

Influence of Trauma and Personality on Posttraumatic Cognitions in Military Veterans



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INTRODUCTION

- Military servicemembers experience many potentially traumatic events during their time in service, both related and unrelated to combat.
- One way to conceptualize the meaning of these events is through posttraumatic cognitions: self-blame, negative views of the world, and negative views of the self.
- Although trauma severity is the primary influence on the prominence of these posttraumatic cognitions, personality is also a factor, the predominant model of which is the Big Five.
- Of Big Five traits, neuroticism is positively associated, and agreeableness and extraversion are negatively associated, with posttraumatic cognitions.
- However, studies on this have been confined to interpersonal traumas in community samples and has not yet been replicated in a military sample exposed to military trauma.

METHODS

- Participants were 93 United States military veterans ($M_{age} = 48$, range: 25-76).
- Measures:
 - Combat trauma: *Combat Exposure Scale*
 - Non-combat trauma: *Life Events Checklist for the DSM-5*
 - Posttraumatic cognitions: *Posttraumatic Cognitions Inventory*
 - Personality traits: *International Personality Item Pool*
- We examined the influence of trauma and personality on posttraumatic cognitions using a Bayesian approach to multiple regression.

RESULTS

- Neuroticism had the most consistent association with each type of posttraumatic cognition, whereas agreeableness had a more specific effect (see Table 2).
- Combat trauma and negative life events had small, positive associations with negative views of the world and of the self, respectively.

DISCUSSION

- The tendency to feel bad is a risk factor for all cognitions, but being antagonistic towards others leads to negative views of the world specifically.
- It is increasingly common to target neuroticism in treating trauma-related and other mood disorders, but there has been less focus on how to address low agreeableness.
- This is an area for future work, as best practices in how to treat people who are generally disagreeable (military and civilian alike) is a common struggle among clinicians.

Neuroticism has the strongest influence on posttraumatic cognitions over and above military trauma.



Table 1

Sample Demographics

	%
Sex	
Female	30
Male	70
Race	
Asian	4
Black	13
Multiracial	3
Native American	2
Pacific Islander	1
White	75
Other	1
Branch	
Air Force	22
Army	31
Coast Guard	1
Marine Corps	10
Navy	18
Multiple branches	18

Table 2

Relative Influence of Traumatic Stressors and Personality Traits on Posttraumatic Cognitions

	Self-Blame			Negative Views of the Self			Negative Views of the World		
	β	95% HDI	R^2	β	95% HDI	R^2	β	95% HDI	R^2
Combat exposure	.07	[-.14, .28]	.30*	.16*	[.02, .30]	.67*	-.05	[-.20, .10]	.64*
Negative life events	.18	[-.04, .39]		.03	[-.11, .17]		.18*	[.03, .33]	
Agreeableness	.00	[-.26, .26]		-.08	[-.25, .09]		-.34*	[-.52, -.16]	
Conscientiousness	-.06	[-.27, .15]		-.14	[-.28, .00]		.05	[-.09, .20]	
Neuroticism	.34*	[.07, .60]		.61*	[.44, .79]		.44*	[.26, .63]	
Openness	-.01	[-.23, .21]		.06	[-.09, .20]		-.05	[-.21, .10]	
Extraversion	-.12	[-.35, .10]		-.07	[-.22, .08]		-.12	[-.28, .04]	

Note. * indicates 0 was not within 95% HDI.