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Comorbidity of post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol abuse in women: Systematic analysis

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Aims: The current study aimed to systematically analyze various research done in the area of female posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcohol abuse and to critically review these results on the basis of theoretical models as well as answering following questions: (1) What is the reciprocal relationship between trauma/PTSD and alcohol abuse among females; (2) What are the moderating factors/variables of this relationship?

Methods: The computer bibliographic databases EBSCO, Scopus, Springer, Web of Science, Medline, Science Direct were used to search for scientific publications. Systematic analyses sample consisted of peer reviewed, English written papers addressing mixed gender and female PTSD and alcohol abuse issues from 2012-2017 May.

Results: Total of 1011 articles was found in scientific databases related to search keywords of which 29 met the selection criteria and were analyzed. The results of longitudinal research indicate that various traumas especially sexual abuse trauma exposure in childhood is linked with increased risk of problematic alcohol use and re-victimization in adulthood, re-victimization in adolescence, rather than victimization in childhood has a greater impact on the onset and progression of problematic alcohol use in adulthood. Cross-sectional and epidemiological studies also support significant relationships between female PTSD and alcohol abuse. Regards to negative impact of alcohol use on PTSD symptoms results are yet controversial. Some studies suggest that alcohol does not exacerbate symptoms of PTSD over time, while others argue that alcohol abuse worsens PTSD symptoms and is linked to chronicity of both disorders. Motivational and emotional factors have an important impact on alcohol abuse in women with PTSD, when increase in both negative and positive feelings and various motives, specifically coping motives is linked to alcohol use in response to PTSD symptoms. Regards to theoretical models, results of longitudinal studies tend to systematically demonstrate mutual maintenance model perspective, however studies of cross-sectional design reveals self-medication aspects of alcohol use behavior and emphasizes proximal relationship between PTSD symptoms and alcohol abuse.

Conclusions: In general, the results are in line with previous systematic analyses. Findings have important clinical implications, as treatment of comorbid conditions is more complex and time-consuming than those with a single disorder. Therefore, it is important for clinicians working with both disorders to pay enough attention to identification and integration of traumatic events. Likewise teaching effective emotional regulation strategies for coping with distress as well as strategies for experiencing and increasing positive affect, such as mindfulness or engaging in positive visual imagery, would help to reduce problematic alcohol use and the probability of re-victimization in the future.

Biography

Neringa Bagdonaite is currently pursuing his PhD in Mykolas Romeris University, Institute of Psychology. He has completed his graduation in Mykolas Romeris University and did research in the field of psychology. His research interests are psychology, psychological trauma, etc.

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