

## ABSTRACT

### SUBTHRESHOLD PTSD AND ASSOCIATED PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS IN TRAUMA EXPOSED MALE AND FEMALE VETERANS

By

Matthew Southard, M.A.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) represents the upper end of a stress-response continuum to traumatic events, rather than a discrete pathological syndrome (Ruscio, et al., 2002). Veterans with sub-threshold PTSD are often overlooked in research studies, despite significant clinical factors associated with it that may affect overall functioning and recovery from trauma exposure. Individuals with PTSD report higher levels of anxiety, depression, and adjustment difficulties (Ginzburg, Ein-Dor, & Soloman, 2009; Thompson et al, 2011; Kulka et al., 1988). Additionally, individuals with PTSD have reported higher rates of anger and aggressive behaviors (Novaco and Chemtob, 2002; Kotler et al, 2001; Orth & Wieland, 2006). Individuals with subthreshold PTSD may experience similar rates of symptoms of anxiety, depression, anger, and aggression as those with full-PTSD (Jakupcak, et al., 2007; Mylle & Maes, 2004; Stein, Walker, Hazen & Forde, 1997). Emotional regulation may underpin the expression of these associated emotions and behaviors, including anxiety, aggression, anger, and depression (Crevier et al., 2014), and may differ for men and women, as gender may influence the expression of associated psychological distress in trauma exposed individuals. The present study found differences in the relationship between traumatic stress symptom severity (i.e. full-PTSD, subthreshold PTSD and no-PTSD) and symptoms of anger, aggression, in depression in military service members. No gender differences were found in the associations between trauma severity and levels of anger, aggressive behaviors, and depression in military service members.

Emotion regulation was not found to moderate the relationship between trauma severity and levels of aggression and depression in military service members. This study supports existing research by measuring the association between types of trauma severity. The present study expands on existing PTSD research regarding a gender differences in traumatic stress response groups, in addition to measuring anger and aggression as discrete variables. Finally, this study also expands on PTSD research regarding the effects of emotion dysregulation on symptoms of aggression, and depression on trauma severity in veterans.