

Prevention of Partner Aggression in Veterans with PTSD

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Healthcare System

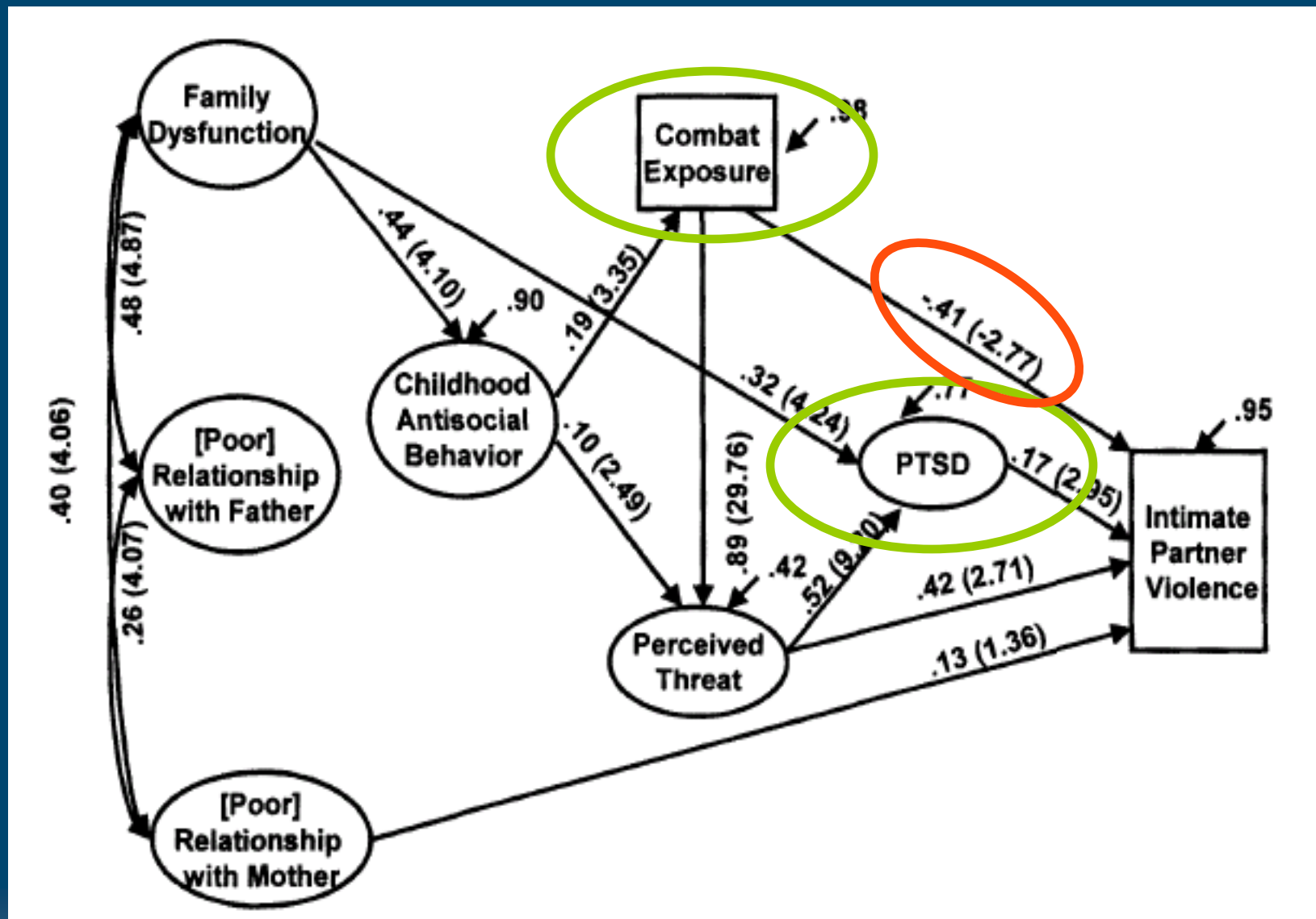
