



2021

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Decreasing Suicidal Risks among Military Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder or Major Depression

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Abstract

- Suicide is a major cause of death in US. Military personnel are at a higher risk of committing suicide compared to the general population. The risk is exacerbated by Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and major depression.
- Few reviews have explored the effects of the recommended psychotherapeutic interventions on suicidal ideations and suicide rates for these two disorders, focusing on the veteran population. To address this, a literature search was performed through electronic databases to identify appropriate journal articles.
- Treatment with CPT and PE for PTSD has been found effective in decreasing suicidal thoughts, intents, and attempts. On the other hand, CBT has been found effective in decreasing suicidal thoughts among veterans with various symptoms of depression. It is important for clinicians to always assess the risk of suicide for veterans diagnosed with these conditions.
- Future research should seek to explain the mechanism by which the explored psychotherapeutic interventions decrease suicidal thoughts, intents, and attempts in patients with PTSD or depression

Introduction

- Suicide is among top ten mortality causes in the U.S. On an average 20 deaths per day are recorded as a result of suicide (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). This rates exceed that of general population among active service members.
- Past studies have looked at the correlation of PTSD and suicidal ideations (Stayton et al., 2019) additionally Nock et al. (2013) concluded that CPT and CBT has the potential for decreasing the suicide risk in PTSD and depression patients.
- Limited research has been done exploring the impact of psychotic interventions among veterans with PTSD or depression.
- The present study seeks to fill the literature gap by investigating changes in suicidal ideations among veterans receiving CPT or PE for PTSD, or CBT for depression.

