

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Perceived Burden in Spouses of National Guard/Reserve Service Members Deployed During Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom

Caska, C. M., & Renshaw, K. D. (2011). Perceived burden in spouses of National Guard/Reserve service members deployed during Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 25*(3), 346-351.
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SUMMARY: Male National Guard/Reserve Service members and their female spouses participated in a study examining partner perceived burden (spousal perceptions of negative life change due to their Service member's mental health concerns) in relation to Service members' mental health problems. Spouses' burden was positively associated with Service members' symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety, regardless of the clinical severity.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members' symptoms of PTSD and depression, Service member overall distress, spouses' perceptions of burden, and spouses' psychological distress were all linked empirically.
- Spouses' perceived burden fully explained the associations between Service members' symptoms and spouses' psychological distress.
- Spouses' burden was positively correlated with their neuroticism and avoidant coping and negatively correlated with their self efficacy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate spouses of Service members managing mental health problems regarding coping skills and opportunities for peer support
- Disseminate information to military couples regarding the available services for couples coping with mental illness or marital issues
- Offer workshops for Service members to help them recognize symptoms of PTSD

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community-based programs to increase military couples access to couple and family therapy and marriage retreats
- Continue to support programs that offer pre- and post-deployment workshops for the spouses of deployed military Service members
- Recommend the provision of additional support services for spouses during deployment (e.g., childcare)

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METHODS

- Couples were recruited during marriage education workshops offered to Utah National Guard and Reserve members between 2007 and 2008; 51% elected to participate
- Only male National Guard/Reserve members who had been deployed since 2001 and who had female spouses were included in these analyses.
- Participants completed paper and pencil measures of perceived burden, PTSD symptoms, depression, personality and ways of coping.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 130 male National Guard/Reserve Service members and their female spouses participated.
- Average Service member age was 33.6 years (SD = 7.9 years); average partner's age was 31.5 years (SD = 7.9 years).
- Mean length of marriage was 8.9 years (SD = 7.4 years).
- The majority of Service members (90%) and partners (92%) were White.

LIMITATIONS

- The participants were all participating in a marriage workshop, so they may be more distressed than other couples.
- The sample consisted of only male Utah National Guard/Reserve members and their female partners, and these findings may not generalize beyond this population.
- The measures were all self-reported, and results may be biased.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Continue to explore how sub clinical levels of PTSD and other mental health outcomes influence spouses' perceptions of burden
- Use a longitudinal design to measure the development of spousal burden over time
- Replicate this study with couples where the Service member is Active Duty

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