

A randomized controlled trial for aggression and substance use involvement among Veterans: Impact of combining Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Behavioral Treatment and Telephone-based Counseling

Publication Brief

Purpose In this randomized controlled trial, researchers studied the effectiveness of two interventions to decrease substance use and aggression in a sample of mostly male Veterans reporting past-year severe physical aggression and recent substance use, who were seeking substance use disorder (SUD) and/or mental health treatment.

Background In Veterans, SUD and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are common and are linked to violence. Both partner- and non-partner aggression are common for Veterans with SUD. Few treatment programs incorporate specialty services addressing aggressive behaviors as part of treatment. Extending receipt of these services into Veterans' everyday lives using telephone counseling could have high impact.

Methods Veterans seeking treatment for SUD and/mental health issues were recruited for this study. Veterans reporting past-year severe aggression and recent substance use, were randomized into 3 groups: a) a 6-session Motivational Interviewing-Cognitive Behavioral Treatment in-person intervention (MI-CBT); b) a 6-session MI-CBT intervention plus a 12-session Telephone Counseling (MI-CBT + Telephone Counseling); or c) enhanced treatment as usual (E-TAU), with review of community resources. Participants were evaluated at baseline, and over 12-months after the Telephone Counseling sessions.

Findings There was a significant reduction from baseline to follow up in the frequency of aggression and the frequency of substance use in all groups; however, men in the MI-CBT + Telephone Counseling group showed a significant decrease in partner physical aggression from baseline to follow-up relative to control.

Discussion This study showed significant reductions in Veterans' substance use and aggression over time, and that a more intensive intervention could provide further reductions in partner aggression among males. Future studies should examine moderators of outcome, cost-effectiveness, and dissemination efforts in VA SUD treatment clinics.

Citation Chermack S. T., Bonar E.E., Goldstick J.E., Winters J., Blow F.C., Friday S., Ilgen M.A., Rauch S.A.M., Perron B.E., Ngo Q.M., & Walton M.A. (2019). A randomized controlled trial for aggression and substance use involvement among Veterans: Impact of combining motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral treatment and telephone-based continuing care. *J. Substance Abuse Treatment*, 98, 78-88.