

Veterans with PTSD may benefit from manualized Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT)

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As veterans have high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and historically poor treatment outcomes and high attrition, alternative treatments have gained much popularity despite lack of rigorous research. For this study published in *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, a recently developed and manualized 8-session group Equine-Assisted Therapy for PTSD (EAT-PTSD), was tested in an open trial to assess its preliminary feasibility, acceptability, and outcomes for military veterans.

The research was conducted by Yuval Neria, Ph.D., Co-Director/Principal Investigator, Man O' War Project, Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Professor of Medical Psychology Departments of Psychiatry and Epidemiology, Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Director, PTSD Research Program, Director, New York Presbyterian Military Family Wellness Center at New York State Psychiatric Institute and Prudence W. Fisher, Ph.D., Co-Director/Principal Investigator, Man O' War Project; Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatric Social Work (in Psychiatry) Columbia University, Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons; Research Scientist at New York State Psychiatric Institute.

The study found that manualized EAT-PTSD shows promise as a potential new intervention for veterans with PTSD. It appears safe, feasible, and clinically viable. These preliminary results encourage examination of EAT-PTSD in larger, randomized controlled trials.

The study was conducted from July 2016 to July 2019. Sixty-three treatment-seeking veterans with PTSD enrolled. PTSD diagnosis was ascertained using the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5, Research Version (SCID-5-RV) and confirmed using the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS-5). Mean age was 50 years, and 23 patients (37%) were women. Clinician and self-report measures of PTSD and depression were assessed at pretreatment, mid-treatment, and post

treatment and at a 3-month follow-up. An intent-to-treat analysis and a secondary analysis of those who completed all 4 clinical assessments were utilized.

Thirty-two patients (50.8%) showed clinically significant change ($\geq 30\%$ decrease in CAPS-5 score) at post treatment and 34 (54.0%) at follow-up. Post treatment assessment revealed marked reductions in both clinician-rated and self-reported PTSD and depression symptoms, which persisted at 3-month follow-up. Specifically, mean (SD) CAPS-5 scores fell from 38.6 (8.1) to 26.9 (12.4) at termination. Only 5 patients (8%) withdrew from treatment, 4 before mid-treatment and 1 afterward.

More information: Prudence W. Fisher et al, Equine-Assisted Therapy for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among Military Veterans, *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* (2021). [DOI: 10.4088/JCP.21m14005](https://doi.org/10.4088/JCP.21m14005)

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