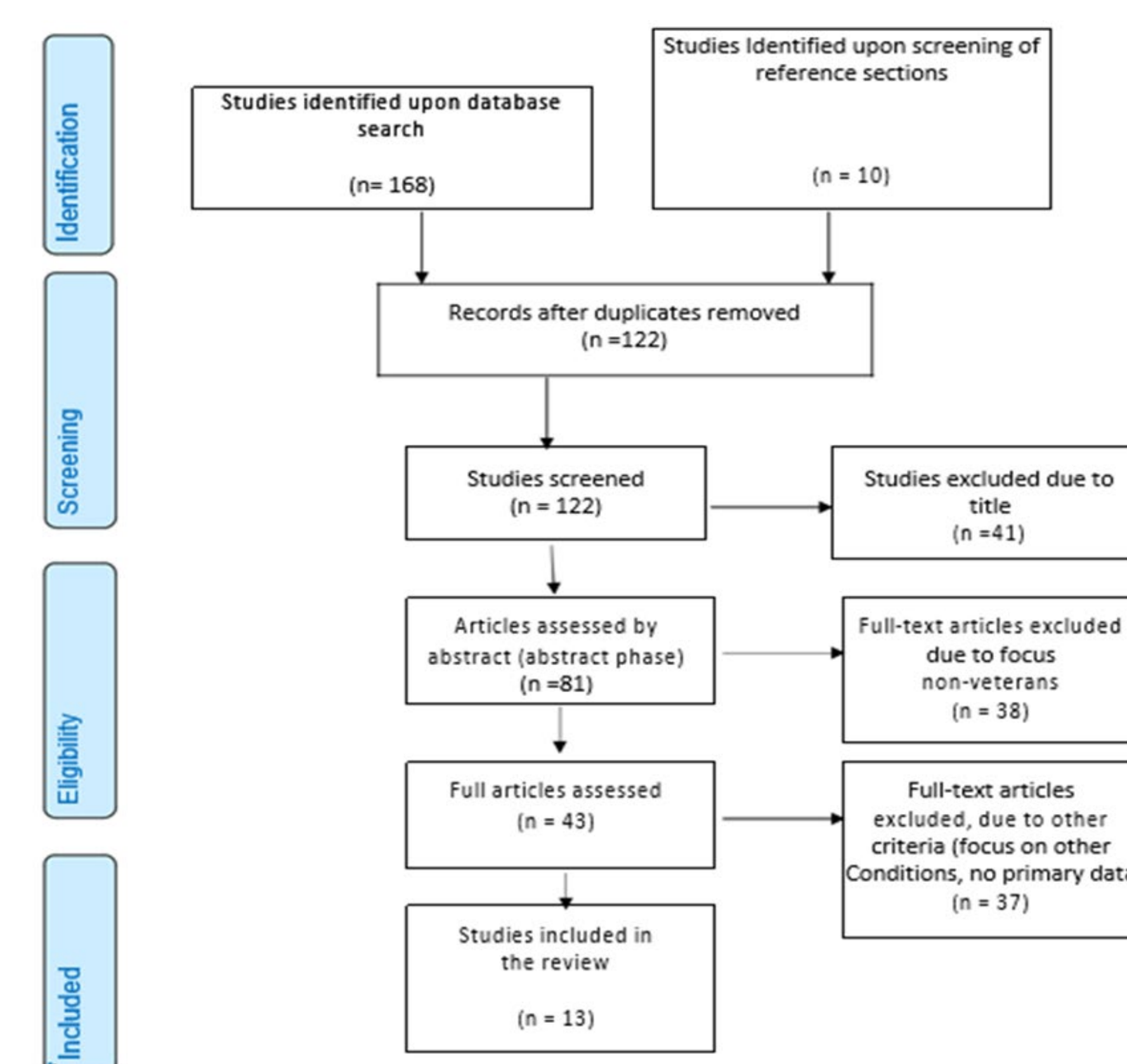
Statement of the Problem

Depression and PTSD are prevalent causes recognized as the leading risk factors for suicide. Therefore, this research is aimed to review CBT and CPT interventions among veterans.

Research question: In veterans with PTSD or depression is CBT, or CPT more efficacious in reducing suicide rate and suicidal ideations?

Methods

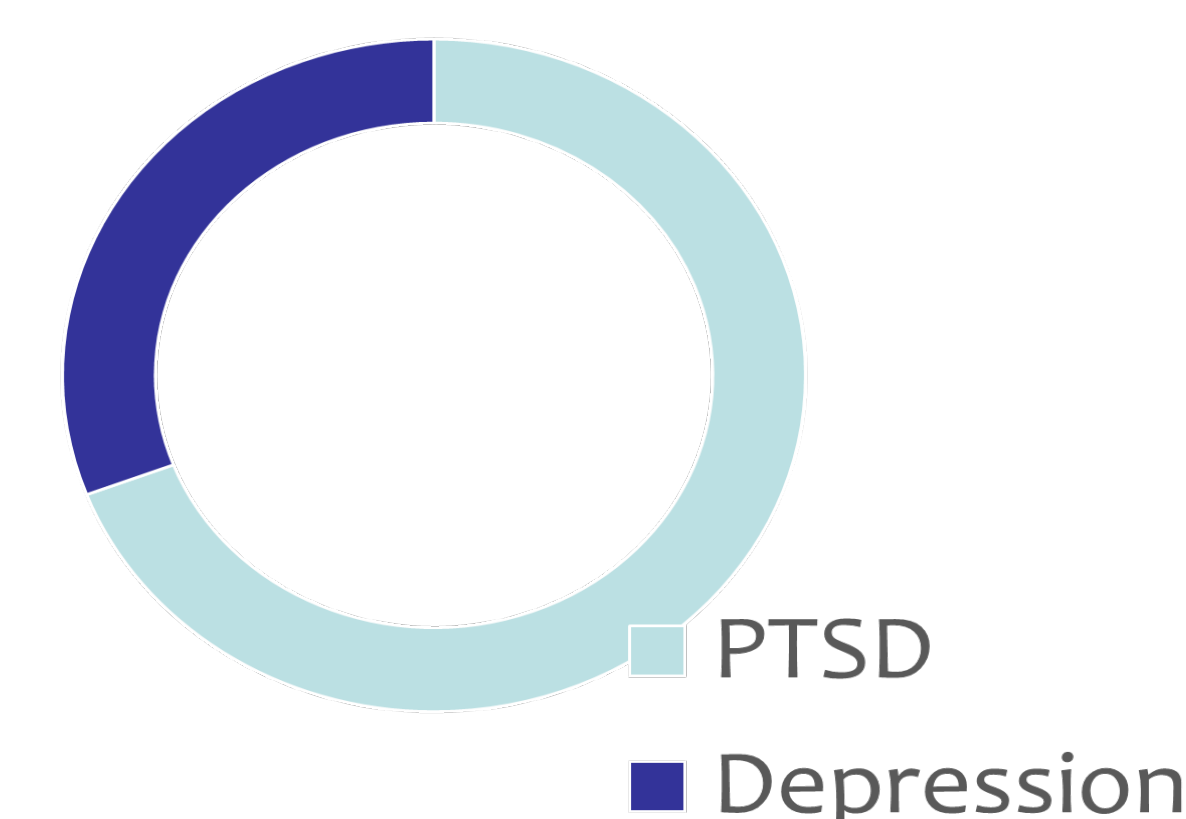
- Literature search conducted across selected electronic databases.
- **Key words:** Military personnel, veterans Post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, depression, major depressive disorder, cognitive behavioral therapy, suicide attempts, suicide rates, suicidal thoughts, suicidality



