

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## The Warrior's Journey: Sociocontextual Meaning-Making in Military Transitions

Brinn, A. J., & Auerbach, C. F. (2015). The warrior's journey: Sociocontextual meaning-making in military transitions *Traumatology*, 21(2), 82-89. doi:10.1037/trm0000030

**SUMMARY:** Semi-structured interviews were completed with 12 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans regarding how they made meaning of their traumatic experiences and how they defined their identity after experiencing combat. Veterans tended to make meaning in group settings with other Veterans who experienced the same event, which helped to reduce symptoms related to traumatic stress.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Veterans were able to make sense of their traumatic experiences most successfully when in the company of other Veterans who had similar experiences.
- Participants indicated that they were not able to make meaning of some events due to the level of trauma associated with the experience.
- Veterans stated that informal debriefings with other Service members who experienced the same combat event was helpful in making meaning of the traumatic event.
- The meaning-making process was most helpful when Veterans were able to identify with a greater social context, such as identification as a warrior.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide informational sessions to Service members and their families about the techniques for making meaning of the challenges associated with combat
- Develop peer support groups for Service members who have experienced traumatic combat events to provide opportunities to support each other
- Offer workshops for Service members and their families to learn about how to manage stress associated with combat-related trauma

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support training of professionals who work with military families to increase their awareness of the effectiveness of making meaning of traumatic experiences for Service members
- Increase awareness campaigns about the impact of combat-related traumatic stress on Service members and their families
- Encourage initiatives that teach military families how to support Service members as they transition during post-deployment and make meaning of their combat experiences

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## METHODS

- Veterans were recruited by sending out web-based bulletins inviting them to participate.
- Participant eligibility included serving in OIF/OEF and past engagement in direct combat.
- Data were collected from semi-structured interviews that assessed the role of meaning-making and the social context within which the traumatic experiences are processed.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Interviews were conducted with 12 male Veterans. They represented three service branches: Army (n = 7), Air Force (n = 1), and Marines (n = 4). Average length of service was six years (SD = 2.21).
- Participants' average age was 29.6 years old (SD = 4.32). Most participants were White (n = 11), and one participant was multiracial.
- All Veterans were either employed (n = 8) or enrolled in school (n = 4) full-time.

## LIMITATIONS

- The authors weren't clear where the sample was recruited from (e.g., from the community, from a university) which makes it difficult to assess if there was any bias that may have influenced the results.
- There was no mention of inter-rater reliability process or presentation of objective data to indicate that adequate inter-rater reliability was obtained.
- There were no examples provided as to how the content of the interviews were selected into the three levels of coding, so the specifics of that stage of data analysis were unclear.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Consider collecting data from a larger, more heterogeneous sample that includes female Service members
- Gather data on military spouses' meaning-making of Service members' combat-related trauma and the impact on their relationship
- Examine the links between Service members' meaning of their combat related experiences and quality of life after deployment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>