



## The Home Front: Operational Stress Injuries and Veteran Perceptions of their Children's Functioning

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**SUMMARY:** Canadian military veterans (n=1,244) recruited from a Canadian Veterans Affairs hospital completed a mail survey regarding PTSD, depression, and concerns about children. Approximately one-third of participants with PTSD cited concerns about their children's emotional well-being, and almost half were worried about their children's behavior.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Approximately 30% of Veterans with PTSD reported concerns about their children's happiness.
- Almost half (47%) of participants with PTSD reported behavioral concerns about their children.
- Veterans with PTSD were significantly more likely to report concerns about their children's behavioral and emotional well-being than Veterans without PTSD.
- Parental PTSD symptoms of emotional numbing and hyper-arousal (exaggerated startle, irritability) were related to both emotional and behavioral concerns about children.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Create classes for returning Service members regarding the potential influence of PTSD on children and offer tips on how to minimize any adverse impact
- Include information in parenting classes for military spouses about how to support their
- Service member with PTSD as a parent
- Offer peer support programs for youth whose parent has PTSD, allowing them opportunities to exchange social support with others with shared experiences

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Recommend routine assessment of PTSD and other mental health concerns among Service members after deployment
- Encourage collaboration between installation family program staff and civilian school personnel in support of military children whose parents have PTSD
- Allocate funds to provide professional development training to community members who work with military youth to sensitize them to the unique experiences of these families

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



## METHODS

- Mail-out surveys were sent to military veterans in 1999 after they completed a health assessment at Veterans Affairs Canada.
- Response rates was 72%.
- Participants completed brief measures of PTSD and depression.
- Child functioning was assessed via two items, rating awareness of a child's unhappiness and concerns about the child's behavior.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Canadian military veterans (n=1,244) with children participated.
- Sample was primarily male (94%), and most were married (89%).
- Almost half (42%) were over age 45, 26% were 45-54, and 23% were 35-44.
- The majority (76%) were noncommissioned officers and had been deployed one or two times.

## LIMITATIONS

- Data are correlational, so no causal relationships can be determined.
- The primary parenting outcomes were assessed by two items that have not been validated.
- All measures were self-report which may introduce bias.
- A large portion of the participants were over age 45, and may have been reporting on relationships with older (or adult) offspring.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Qualitative research could more fully examine the relationships between parental PTSD and parenting challenges.
- Researchers could include other informants, including co-parents and children, to ascertain their perspectives on child functioning.
- Parents and children could be followed longitudinally to examine changes in family relationships over time.

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-works>