

Novel aspects of posttraumatic stress disorder

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A multivariate analysis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) performed by European researchers is expected to improve risk assessment and disease diagnosis.

PTSD refers to the anxiety disorder caused by various psychologically [traumatic experiences](#). It is the most common war-related psychiatric disorder occurring among combat veterans and other people exposed to war-related stress.

The objective of the EU-funded 'Psychobiology of posttraumatic stress disorder' (PBPTSD) project was to understand the characteristics, subtypes and risk factors of PTSD, aiming to improve its diagnosis and prevention.

Project partners assessed relevant psychological, biochemical, endocrinological, genetic, physiological and anthropometric parameters in various groups of male subjects. These included patients with war-zone–related PTSD, patients in remission, war-zone–exposed subjects without PTSD and healthy controls. Female subjects also participated in the psychological part of the study.

Biological measurements were made on the Hypothalamo-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis, and included cortisol receptor and its gene polymorphism, anthropometry, [body composition](#), lipid status, [insulin resistance](#), and sleep and dream disturbances (nightmares).

Results showed that neurocognitive functioning, self control and superior executive functioning were lower in PTSD groups. These traits seemed to define the individual resilience capacity in situations of [extreme stress](#). Furthermore, higher level of intelligence and memory functioning were the basic neurocognitive factors protecting against developing PTSD after the traumatic event. Collectively, for risk factor assessment, the PBPTSD findings suggested that personality traits and neurocognitive functioning should be measured.

Overall, the PBPTSD study unveiled novel psychological and biological variables that contribute to PTSD and could be used for efficient disease detection. Implementation of these variables for risk assessment is expected to predict the likelihood and outcome of PTSD.

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