

A Systematic Review of Posttraumatic Stress and Resilience Trajectories: Identifying Covariates and Predictors for Future Treatment of Veterans and Service Members

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INTRODUCTION

- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is more prevalent among veterans and service members than the general population.
- Gold-standard evidence-based treatments (i.e., Prolonged Exposure and Cognitive Processing Therapy) are less effective for veterans and service members.
- Understanding the covariates and predictors of symptomatic and resilient trajectories may help clinicians tailor conceptualizations, evidence-based treatments, and change agents to the individual, in line with process-based cognitive behavioral therapy.
- We conducted a systematic review to examine covariates and predictors of resilience and symptomatic trajectories in veterans and service members exposed to potentially traumatic events.

METHODS

1. 24 studies met inclusion criteria.
2. Included studies utilized Latent Growth Class Analysis or Latent Growth Mixture Modeling, at least three trajectory time points, at least a sample of 100, and a trauma-related outcome assessment.
3. Of the 396 assessed, 336 were screened, and 24 were retained.

RESULTS

1. Across all studies, most participants followed a resilience trajectory (69%), while symptomatic trajectories accounted for the remainder of participants (31%).
2. Covariates and predictors of resilience trajectories were related to environmental, psychological, and demographic factors.
3. Covariates and predictors of symptomatic trajectories were also related to environmental, psychological, and demographic factors.

DISCUSSION

- Psychological, demographic, and environmental covariates were identified for resilience and symptomatic trajectories of posttraumatic stress.
- Some service member and veteran subgroups were characterized by multiple risk factors and few protective factors associated with the development of posttraumatic stress symptoms. Considering use of a process-focused, evidence-based CBT model may help clinicians target transdiagnostic factors in service members and veterans.

Unique factors were associated with resilience and symptomatic trajectories. Process-based CBT may provide a framework for integrating these factors into treatment.



Synthesized Predictors with Frequency for Resilient Trajectories

Predictor	Frequency
Less Combat Exposure/No Combat Experience	2
During Deployment	
Males	1
Higher Education	1
White	1
Officer Rank	1
Single Deployer	1
Subclinical Depression Pre-deployment	1
Peacekeeping Hassles	1
Previous Trauma	1

Note. Trajectories were dichotomized into symptomatic and resilient across studies. Covariates shown here predict resilient trajectories and how often each covariate appeared across $N = 24$ studies.

Synthesized Predictors with Frequency for Symptomatic Trajectories

Covariate	Frequency
Deployment-Related Stressor/Combat Exposure	7
History of/Comorbid Depression	6
Prior Trauma	5
Current Smoking/Alcohol	5
Stressors Before, During or After Deployment	5
Younger Age	4
Enlisted Personnel/Lower Ranking	4
Neuroticism	3
Non-White/Hispanic	3
Army	3
Perceived Threat During Deployment	3
Suicidal Ideation	3
High School Education or Less/Lower Education	2
Poor Physical Health	2
Avoidant Coping/Coping Style	2
Married	2
Sexual/Physical Assault History	2
Family Cohesion	2

Note. Trajectories were dichotomized into symptomatic and resilient across studies. Covariates shown here predict symptomatic trajectories and how often each covariate appeared across $N = 24$ studies. If a covariate appeared multiple times in the same study (e.g., predicted two different types of symptomatic trajectories), it was coded once. These are the most frequent predictors.

