

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Complicated Grief Among Military Service Members and Veterans Who Served After September 11, 2001

Charney, M. E., Bui, E., Sager, J. C., Ohye, B. Y., Goetter, E. M., & Simon, N. (2018). Complicated grief among military service members and veterans who served after September 11, 2001. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 31*(1), 157-162.  
doi:10.1002/jts.22254

**SUMMARY:** Service members and Veterans are at risk for complicated grief (i.e., having intense grief symptoms such as nonacceptance of the death and preoccupation about the deceased). This study had 468 mental health treatment-seeking Service members and Veterans complete questionnaires regarding their complicated grief symptoms, mental health symptoms, and quality of life. Results indicated that the prevalence of complicated grief was high among participants and that complicated grief was associated with a number of mental health symptoms.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Approximately one third (30%) of participants met diagnostic criteria of complicated grief.
- The presence of complicated grief was associated with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and stress.
- Participants who met diagnostic criteria of complicated grief were less likely to have high quality of life compared to participants who did not have complicated grief.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for Service members and military spouses who are in complicated grief
- Disseminate information regarding available resources on military bases for Service members who lost a family member or close friend
- Educate military families on useful methods to cope with grief

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness regarding the negative effects of complicated grief on Service members' mental health and quality of life
- Recommend regular screening of complicated grief among Service members who are in bereavement
- Support the development of programs that treat complicated grief in Service members

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.



# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a mental health clinic, and had to be a Service member or a Veteran to be eligible for the study.
- Participants completed questionnaires regarding their complicated grief symptoms, PTSD, depression, anxiety, stress symptoms, and quality of life.
- Data were analyzed to examine the rate of complicated grief among participants as well as characteristics that are associated with complicated grief.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 468 Service members or Veterans; the average age of the participants was 33.98 years (SD = 8.69) and the majority of them were male (91%).
- The race/ethnicity of the participants was not reported.
- The military branches of the participants were Army (35%), Marine Corps (21%), National Guard (21%), and other (23%).

## LIMITATIONS

- All participants were seeking treatment at a mental health clinic; therefore, they may show more symptoms than the general population and these findings may not generalize to non-clinical populations.
- Only self-report data were used in the study, so the findings may be subject to memory bias and social desirability bias.
- The cross-sectional design of the study made it impossible to examine the causal relationship between complicated grief and mental health symptoms.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit participants of different mental health status and from various race/ethnicity backgrounds so that the study can be better generalized
- Use both subjective and objective data to increase the reliability of the study
- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationship between complicated grief and mental health symptoms

## 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>