

Gaps exist in brain injury knowledge among veterans

March 29 2013, by Kevin Storr



(Medical Xpress)—Researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) found that only 1 in 5 veterans reported receiving brain injury education while serving in the military. The researchers, whose findings were published this week in the *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*, believe a lack of accurate knowledge could lead to misdiagnosis or misinterpretation due to the many symptoms that can overlap among brain injury and other conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and chronic pain.

"The ultimate risk in [misinterpretation](#) is that the patient may be treated in a different direction from where they need to go," said Cady Block, primary investigator of the study and doctoral student with the UAB

Department of Psychology. "In the case of a veteran who sustains a [brain injury](#), for example, they may be deemed to be disabled instead of integrating back into their community and their job. That direction of treatment may not look at encouraging ways to give them their life back."

The study looked at 100 veterans and 50 of their friends or family. It found that both groups were able to correctly identify symptoms associated with [mild brain injury](#). However, both groups endorsed numerous symptoms that are not typical of such injuries.

"It is just as important that patients and their support system are able to recognize not only what a brain injury is, but also what it is not," Block said. "Improved knowledge will mean fewer frustrations for both groups, better care overall and a brighter outlook for veterans."

The first known study of brain injury knowledge, published in 1988, revealed that 42 percent of people believed a second blow to one's head could actually help restore memory. Block says her team's work in 2012 reveals misinformation about brain injuries has not decreased during the past 24 years despite increased education initiatives.

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There are websites with a wealth of information, like the Defense Centers of Excellence, the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Yet the UAB study shows 80 percent of the veterans with whom they worked, and 79 percent of a group of family or friends, said they did not go to the Internet for more information.

In fact, the study revealed that both groups turned to a different channel for knowledge.

"Unfortunately, much of what they knew was based on what they witnessed on shows like Dr. Oz, Grey's Anatomy and House," said Block. "They have access to the VA and healthcare providers, yet the majority gets information from movies and TV dramas."

Inaccurate portrayals of brain injury in the popular media could potentially contribute to distorted beliefs about brain injury symptoms and recovery, as well as about survivors of brain injury themselves, if they are not countered by accurate information.

These findings come in the wake of a recent push by the U.S. Department of [Veterans](#) Affairs to increase traumatic brain injury (TBI) knowledge and awareness.

"A mild brain injury is significant, but when armed with the proper information, diagnosis and treatment, these individuals should expect to get back to work, back to school and back to a good quality of life," Block said.

More information: [journals.lww.com/headtraumareh...
Knowledge.99854.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/headtraumareh/Knowledge.99854.aspx)

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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