



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Emotional Distress and Marital Adjustment of Caregivers: Contribution of Level of Impairment and Appraised Burden

Dekel, R., Solomon, Z. & Bleich, A. (2005). Emotional distress and marital adjustment of caregivers: Contribution of level of impairment and appraised burden. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, 18, 71-82. doi: 10.1080.10615800412336427.



215 male Israeli military Veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) seeking compensation for psychiatric conditions and their wives participated in a study. Researchers examined the contribution of the husband's impairment and the wife's sense of burden to the wife's level of emotional distress and marital adjustment. Levels of emotional distress among these spouses were higher than those in the general United States population, and their level of distress related to perceived caregiver burden.

Key Findings:

- The average level of distress among wives of Veterans with PTSD was higher than that of the general U.S. population.
- Higher levels of husband impairment and emotional distress were associated with lower levels of marital adjustment and higher levels of emotional distress among wives.
- Wives' caregiver burden completely mediated the relationship between Veterans' and wives' emotional distress.
- Wives' caregiver burden also completely mediated the relationship between Veterans' functioning and wives' marital adjustment.
- Wives' caregiver burden partially mediated the relationships between Veterans' distress and wives' marital adjustment, as well as between Veterans' functioning and wives' emotional distress.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could develop supportive classes for military wives to teach them effective methods of coping with stress related to their Veterans' PTSD.
- Programs could conduct informal focus groups with military wives of Veterans with PTSD to explore effective outreach strategies to these women (possibly including online forums).

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate funding for support programs for military wives who are living with a Veteran managing PTSD.
- Policies could recommend that PTSD treatment programs incorporate modules pertaining to intimate relationships; they may also include spouses as part of their curricula.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could attempt to measure additional variables (e.g., demographic or health variables) that may help explain the relationships among caregiver burden, Veteran distress and functioning, and wives' marital adjustment and distress.
- Additional studies could use a longitudinal model to measure how these variables predict one another across time.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- Male Israeli military Veterans with PTSD who were applying for financial compensation were recruited at three assessment clinics. Recruitment rates were not reported.
- Veterans and their wives completed self-report questionnaires and clinical interviews.
- Veterans completed measures of emotional distress, psychiatrists assessed veterans' functional disability, and wives completed measures of emotional distress, sense of burden, and marital adjustment.
- Structural equation modeling tested the relative contributions of husbands' impairment and caregivers' sense of burden to the caregivers' emotional distress and marital adjustment.

Participants:

- 215 male Israeli military Veterans and their wives participated.
- Average Veteran age: 48.8 years (SD: 8.49 years).
- Average time since traumatic event: 19.6 years.
- Highest education level for Veterans: 52% elementary or partial high school, 34% high school graduates, 14% college degree.
- No demographic data was presented on the wives.

Limitations:

- The sample was Israeli; it is unknown how these findings may generalize to American military populations.
- The design was cross-sectional, and causal conclusions are not appropriate.
- Because of the lack of variability in PTSD symptoms, PTSD symptoms could not be used as a measure of distress.
- There was no demographic data available for the wives.
- The sample consisted of all military Veterans with PTSD who were seeking compensation; therefore, these results may not generalize beyond this specific population.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★ ★ ★