Boston University School of Medicine



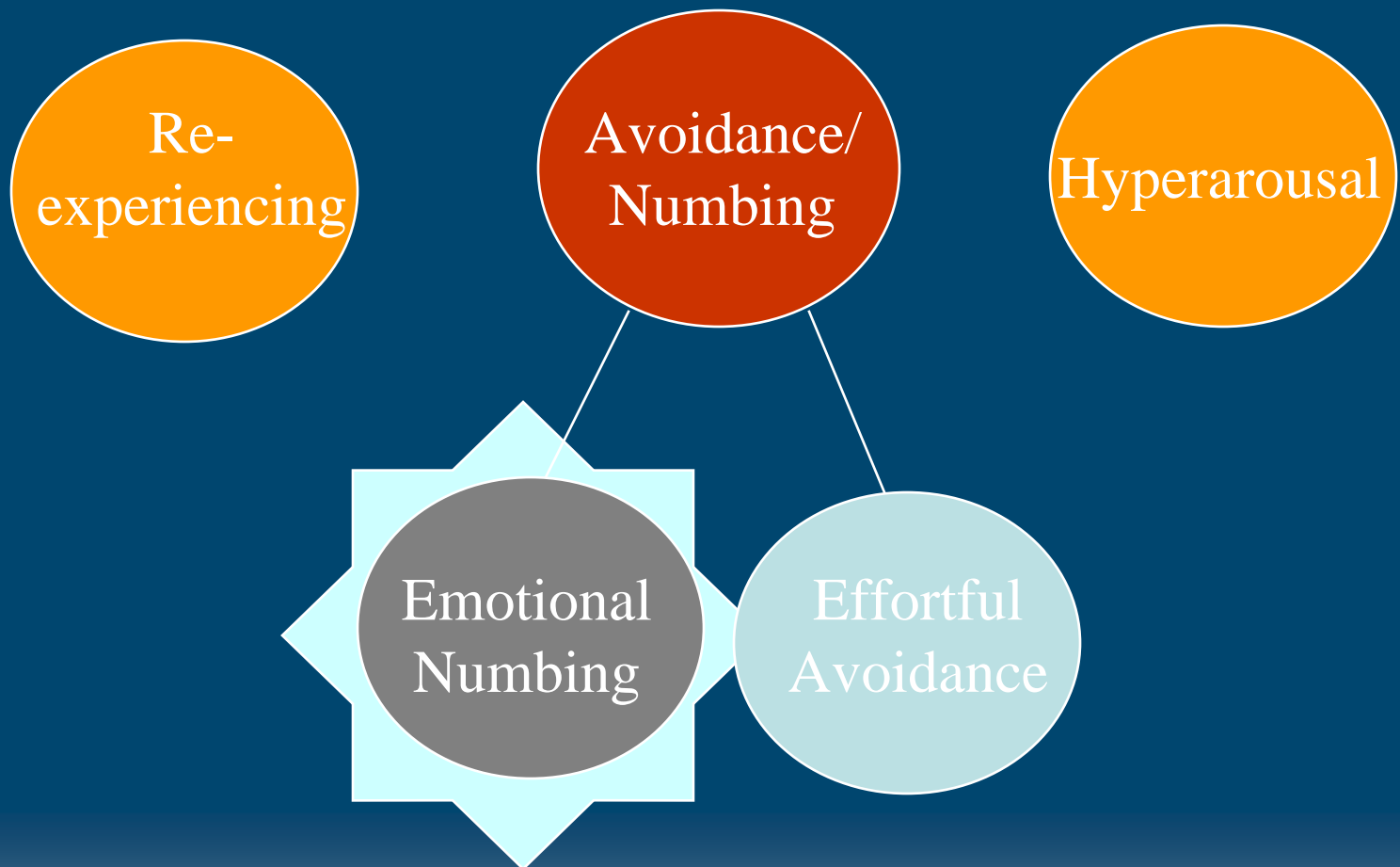
ADVANCING SCIENCE AND PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF TRAUMATIC STRESS

