

Research suggests mild traumatic brain injury common in veterans with mental health needs

May 1 2019, by Martin Herrema



Military helmet. Credit: israel palacio on Unsplash

New research conducted by the University, the veterans' mental health charity Combat Stress, and East Kent NHS Neuro-Rehabilitation Unit

suggests that up to three-quarters of UK military veterans who seek help for long-term mental distress have experienced repeated mild brain injury. This figure is far higher than previous UK estimates but is very similar to that reported in US combat veterans.

Mild traumatic [brain](#) injury is seen in the USA as a signature, albeit silent, injury of the Gulf Wars. It is the result of concussion following a blow to the head and/or exposure to blast waves.

Most people recover from the effects of concussion, however, recovery can be complicated in veterans who have sustained repeated injury over their lifetime and also experienced post-traumatic disorder.

In the new study, veterans who fell into this category showed a greater level of general disability than 90 percent of the general international population.

One of the most common symptoms of [mild traumatic brain injury](#) is dizziness and imbalance. The results of the Kent study, which assessed 162 military veterans, show for the first time that dizziness may be one cause of the long-term depression, anxiety, headache and forgetfulness that can accompany repeated mild traumatic brain injury.

Study director Professor David Wilkinson, from the University's School of Psychology, said "Balance function is not routinely assessed in military veterans, yet our results suggest that if doctors assess and treat the dizziness then other hard-to-treat psychological symptoms may also start to recover."

Dr. Walter Busuttill, director of medical services at Combat Stress, said: "This study shows a very clear link between mild traumatic brain injury and dizziness, which can be a part of longstanding post-concussion syndrome."

"We have no evidence that a history of actual or potential mild traumatic brain injury can interfere with psychological treatment outcomes for veterans with PTSD. However, we would welcome a further study to examine this."

The results chime with recent evidence for a strong link between the repeated, albeit mild, head injury sustained in certain contact sports and mental deterioration in later life. Larger-scale study is now needed to better understand the scope and nature of unmet mental health need in [military veterans](#) with repeated mild traumatic brain [injury](#) and balance disorder.

The study, titled "Neuropsychiatric Outcomes in UK military Veterans with Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Vestibular Dysfunction," is published in the *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*.

More information: Emma Denby et al. Neuropsychiatric Outcomes in UK Military Veterans With Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Vestibular Dysfunction, *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation* (2019). [DOI: 10.1097/HTR.0000000000000468](#)

Provided by University of Kent

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