



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

The Adjustment of Children of Australian Vietnam Veterans: Is There Evidence for the Transgenerational Transmission of the Effects of War-related Trauma?

Davidson, A. C. & Mellor, D. J. (2001). The adjustment of children of Australian Vietnam veterans: is there evidence for the transgenerational transmission of the effects of war-related trauma. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 35, 345-351.



50 male, Australian Vietnam veterans with and without posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 33 age-matched civilian males, and each adult's oldest willing child (age range 16-30) completed surveys assessing family functioning, self-esteem, and symptoms of PTSD to examine the transgenerational transmission of PTSD. Results suggested that family functioning, but not poor self-esteem or PTSD symptoms, was more impaired among offspring of Veterans with PTSD relative to comparison groups.

Key Findings:

- Offspring of Veterans with PTSD reported more dysfunctional family functioning, especially related to affective responsiveness and problem solving, than civilian children.
- There were no significant differences in PTSD symptoms or self-esteem among the groups of offspring.
- Veterans with PTSD reported significantly lower self-esteem, higher posttraumatic stress symptoms, and more family dysfunction than their peers.
- Contrary to hypotheses, there were no significant correlations between fathers' PTSD and self-esteem scores and those of their children.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could provide activities aimed at enhancing family functioning, particularly related to improving parental affective responsiveness and effective problem-solving in the family.
- Programs could collaborate with community agencies to offer supportive classes for families of those living with PTSD, including teaching strategies to enhance skills in managing stress.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate funding to increase access to programs designed to strengthen family functioning, particularly for families of Veterans experiencing post-deployment mental health problems.
- Policies could support the development of a range of services for offspring of Veterans with PTSD, including support services, bibliotherapy, and peer support.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could incorporate additional measures to evaluate whether PTSD confers vulnerability for a wider variety of child outcomes.
- Future research could include wives and additional children to more thoroughly assess familial and transgenerational effects of trauma.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- Vietnam Veterans and their oldest willing child were recruited from notices in national newsletters and direct mailings. They were also asked to recruit civilian men of similar age (e.g., brothers, neighbors) along with their oldest willing child.
- 60% of individuals who responded to the ads returned surveys.
- Participants completed questionnaires assessing family functioning, self-esteem, and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Veterans also completed a measure of combat exposure.
- Analyses of variance were used to compare outcomes for Veterans with and without PTSD to civilian controls, and to examine outcomes for their children to examine potential transgenerational effects of trauma-related dysfunction.

Participants:

- 50 male Australian Vietnam Veterans and their oldest willing child composed the Veteran group.
- 33 age-matched civilian fathers along with their oldest willing child were the control group.
- Children ranged in age from 15-30.

Limitations:

- As noted by the authors, the literature suggests that there are differences in traumatic war experiences and postwar adjustment between Australian and U.S. Veterans; therefore, the extent to which these results generalize to U.S. samples is unknown.
- The recruitment technique may have led Veterans to recruit non-Veteran peers with similar levels of dysfunction, thereby reducing group differences.
- The age range of the children varied considerably; familial experiences of 16 year olds may be considerably different than that of 30 year old children.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:	★☆☆
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)		
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Research Methods					Quality Rating:	★★★☆☆
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)		
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Limitations					Quality Rating:	★★★☆☆
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)		
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Implications					Quality Rating:	☆☆☆☆
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)		
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications						
Overall Quality Rating						★★★☆☆