

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

PTSD Symptoms, Disclosure, and Relationship Distress: Explorations of Mediation and Associations Over Time

Campbell, S. B., & Renshaw, K. D. (2013). PTSD symptoms, disclosure, and relationship distress: Explorations of mediation and associations over time. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 27(5), 494-502. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2013.06.007>

SUMMARY: Becoming more prevalent, a posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis can result in relationship distress among treatment-seeking Service members upon arrival home. In a sample of OIF/OEF National Guard Service members, the correlations between Service members' PTSD symptoms, Service members' emotional disclosure with their partner, and relationship satisfaction of both partners were qualitatively analyzed over time. Findings propose that the emotional numbing symptoms of PTSD were strongly correlated with relationship dissatisfaction among Service members and their romantic partners.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members and their partners with more severe PTSD symptoms resulted in lower relationship satisfaction for both the Service member and partner.
- Emotional numbing symptoms (e.g., emotional detachment, desensitization, or emotional suppression) in Service members had the greatest influence on both the Service members' and partner's relationship satisfaction.
- A decrease in the Service members' emotional disclosure (e.g., "How likely your spouse or significant other is to disclose the following situation regarding his deployment with you?") decreased the relationship satisfaction of both partners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military couples on coping mechanisms to reduce numbing PTSD symptoms
- Offer classes for Service members and their partners designed to improve relationship disclosure
- Provide pre and post-deployment support groups aimed to increase communication between Service members and their partners

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional education for professionals who work with military couples to include information regarding post-deployment mental health needs and relationship support
- Continue to support programs that address reintegration challenges in regards to relationship strain of Service members
- Encourage collaborations between established programs within community and military organizations for Service members with PTSD

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METHODS

- Military couples were recruited through eight marriage workshops in Utah offered to married or cohabiting National Guard/Reserve members and their partners.
- Questionnaires typically took between 60-90 minutes for each partner and assessed PTSD symptoms in Service members, likelihood of disclosure for both Service members and partners, and an overall relationship assessment.
- After four to six months, participants were contacted again to participate in a second questionnaire that assessed similar constructs.

PARTICIPANTS

- The initial data collection included a sample of 224 Service members who reported at least one deployment during OIF/OEF, and 214 of their partners.
- In the second data collection, 83 Service members and 91 partners from the initial data collection participated, in which 68 Service members and partners were a couple.
- The majority of Service members were White (92.5%) and male (98.8%), ranging from 20-59 years of age with no additional demographic information provided.
- The majority of partners were White (93.3%) with ages ranging from 18-55 years with no additional demographic information provided. All partners were female with the majority married to their partners (96.4%).

LIMITATIONS

- The inability to reproduce the participant's sample sizes at each data collection time creates a flaw in the reproducibility of the experiment's findings.
- Loss of participants from the first questionnaire to the second limits the ability to detect an effect of the results.
- Emotional disclosure was only measured in the second questionnaire, preventing the analysis of disclosure over the four to six month time period.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate deployment-related versus general emotional disclosure in the relationships of Service members
- Incorporate a larger sample through random selection of participants to ensure that results are applicable to the greater population
- Increase the study's reliability through the incorporate similar surveys or questionnaires to all participants

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