benefit.

If I can answer any questions, please feel free to call.

We look forward to seeing you at the sale.

It's a Veterans Affair. Fellowship with the Veterans for Christ, Inc. at Bo Jangles 2685 Panola Rd. May 19th. Come out taste and see what cooking in your Community at all Bo Jangles. 10 % discount for all Veterans purchases.

New Veterans for Christ, Inc. Chapter coming soon in Bethlehem, Ga.

The Veterans for Christ, Inc. will be starting a new chapter in the Athens area in the coming months to help veterans less fortunate than ourselves.

For further information on this new chapter email David McKinney at gtp0.148@gmail.com

YOU TOO CAN BE A MEMBER OF THE VETERANS FOR CHRIST, INC.

Sign up online to become an associate member. The annual associate membership of \$120.00 which can be used as a tax deduction for supporters. Registration fees can be paid online through our PayPal account. You will get a free VFC T-shirt with your associate membership. Your tax deductible membership fee will support the VFC mission.

All Honorably Discharged Veterans are welcome to come and observe the VFC; feel free to ask questions and learn more. If we don't know the answer we know someone who does. Please browse our web site www.veteransforchristinc.org. There you'll find information on many subjects of interest to veterans. You'll also find a Newsletter for your branch of service and links to Social Security and many other links with an abundance of information.

Our monthly meetings are held at the God's Amazing Grace Christians Ministries 3576 Covington Hwy, . Decatur, Ga. Our meetings are the third Tuesday of every month and start at 6:30 (PM) for approximately one hour and a half, unless otherwise advertised. We will be respectful of your time.

Thank you for your interest in the VFC. We look forward to communicating and fellowshiping with you soon. We are looking for a corporate sponsor for our VFC Gerald Prince College Scholarship which is donated each September at our Anniversary Luncheon

"Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, being men of courage, be strong." 1Cor 16:13

Sincerely,

William A. Harris, Jr.

William A. Harris, Jr., USAF Retired
President, Veterans for Christ, Inc.

www.veteransforchristinc.org