

Five-question clinical tool the first to help screen risk of violence in military veterans

June 4 2014

A new brief, 5-question screening tool can help clinicians identify which veterans may be at greater risk of violence, according to a new study led by a UNC researcher.

The study, published online by the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, is based on a national survey sample of [veterans](#) combined with a smaller, in-depth assessment sample. The screening tool, called the Violence Screening and Assessment of Needs (VIO-SCAN), asked veterans about financial stability, combat experience, alcohol misuse, history of violence or arrests, and probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) plus anger. The screening tool can be viewed in the text of the [article](#).

"When we hear about a veteran being violent, there is a knee-jerk reaction that it stems from PTSD. The VIO-SCAN shows that PTSD is relevant to screening risk but is only the tip of the iceberg. Non-PTSD factors need to be looked at, such as alcohol abuse or past criminal behavior, just like in civilians," said study lead author Eric Elbogen, PhD, Research Director of the Forensic Psychiatry Program in the University of North Carolina School of Medicine and Psychologist in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

On the VIO-SCAN, veterans give yes or no answers to questions such as, "Did you personally witness someone being seriously wounded or killed?" and "Have you ever been violent towards others or arrested for a crime?" The answer to each question is scored as either 0 or 1. The score for each answer is combined to yield an overall score ranging from

0 to 5, with 0 indicating generally lower risk and 5 indicating generally higher risk.

"We believe this [screening tool](#) will provide clinicians with a rapid, systematic method for identifying veterans at higher risk of violence. It can help prioritize those in need a full clinical workup, structure review of empirically supported risk factors, and develop plans collaboratively with veterans to reduce risk and increase successful reintegration in the community," Elbogen said.

However, Elbogen cautions, the VIO-SCAN is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of whether a veteran will or will not be violent. Instead, it is a screen identifying whether a veteran may be at high risk and thereby require a full clinical workup to make a final risk judgment.

Provided by University of North Carolina Health Care

Citation: Five-question clinical tool the first to help screen risk of violence in military veterans (2014, June 4) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-06-five-question-clinical-tool-screen-violence.html>

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