

Many young war vets struggle with PTSD and alcohol abuse

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The mother of an Iraq War veteran, accused of killing a Bakersfield woman in a suspected drunk driving crash says her son suffers from post traumatic stress disorder. A local PTSD therapist said problems with alcohol and drugs plague troops coming home from war.



"My son has PTSD and depression," said Rosadalia Trevino, the mother of 23-year-old Iraq War veteran Marcus Trevino. On June 3rd, the California Highway Patrol said her son was driving drunk when he ran a stop sign and caused a fiery crash with another car. Perla Gonzalez, 28, was killed. Her 14-month-old son, Jayden, survived but had to undergo extensive surgeries for burns. Her friend, Cherie Lopez, was also injured.

Before the crash, Trevino had a previous DUI conviction and another dui arrest in Riverside that is still in the courts.

"The alcohol abuse is extremely common," said Russ Sempell, a therapist with the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which has centers in Bakersfield and Tehachapi and treats war veterans with PTSD. He said many vets returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan develop PTSD, and try to numb the pain with alcohol or drugs.

"We as individuals in our society have to be responsible for ourselves and our behaviors and our choices. And at the same time there is a compassion for tragedies that cause tragedies. Sempell said, adding most vets struggling with post-war trauma and addiction won't get help on their own, because they are supposed to be strong. He said the families need to be the ones to intervene, before it's too late.

"If this tragedy, that happened last week, if it can help one more vet and civilian that might be protected from an accident on the streets in Bakersfield then we can turn a crisis into an opportunity," Sempell said.

"This has affected both families the victims' families and our family and I wish I could help them but I don't know what to do," Rosadalia said.

If you are or know a veteran who has PTSD or is struggling with drugs or alcohol you can call NAMI for free help at (661) 303-1416.

