

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Hitting Home: Relationships Between Recent Deployment, Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms, and Marital Functioning for Army Couples

Allen, E. S., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2010). Hitting home: Relationships between recent deployment, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and marital functioning for Army couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(3), 280-288. doi:10.1037/a0019405

SUMMARY: Survey data from Army husbands and civilian wives were utilized to examine whether a recent history of deployment and current posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms were related to several aspects of marital functioning (i.e., satisfaction, negative communication, positive bonding, parenting alliance, confidence, dedication, and satisfaction with sacrificing for the spouse). Results indicated that a recent history of deployment did not negatively influence marital functioning. However, PTSD symptoms were associated with reduced marital functioning, even after accounting for adaptive processes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- A history of recent deployment was not associated with differences in marital functioning; however, it was associated with greater symptoms of PTSD, which negatively affected marital functioning for both husbands and wives except to wives' satisfaction with sacrifice.
- Some aspects of marital functioning were more greatly affected by husband's PTSD symptoms; for example, confidence in the relationship suffered more than dedication to the relationships.
- Adaptive processes such as negative communication, positive bonding, and parenting alliance mediated the relationship between PTSD symptoms and marital satisfaction for men but not women.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military couples regarding how PTSD symptoms (e.g., avoiding) may affect marital functioning
- Disseminate information regarding the possible symptoms of PTSD Service members may face after deployment and the resources available to help families cope
- Continue to provide workshops that work to enhance military couple's communication skills and marital functioning

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for service providers regarding the unique needs of military personnel and their families following a deployment
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to provide streamlined care for military families coping with mental health issues following a deployment
- Continue to support reintegration programs for military families

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants were selected from a larger study examining the effectiveness of a marriage education workshop conducted at Fort Campbell, KY.
- Participants included married couples consisting of Active Duty U.S. Army husbands and civilian wives (n = 434 couples).
- Baseline assessment data from the larger study were utilized for the current study; data were collected between March and September 2007.

PARTICIPANTS

- The majority of Army husbands were White (71%) and were on average 27.8 years old (SD = 5.6).
- Seventy-three percent of wives were White and were on average 27.1 years old (SD = 6.0).
- The average length of marriage for couples was five years and 72% of couples had at least one child living in their household at least part-time.

LIMITATIONS

- Only couples comprised of an Army husband and civilian wife were included in this study, limiting the generalizability of results to different types of military couples (e.g., female service members married to a civilian husband) and other branches of the military.
- Participants self-selected into the larger study based on the opportunity to be enrolled in a marriage education workshop; therefore, couples in this sample may have had more marital problems and been more motivated to seek assistance.
- Only couples who had a Service member deploy within the last year were included in the study and number of deployments and length of deployments were not assessed, which could influence the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the influence of deployment and PTSD symptoms on marital functioning in different types of military couples (e.g., female Service members with civilian husbands)
- Examine how and under what conditions the number of previous deployments strengthens or weakens the marital relationship
- Replicate the current study with couples in other branches of the military

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