

Partner caregivers of veterans with traumatic brain injuries may be at risk for inflammatory disease

February 13 2015, by Nora Dudley

Blame and anger associated with the grief of caring for a loved one with a traumatic-brain injury (TBI) may be related to inflammation and certain chronic diseases, according to researchers from Loyola University Chicago Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing. These findings were published in the latest issue of Biological Research for Nursing.

"Traumatic-brain injuries can result in devastating physical and cognitive impairments," said Karen Saban, PhD, RN, APRN, CNRN, study co-author and associate professor, MNSON. "Grief, anger and blame are common among caregivers who are left to cope with these profound disabilities and the loss of the person they once knew. These feelings may put these individuals at risk for inflammatory-related disease."

Since 2000, more than 240,000 members of the U.S. military have been diagnosed with a TBI. Of these, nearly 43,000 are considered to have suffered a moderate or severe TBI. This injury often results in physically debilitating conditions such as seizures, muscle spasticity, coordination impairment, poor muscle strength and significant cognitive problems, including memory loss, impaired information processing, perceptual skills, personality changes and communication deficits.

This study examined grief and its association with [inflammation](#) in 40 wives or partners caring for veterans with TBIs. Study participants completed written measures of grief, perceived stress and symptoms of

depression and provided morning saliva samples to measure TNF-alpha, a substance associated with inflammation and chronic disease.

Study participants reported levels of grief comparable to individuals who have lost a loved one. Their grief was not associated with TNF-alpha or inflammation in general. However, higher levels of TNF-alpha were found in individuals who reported high levels of blame and anger associated with their grief. High levels of TNF-alpha are related to a variety of inflammatory-related health issues and may be an important indicator of caregivers at risk for developing [chronic health problems](#) such as heart disease.

This research gives us a better understanding of the relationship between blame, anger, [grief](#) and inflammation," Dr. Saban said. "This may assist clinicians in identifying caregivers who are at greatest risk for developing inflammatory-related health problems and managing them appropriately."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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