

What Providers Need to Know: Behavioral Health and Brain Injury

What is Brain Injury?

Acquired brain injury (ABI): injury to the brain that is not hereditary, congenital, degenerative, or induced by birth trauma. ABI includes both of these injury types:

Traumatic Brain Injury:

alteration in brain function, or other evidence of brain pathology, caused by external force, such as falls, assaults, motor vehicle crashes, sports injury

*SAMSHA Publication
NO. PEP21-05-03-001, 2021*

Non-Traumatic Brain Injury:

damage to the brain by internal factors, such as lack of oxygen, stroke, or brain tumor

*Brain Injury Association of America,
www.biausa.org*

Approximately one in five American adults have sustained a TBI severe enough to result in some loss of consciousness.



The vast majority of injuries are mild, with more than 90% released from emergency departments. Most will recover from a mild brain injury. However, there is evidence to suggest that individuals with co-occurring behavioral health conditions often have poorer outcomes following injury than those who do not.

Traumatic Brain Injury and Substance Use Disorders, Lemsky C., 2021, attcnetwork.org

Not only does brain injury cause behavioral health problems, but associated deficits can also affect the effectiveness of behavioral health treatments. Identifying and supporting those with brain injury can lead to more successful outcomes.

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What are Common Symptoms?



Motor and Sensory Effects:

- Dizziness, lightheadedness, or vertigo
- Fatigue or lethargy
- Changes in walking and coordination
- Headaches and other pain symptoms



Emotional/Behavioral Dysregulation:

- Increased likelihood of concurrent mental health issues (anxiety)
- Increased likelihood of behavioral problems (anger, irritability, socially inappropriate behavior)



Cognitive Impairment:

- Slowed thinking (inability to process information efficiently)
- Memory challenges (inability to remember things in the past)
- Issues in attention/concentration (knowing what to do in the present)
- Difficulties multitasking
- Impairments of language and communication



*Traumatic Brain Injury and Substance Use Disorders, Lemsky C., 2021, attcnetwork.org
<https://attcnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/TBI%20%20SUD%20Toolkit%20FINAL%2011.05.2021.pdf>*

What About the Intersection with Substance Use and Behavior?

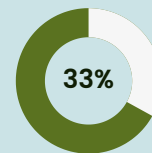
Having one or more brain injuries with loss of consciousness is associated with greater risk for behavioral health problems, including problematic substance use beginning in adolescents and more psychiatric symptoms and a significantly elevated risk of suicide.

Traumatic Brain Injury and Substance Use Disorders, 2021, attcnetwork.org.

2 to 4

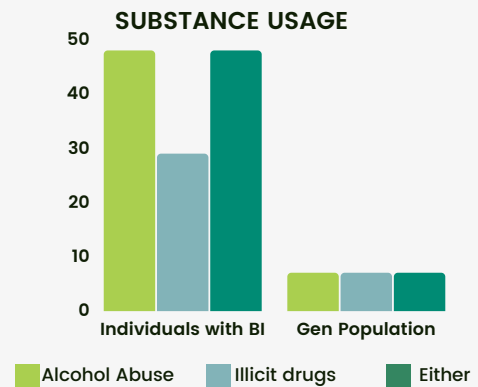
People with brain injury of any severity have 2 to 4 times the risk of attempting or having a death by suicide.

Dreer, L.E. et. al. 2018



One-third of individuals with brain injury experience mental health problems 6 months-1 year post injury.

Fazel, et al. 2014



NSDC, Corrigan, 2003