



## Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Section - 2014

### I23 Combat-Related PTSD and Violence

Marc A. Cohen, MD\*, 360 N Bedford Drive, Ste 317, Beverly Hills, CA 90210

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to: (1) comment on the historical context of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); (2) enumerate the core features of the revised *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) criteria for PTSD; (3) highlight the psychological stages of a stress reaction; (4) briefly describe the etiological formulations of PTSD; (5) describe the relationship between combat-related PTSD and violence; and, (6) identify the legal implications of PTSD on criminal issues, such as criminal responsibility and mitigation.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an overview of the origin of PTSD, its relationship to violence, and implications for forensic assessment.

Recent epidemiological evidence has demonstrated the increased prevalence of PTSD related to combat exposure from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The increase in PTSD, along with anecdotal reports of violence among combat veterans, has raised concerns regarding the relationship between PTSD and violence. In January 2008, *The New York Times* published a series of articles about veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. The series identified and described 121 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who committed killings or were charged with homicide after returning from active duty. Some authors argue that the military experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have created a new breed of lethal and impulsive killers. However, the examination of data from past war campaigns (including the Vietnam war, in particular) does not support this claim. For example, data from the Bureau of Justice Survey of Incarcerated Veterans indicates that male veterans were found to be half as likely as other men to be held in prison, and a comparison of Vietnam-era veterans (1964-1973) with Post-Cold War-era veterans (1990-2004) produced nearly equal percentages of veterans serving a prison sentence for a violent offense.

Scientific evidence reveals a complex association between PTSD and violence. More often than not, other ingredients, such as features of antisocial personality disorder and substance abuse, contaminate the direct causal link between PTSD and violence. The revised DSM-5 criteria for PTSD broadens the definition of a qualifying trauma and expands and reorganizes the list of accompanying symptoms, which is expected to affect both civil litigation and criminal defense in a wide range of cases which involve trauma. In particular, the implications of the revised DSM-5 criteria for PTSD on criminal issues, such as criminal responsibility and mitigation, are likely to be affected and warrant further investigation.

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#### Combat-Related PTSD, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Violence