# Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder report sexual problems

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a distressing and disabling condition that can develop after experiencing a life threatening or horrifying experience such as an accident, disaster, or combat. Recent research shows that problems with sexual functioning may be a hidden and under-studied casualty of PTSD. Trauma exposure and PTSD profoundly rupture a survivor's sense of safety, self-worth, and ability to trust and feel connected to others. Healthy sexual functioning requires all of these, and the vulnerability and intimacy inherent in sexual activity makes this domain a particularly fraught one for individuals with PTSD. A recent research study with trauma exposed veterans found that veterans with PTSD were more likely to report sexual problems than combat exposed veterans without PTSD, and the more severe the PTSD symptoms the more likely they were to report sexual problems. Sexual dysfunction has long been recognized as a symptom of depression, and individuals with PTSD often also have depression. This study found that male veterans with PTSD were more likely to report sexual dysfunction regardless of whether they also had a diagnosis of depression, and regardless of their age. This study was also the first to also investigate whether there are biological underpinnings that link PTSD with sexual dysfunction. Researchers found that among veterans with PTSD, sexual problems were associated with stress hormones, such as cortisol, that are known to be affected by PTSD. These preliminary findings are suggestive of possible biological mechanisms through which PTSD may lead to impaired sexual function. Improved understanding of psychological and neurobiological aspects of sexual problems in PTSD may ultimately lead to better treatments for sexual and relationship problems for individuals suffering from PTSD.

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## Publication

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