

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Distress in Spouses of Vietnam Veterans: Associations With Communication About Deployment Experiences

Campbell, S. B., & Renshaw, K. D. (2012). Distress in spouses of Vietnam veterans: Associations with communication about deployment experiences. *Journal of Family Psychology, 26*(1), 18-25. doi:10.1037/a0026680

SUMMARY: Vietnam Veterans and their partners participated in a study that investigated the relationship between partner psychological well-being and relationship functioning with Veterans' sharing about their Vietnam experiences. Couples' general communication factored more heavily in partner relationship satisfaction than did communication about Vietnam.

KEY FINDINGS:

- When level of general communication and Veterans' PTSD symptoms were controlled, communication about Vietnam was not associated with partners' relationship distress.
- Overall, Vietnam-specific communication was associated with better general communication.
- In couples where the Veteran did not have significant PTSD, Vietnam-related communication was similar to their general communication.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes for Service members and partners about how general communication is more important for relationship health than military or deployment specific communication
- Offer workshops to build communication skills as part of reintegration events, noting that Service members may experience strong emotions when talking about deployment experiences
- Provide education for family members of Service members with PTSD, providing information about PTSD and its impact on the family

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support couples programs for Service members and their families who have relationships problems
- Continue to provide support for programs that work to increase family readiness
- Provide professional development for family service workers on effective communication strategies for military couples

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METHODS

- Vietnam Veterans (and their partners) who participated in the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Survey were invited to participate.
- Veterans and spouses were interviewed separately.
- Veterans completed measures of PTSD symptoms, marital problems, psychological distress, and communication patterns, while their partners completed measures of marital problems, psychological distress, and communication patterns.
- Statistical analyses were used to explore relationships between Veterans and their partners' responses.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 465 Vietnam Veterans and their opposite sex partners.
- There were 81% male Veteran-female partner pairs.
- The average age of Veterans was 41.7 years (SD = 5.2 years), while the average age of their partners was 40 years (SD = 7.4 years).
- Ninety four percent of the pairs were married and the average marriage length was 14.4 years (SD = 7.2 years).

LIMITATIONS

- The data were cross-sectional and any causal conclusions are inappropriate.
- Researchers did not assess the precise type, kind, or intensity of communication about Vietnam.
- The data were collected at least ten years after return from combat; results may have differed if collected earlier.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Use a more in-depth measure of communication about deployment in order to assess more complicated relationships
- Investigate a more recent cohort of Veterans
- Examine couples longitudinally to assess if communication impacts long-term relationship outcomes and satisfaction

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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