

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Couple Therapy for Military Veterans: Overall Effectiveness and Predictors of Response

Doss, B. D., Rowe, L. S., Morrison, K. R., Libet, J., Birchler, G. R., Madsen, J. W., & McQuaid, J. R. (2012). Couple therapy for military veterans: Overall effectiveness and predictors of response *Behavior Therapy*, 43(1), 216-227.

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**SUMMARY:** Data from 177 couples who attended therapy at two Veteran medical centers were used to examine the effectiveness of couple's therapy on relationship satisfaction. The influence of demographic, relational, and psychological characteristics was also explored. Results indicated that therapy effectively increased relationship satisfaction and only race was found to influence this relationship.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Although 62% of couples terminated therapy early, those who continued the course of therapy showed gains in relationship satisfaction.
- Couples who indicated higher levels of distress at the onset of therapy experienced more gains in relationship satisfaction compare to couples who were considered non-distressed.
- Black participants showed significantly more gains in relationship satisfaction over the course of therapy compared to White participants.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military couples to enhance positive communication skills to help couples effectively cope with relationship issues
- Disseminate information regarding which programs and services support Service members and their families
- Provide training for civilian service providers who work with military members regarding the unique challenges military members face

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote reintegration programs for Service members and their partners that focus on the couple relationship and positive adjustment once a Service member returns
- Continue to provide support for programs and services specifically aimed at helping Service members and their families
- Encourage collaboration among military and civilian service providers to help meet the needs of the military couples and families they serve

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## METHODS

- Couples presenting at two Veterans Affairs Medical Centers between June 2004 and November 2007 were recruited to participate in the study.
- Participants completed an initial battery of intake questions regarding demographics, psychological symptoms, and relationship issues.
- Couples also completed weekly questionnaires that addressed relationship satisfaction and these scores were used to examine the effectiveness of therapy.

## PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 177 heterosexual couples (354 individuals) participated, resulting in a response rate of 82%.
- The majority of participants were married (85%), White (70% of men, 68% of women), and middle-aged with a mean age of 49.8 years for men and 46.5 years for women.
- Seventy-six percent of women and 61% of men scored within the distressed range for relationship satisfaction.

## LIMITATIONS

- The two Veteran clinics utilized different treatment approaches, which makes it difficult to make comparisons between the two clinics.
- Veteran couples in the current study were older so results may not be generalizable to Veterans who are younger and served in OIF/OEF.
- Without a control group, it is difficult to understand how much influence couple's therapy had on relationship satisfaction.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine why couples terminate therapy prematurely and explore ways to reduce the rate of premature termination
- Investigate how different treatment approaches influence the rate of therapy's effectiveness on couple's relationship satisfaction
- Explore how demographic characteristics, such as race and gender, influence therapy outcomes for military couples

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