

Problematic Anger among U.S. Service Members and Veterans

A summary of anger-related projects by the Millennium Cohort Study

KEY POINTS

Anger can be a useful emotion that signals the need to address an injustice. In contrast, problematic anger is intense anger associated with elevated distress that interferes with functioning. In 2016, we began to survey participants about problematic anger, and we recently published 3 studies on this topic. Collectively, these studies identify the potential toll of problematic anger on service members and Veterans and focuses attention on the importance of training individuals in emotion regulation.

Risk Factors

- 17% of service members and Veterans screened positive for problematic anger.¹ Several factors (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, financial problems, problem drinking) were associated with an increased risk of problematic anger 3-5 years later
- The prevalence of problematic anger nearly doubled from the 2 years prior to military separation (16%) to the 2 years following separation (31%)³

Impact

- Problematic anger was significantly associated with involuntary job loss and financial problems for both service members and Veterans²
- Problematic anger around the time of separation was associated with adjustment difficulties (e.g., PTSD, depression, low relationship quality, challenges coping with parental demands, low social support, and economic difficulties) 3-5 years later
- Among Veterans, problematic anger was also associated with unemployment and homelessness

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Problematic anger in the military is critical given its high prevalence, distinction from other mental disorders, role in impeding effective PTSD treatment, and impact on vocational and interpersonal functioning
- Interventions focusing on increased emotional regulation and positive coping strategies prior to and after military separation may help improve the military-to-civilian transition experience
- Study findings suggest it may be useful for military leaders, Veteran organizations, and policy makers to support the mental health adjustment and financial well-being of military personnel and Veterans by proactively addressing problematic anger

1. Adler AB, LeardMann CA, Roenfeldt KA, Jacobson IG, Forbes D; Millennium Cohort Study Team. Magnitude of problematic anger and its predictors in the Millennium Cohort. *BMC Public Health*. 2020 Jul 27;20(1):1168. PMID: 32718306; PMCID: PMC7385895.
2. Adler AB, LeardMann CA, Yun S, Jacobson IG, Forbes D; Millennium Cohort Study Team. Problematic Anger and Economic Difficulties: Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study. *J Affect Disord*. 2021 Oct 25:S0165-0327(21)01170-8. PMID: 34710505.
3. Adler AB, LeardMann CA, Villalobos J, Jacobson IG, Forbes D; Millennium Cohort Study Team. Association of Problematic Anger with Long-term Adjustment Following the Military-to-Civilian Transition. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2022 Jul 1;5(7):e2223236. PMID: 35862043.



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