- Inclusion criteria: Studies evaluating the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic interventions in decreasing suicidal rates and ideations among veterans with PTSD and or depression.
- Relevant data, including psychiatric diagnoses, psychotherapeutic strategy, methods used, , main results and sample size, were extracted.

Results

- Thirteen relevant studies were identified.
- Nine studies explored the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic interventions for PTSD, four focused on depression. All the studies were conducted in the US and study settings were mostly clinics for veterans under the Department of Veteran Administration.



- CPT and PE were found effective in decreasing PTSD symptoms with concurrent reductions in suicidal ideations (Bryan et al., 2016; Cox et al., 2016; Horwitz et al., 2019; Resick et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2020)
- CBT has been found effective in decreasing depression symptoms and suicidal ideations (Brown et al., 2016; Rudd et al., 2015; Trockel et al., 2015)

- Eight studies in this review reported that a reduction in PTSD symptoms led to a subsequent decrease in suicidal ideations with the reductions being maintained for long periods of up to ten years.
- Five studies reported decrease in suicidal ideations and attempts following the provision of CBT intervention (Bryan et al., 2016; Norr et al., 2018; Resick et al., 2017; Rudd et al., 2015)
- Degree of reductions in suicidal ideations varied, although clinically meaningful reductions in suicidal ideations from the baseline were reported in all the studies.

Discussion

- Not all the studies were able to explain the methodology by which the reductions in PTSD symptoms were taking place following administration of CPT, CBT, and PE.
- Eight studies in this review reported that a reduction in PTSD symptoms led to a subsequent decrease in suicidal ideations with the reductions being maintained for long periods of up to ten years.
- Five studies reported decrease in suicidal ideations and attempts following the provision of CBT intervention (Bryan et al., 2016; Norr et al., 2018; Resick et al., 2017; Rudd et al., 2015)
- Degree of reductions in suicidal ideations varied, although clinically meaningful reductions in suicidal ideations from the baseline were reported in all the studies.

Limitations:

- Majority of the included studies had a very small sample size of women.
- Literature search was limited to articles available in English language, hence likelihood of publication bias.
- studies should be randomized controlled trials and longitudinal in nature to empower the researchers to control for confounding variables.

Applicability to Clinical Practice

- Among comparative studies, CPT was generally found more effective compared to PE in decreasing suicidal symptoms.
- There were significant reductions in suicidal thoughts and attempt rates among veterans receiving CBT for depression or various symptoms of depression.
- The findings of studies supported the effectiveness of evidence-based practice for depression in decreasing suicidal thoughts among veterans.
- Findings have implications for practice as the studies indicate the interventions do not increase suicidal ideations as previously thought (Bryan et al, 2016)
- Clinicians should always assess suicidal thoughts and ideations in patients with PTSD or depression and address the ideations through evidence-based interventions.
- The mechanism by which treatment works is poorly understood this highlights the need for further research to elucidate the pathways as they appear inconsistent across the identified studies.
- **Conclusion:** Treatment with CPT and PE for PTSD has been found effective in decreasing suicidal thoughts, intents, and attempts.
- CBT has also been found effective in decreasing suicidal ideations among depressed veterans.

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Acknowledgements

- All the glory to the Almighty God
- I would also like to thank my friends in research fields for assisting me with the process of identifying the articles and critically reviewing them.
- I would also like to thank Professor Daryl Sieg, PA-C and Dr. Mandeep Kaur, PhD, PT for assisting me with topic selection and reviewing my drafts.