

Triple threat: Young macho men with serious injuries often abuse alcohol

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Men with serious injuries, such as traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury, must deal with a range of emotions. If these men have strong traditional masculine ideas and abuse alcohol, it becomes even more difficult to help them heal and come to terms with their emotions and situations. A University of Missouri psychology researcher studied these challenging factors to find better ways to understand and treat men who fit this mold, such as the injured soldiers coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan.

“It is really a triple whammy,” said Glenn Good, professor of educational, school and counseling psychology in the MU College of Education. “Counselors face many challenges when it comes to helping men deal with emotions surrounding serious injuries. Newly injured men often face adjustments in the level of personal assistance they require, and this may result in struggles with some aspect of the traditional masculine role, such as a ‘go it alone’ mentality. When three factors - injury, traditional male role and alcohol abuse - occur together, the rehabilitation process may be a challenge. In this study, we examined the combination of all three factors with the aim of better understanding how to treat men with several challenges.”

Good and his colleagues found that a young man with a serious injury would often report a greater pursuit of status, higher drive for dominance and increased risk taking. However, they were more open to accepting assistance. Older men in the study tended to hold to the masculine attitude that they could do everything on their own and did not

need any help, presenting a greater challenge.

“Unfortunately, we are going to have a country full of men like this coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan,” Good said. “Soldiers have been trained to be hyper-masculine and, after a serious injury, could easily turn to alcohol use to deal with their new challenges. We have to confront this problem and create interventions that address all of these issues and not just one behavior or problem at a time. Our systems of care for people with spinal cord injuries, veterans and non-veterans, must address these issues proactively and with adequate resources to face these multiple challenges.”

Good found alcohol use was common regardless of age. In the study, binge drinking was defined as five or more drinks per occasion.

“Some men are drinking instead of seeking appropriate help, but some have been heavy drinkers all along,” Good said. “The binge drinking is problematic. Some may drink to suppress their bad feelings about being injured and their perceived loss of masculinity. They may think they are being strong by not seeking help when in fact turning to alcohol could be even more detrimental.”

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

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