

# News RELEASE

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## **People with Major Depression May Have Higher Suicide Risk -- Study**

Arlington, VA - People suffering from major depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are more likely to attempt suicide, and women with both disorders are more likely to have attempted suicide than men with both disorders, according to a new report in the March 2003 *American Journal of Psychiatry*, the monthly scientific journal of the American Psychiatric Association.

Following a catastrophic trauma up to one-quarter of individuals develop PTSD, a psychiatric disorder that can occur when they experience or witness life-threatening events such as terrorist attacks, military combat, natural disasters, serious accidents or violent personal assaults. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping, and may feel uncomfortable with activities they previously enjoyed. PTSD frequently occurs in conjunction with related mental disorders.

The study, "Association of Comorbid Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Major Depression with Greater Risk for Suicidal Behavior," led by Maria A. Oquendo, M.D., Department of Psychiatry, College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute, explored aggression, history of childhood abuse and personality disorders as risk factors for suicidal acts. One-third of people who report childhood abuse or neglect develop PTSD, and the presence of childhood abuse doubles the odds of developing major depression. In the group studied by Dr. Oquendo et al, 41% reported abuse during childhood, although not all of these patients developed PTSD.

The study also found that women, who may be either exposed to more trauma and/or biologically vulnerable to developing PTSD after trauma **may be** at higher risk for PTSD. In fact, in this study, more women than men reported abuse in childhood and developed PTSD.

While the data from the study "cannot elucidate the temporal relationship between onset of PTSD and suicidal behavior," it is important to note that the increased risk of suicide attempts in patients with PTSD and major depression underscores the need to assess depressed patients for PTSD, to determine accurate risk for suicide.

"For clinicians caring for survivors of trauma, a focus on risk for suicidal acts is imperative to protect these individuals from further morbidity and mortality," said Dr. Oquendo.

["Association of Comorbid Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Major Depression with Greater Risk for Suicidal Behavior," by Maria A. Oquendo, M.D. et al, p. 580, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, March 2003.]

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose 38,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the American Psychiatric Association web site at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org).

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