

# Untreated Major Depression Common After Traumatic Brain Injury

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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It's estimated that three million Americans are living with the effects of a traumatic brain injury, most commonly from car accidents. Symptoms of a brain injury range from irritability and difficulty concentrating to changes in behavior, loss of memory, seizures, and reduced cognitive and functional abilities.

Clinical depression is also known to be associated with [traumatic brain injuries](#) (TBI) but, according to a new University of Washington published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), the majority of brain injury sufferers receive no treatment for it.

## **An Invisible Disorder Hidden Inside an Often Invisible Injury**

Major depression after a brain injury "is an invisible disorder within an often invisible injury," according to the study's authors. Treatment for TBI tends to focus on the physical injury and its cognitive and functional effects, they noted. Doctors from the University of Washington's Schools of Medicine and Public Health sought to determine how commonly clinical depression occurs in TBI patients and how it might affect their recovery.

The study included 559 patients hospitalized for TBI, mostly adult males who had been injured in car accidents. Over the course of the first year after the injury, the study found that approximately 53 percent of the participants experienced major depression - about eight times more than the rate of depression in the general population.

In fact, the investigators also concluded that the rates reported by the study participants likely underestimate the problem.

Despite those high rates, only 44 percent of the study participants who reported major depression received counseling or antidepressant therapy.

An occurrence of major depression within the first year of treatment for a brain injury was associated with lower functional abilities and poorer quality of life. Study participants with depression reported more anxiety and were more likely to report poor overall health.

## **Treatment for Depression Urged as Part of Routine TBI Treatment**

The study urges aggressive efforts needed to make mental health services part of the routine and expected care after a traumatic brain injury. Doctors need to be educated, and proper diagnosis

and treatment of clinical depression needs to be emphasized, the study's authors concluded. For those seeking compensation through a personal injury claim, psychiatric care needs to be considered when evaluating damages.

Related Resource:

["Major depression common after brain injury: study"](#) (Reuters Health, May 18, 2010)