Domestic Violence Rates in Military Populations

- Yearly rates range from 13.3% to 32%
- Heyman and Neidig (1999)
 - Military versus civilian rates
 - Representative data adjusting for age and ethnicity
 - Unadjusted rates substantially higher in military sample
 - Adjusted rates
 - Military sample reported more severe IPV
 - Rates of moderate violence more comparable



PTSD and Relationship Satisfaction



e.g., Riggs et al., 1998; Cook, Riggs, Thompson, Coyne, & Sheikh, 2004

PTSD and Domestic Violence

Re-
experiencing

Avoidance/
Numbing

Hyperarousal

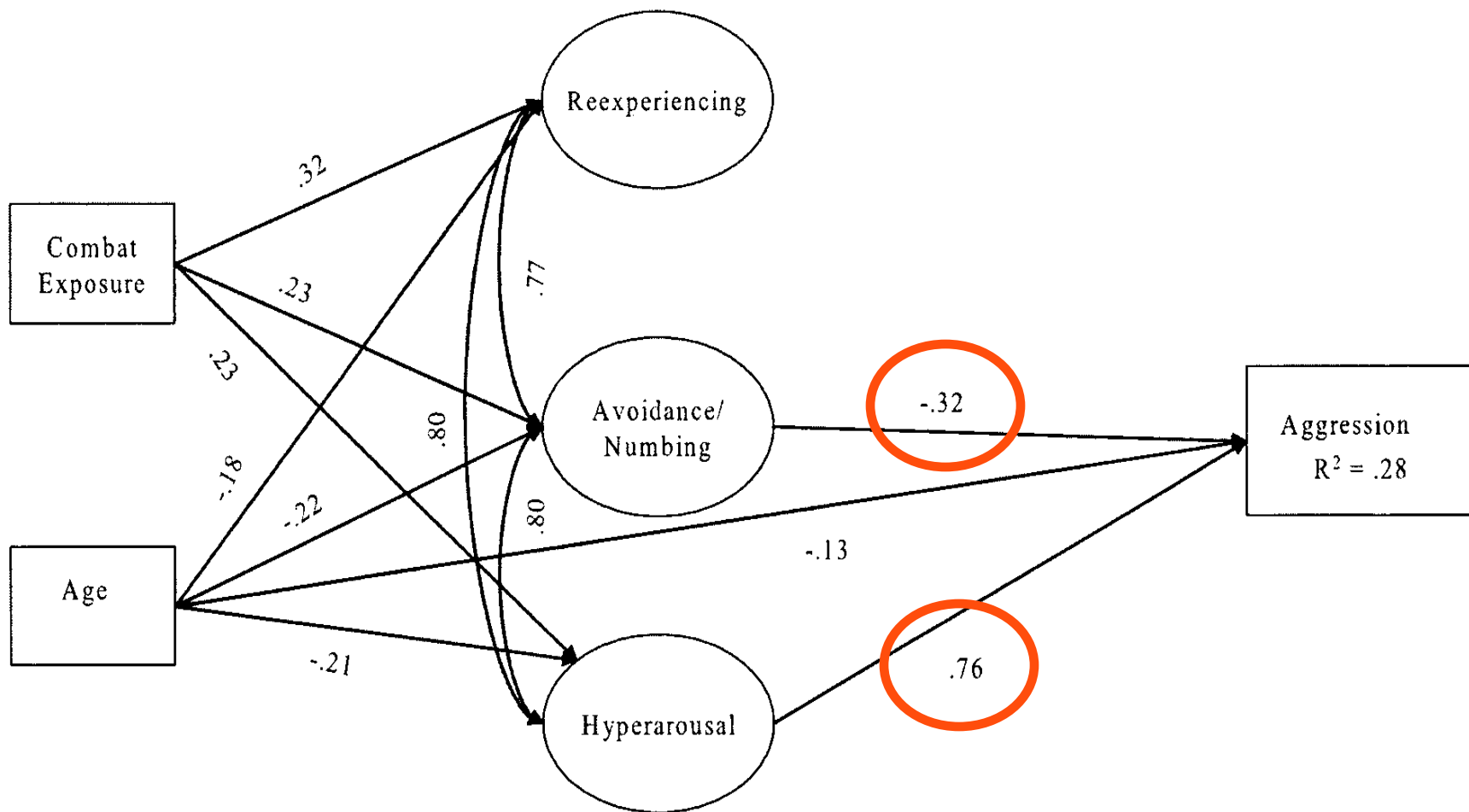


Figure 1. Standardized direct model of the latent posttraumatic stress disorder symptom variables in predicting latent aggression. All pathways shown are significant at $p < .05$. To improve model parsimony, we have excluded nonsignificant pathways in the initial model solution from the final structural model shown.

Survival Mode Model

- Vigilance to threats in warzone leads combat veteran to enter into survival mode inappropriately when stateside
- Perceive unrealistic threats
- Exhibit hostile appraisal of events
- Overvalue aggressive responses to threats
- Exhibit lower threshold for responding to the threat

Information Processing Model for Domestic Violence

- Violent men exhibit cognitive deficits (e.g., faulty attributions, irrational beliefs) that impact interpretation (**decoding stage**)
- Violent men have difficulty generating a variety of nonviolent responses (**decision-making stage**)
- Violent men may lack the behavioral skills to enact a competent response (**enactment stage**)
- The process influenced by “transitory factors” such as alcohol use, anger, physiological arousal, etc.

PTSD and Relationship “Quantity”

- National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS; Kulka et al., 1990)
 - Combat veterans with PTSD compared with those without PTSD were:
 - Less likely to marry
 - 2X more likely to divorce (70% vs 34.9%)
 - 3X more likely to have multiple divorces (22% vs 8%)

PTSD and Relationship Quality

