

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Relationships Between Soldiers' PTSD Symptoms and Spousal Communication During Deployment

Carter, S., Loew, B., Allen, E., Stanley, S., Rhoades, G., & Markman, H. (2011). Relationships between soldiers' PTSD symptoms and spousal communication during deployment. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 24*(3), 352-355.  
doi:10.1002/jts.20649

**SUMMARY:** The frequency of communication between male Army Soldiers and their at-home spouses during a recent deployment was examined to consider the relationship between communication and post-deployment posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Among Soldiers with high levels of marital satisfaction, more frequent communication predicted lower levels of PTSD after homecoming.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Most Soldiers reported using phone calls, instant messaging, and emails with their spouses daily. They received letters and care packages on average 1-2 times a month.
- More frequent communication predicted lower PTSD symptoms, but only among Soldiers with higher levels of marital satisfaction.
- For Soldiers reporting high levels of marital satisfaction, having more frequent delayed communication with spouses during deployment (e.g., letters, care packages, email) was related to higher marital satisfaction.
- Regarding Soldiers with lower levels of marital satisfaction, more delayed communication during deployment was associated with more PTSD symptoms.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Publicize the availability of resources for couples managing PTSD, including support groups, behavioral health programs, and couple/family activities
- Offer support groups for military spouses to allow for the exchange of peer support during deployment and reintegration
- Create classes for military spouses, offering them information and skills about how to be supportive to their deployed Service member

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage public awareness campaigns like the National PTSD Awareness Day
- Support marriage enrichment programs that bolster couples' relationship satisfaction and communication
- Ensure that military installations offer information technology support to at-home spouses during deployments, such as maintaining secure phone and computer connections

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

- Soldiers were recruited from a previous randomized clinical trial studying a marriage education program.
- Participants completed self-report surveys regarding PTSD, combat exposure, and marital satisfaction.
- In addition, participants indicated how often they used six communication modalities with their spouses while deployed (email, letters, phone calls, care packages, instant messaging, and instant messaging with video).

## PARTICIPANTS

- Active Duty male, married Army Soldiers (N = 193) who had returned from a combat deployment within the last year participated.
- Most participants were either White (76%), Latino/Latina (12%), or Black (7%). Age of participants was not reported.
- Among participants, the average marriage length was 5.83 years (SD = 4.59).

## LIMITATIONS

- Data are cross sectional which prohibits the ability to make causal conclusions.
- Communication reports may have been affected by retrospective biases.
- Some relevant variables were not assessed, such as who initiated the communication, content of the communication, and duration of the interactions.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Follow couples over time to examine the relationship between marital communication and PTSD symptomatology
- Examine how the communication with at-home spouses was helpful to the deployed Service member qualitatively
- Elicit the at-home spouses' perspectives on the frequency, quality, and impacts of communication during deployment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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