

Problematic Anger among U.S. Service Members and Veterans

A summary of anger-related research by the Millennium Cohort Study

OVERVIEW

Anger can be a useful emotion that signals the need to address an injustice. In contrast, problematic anger is intense anger associated with elevated distress that interferes with functioning. In 2016, we began to survey participants about problematic anger, and we recently published 3 studies on this topic. Collectively, these studies identify the potential toll of problematic anger on service members and Veterans and focuses attention on the importance of training individuals in emotion regulation.

Key Findings

- 17% of service members and Veterans screened positive for problematic anger.¹ Several factors (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, financial problems, problem drinking) were associated with an increased risk of problematic anger 3-5 years later.
- The prevalence of problematic anger nearly doubled from the 2 years prior to military separation (16%) to the 2 years following separation (31%).³

Impact

- Problematic anger was significantly associated with involuntary job loss and financial problems for both service members and Veterans.²
- Problematic anger around the time of separation was associated with adjustment difficulties (e.g., PTSD, depression, low relationship quality, challenges coping with parental demands, low social support, and economic difficulties) 3-5 years later.^{2,3}
- Among Veterans, problematic anger was also associated with unemployment and homelessness.²

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Study findings suggest it may be useful for military leaders, veteran organizations, and policy makers to support the mental health adjustment and financial well-being of military personnel and veterans by proactively addressing problematic anger.

- Problematic anger in the military is critical given its high prevalence, distinction from other mental disorders, role in impeding effective PTSD treatment, and impact on vocational and interpersonal functioning.
- Interventions focusing on increased emotional regulation and positive coping strategies prior to and after military separation may help improve the military-to-civilian transition experience.

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