- In veterans, PTSD associated with:
 - More relationship distress
 - Less cohesion
 - Less emotional expressiveness and engagement
 - More intimacy difficulties
 - More areas of relationship conflict
 - Domestic violence and problems with anger

Deployment and Relationship Conflict

- Iraq Active and Reserve Soldiers (Milliken, Achterlonie, & Hoge, 2007)
 - Initial mental health screening (PDHA) and 3-6 month follow-up (PDHRA)
 - Concerns about interpersonal conflict increased 4-fold
 - The largest increase of any mental health concern
 - 3.5% to 14% in Active Duty
 - 4.2% to 21.1% in Reserves

Strength at Home: Couples Program

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Goal is to prevent conflict and domestic violence in OEF/OIF veterans with PTSD
 - Relationship distress but no current violence
- Couples-based group format (10 sessions)
 - 3-5 couples per group
- Male and female co-therapist

Strength at Home: Couples Program

- Phase I (Sessions 1-3): Psychoeducation
 - Education on PTSD and impact on relationships
 - Promoting insight into relationship difficulties
 - Core themes
- Phase II (Sessions 4-5): Conflict Management
 - Roots of conflict management style
 - Assertiveness training
 - Time Outs to de-escalate difficult situations
 - Stress reduction
- Phase III (Sessions 6-9): Communication Skills
 - Listening skills
 - Emotional expression
 - Communication “traps”
- Phase IV (Session 10): Termination

Strength at Home: Men's Program

- VA and Department of Defense
- Goal is to prevent conflict and domestic violence in OEF/OIF veterans with PTSD
 - Some recent conflict or violence
- Individual (non-couple) group format (12 sessions)
 - 6-10 veterans per group
- Male and female co-therapist

Strength at Home: Men's Program

- Anger management
 - Psychoeducation
 - Self-monitoring
 - Automatic thoughts
 - Developing realistic threat appraisals
 - Alternative thoughts and strategies
- Stress management
 - Matching strategies to stressors
 - Relaxation training
- Motivational framework emphasizing personal responsibility and accountability