

New study looks at the relationship between immune function and mental health among people in treatment

Emeryville, CA (March 20, 2018): When assessing the relationship between immune function and mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, most researchers exclude people with alcohol and drug use disorders because of the complexity they introduce into the analyses. However, for Priscilla Martinez, study lead and Scientist with the Alcohol Research Group, a program of the Public Health Institute, not including people with substance use disorders is problematic.

“We know that chronic alcohol and drug use impairs the immune system and that using substances is often linked to mental health issues, so to exclude people who could benefit from this kind of research seems counterintuitive,” said Martinez. “But we also recognize how difficult it is to determine what’s really going on when the very act of using drugs or alcohol muddies the results.”

Martinez and colleagues’ study assessed individuals in treatment for alcohol and drug use disorders at five centers in Norway. Results showed significant relationships between various immune responses and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress.

While she spoke to the study’s limitations and noted the findings are preliminary, Martinez hopes their work will encourage other researchers to take up the challenge.

“If there’s one thing I’d like people to learn from our study, is that the association between immune function and mental health within this population is an important relationship to look at, not only because it increases our understanding of the biological response to depression and anxiety, but it can also inform treatment protocols and improve their success.”

###

Martinez, P., Lien, L., Zemore, S., Bramness, J.G., Neupane, S.P. (2018) Circulating cytokine levels are associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety among people with alcohol and drug use disorders. *Journal of Neuroimmunology*:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165572817304599>

If you are interested in arranging an interview with Katherine Karriker-Jaffe, PhD, please contact Diane Schmidt, communications specialist at the Alcohol Research Group at (510) 898- 5819 or dschmidt@arg.org.

About the Alcohol Research Group: The Alcohol Research Group (ARG) is a program of the Public Health Institute. ARG is dedicated to improving public health through deepening our understanding of and developing preventive approaches to the implications of alcohol and other drug use.

About the Public Health Institute: The Public Health Institute, an independent nonprofit organization, is dedicated to promoting health, well-being and quality of life for people throughout California, across the nation and around the world.