The Correlation Between Level of Self-determination and Severity of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in Veterans

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Throughout history, the horrors of combat have left their mark on soldiers around the world through more than just external battle wounds. As years have passed, the number of men and women diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTS(D)), “a psychological condition experienced by a person who has faced a traumatic event, which caused a catastrophic stressor outside the range of usual human experience,” has rapidly increased (Chamberlin, 2012). The problem has grown exponentially; more soldiers die because of suicide than as a result combat itself. Because there is no definite cure for PTS(D), it is important to find the the correlation between two known variables, such as self-determination, the degree to which one feels control over his/her life, and PTS(D) symptom severity. It was hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between the two variables. Surveys were compiled using the Self-Determination Scale (SDS) and The National Stressful Events Survey PTSD Short Scale (NSESSS), and distributed to 114 veterans. The participants were representative of the population of the U.S. Military in the distribution of gender, race/ethnicity, and age, but not in distribution of military branch, as was shown through a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test. Correlation coefficients were found between the two variables as a whole, as well as between the sub-categories of each variable. Of a total of thirty-six correlations found, thirty-five were significant at a 95% confidence level, with the correlation between overall self-determination and overall PTS(D) severity r= -0.576. Because the majority of correlations were significant, it was determined that the data did support the hypothesis, but a larger sample size would be needed to reduce error.

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