

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Attachment, and Intimate Partner Violence in a Military Sample: A Preliminary Analysis

Frey, L., Blackburn, K., Werner-Wilson, R., Parker, T., & Wood, N. (2011). Posttraumatic stress disorder, attachment, and intimate partner violence in a military sample: A preliminary analysis. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 23*(4-Mar), 218-230. doi:10.1080/08952833.2011.604530

SUMMARY: Data from Military couples in which the male is an Army or National Guard member with at least one deployment were used to examine the associations among posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, attachment style (e.g., secure, avoidant, and anxious), and the risk for intimate partner violence (IPV). Findings suggest there is a relationship between PTSD symptoms, attachment style, and the risk of IPV.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Wives reports of their husbands PTSD symptoms positively predicted both husbands and wives avoidant attachment style.
- Husbands and wives' avoidant attachment style positively predicted the level of husbands who reported a risk for IPV.
- Anxious attachment style did not appear to strongly affect the relationship between PTSD symptoms and risk of IPV.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate professionals working with military couples about the interconnectedness between relationship dynamics, Service members distress and the potential for IPV
- Consider trainings for couples that focus on the importance of assessing attachment style and promoting the development of a secure attachment style
- Partner with community-based organizations to collaborate efforts when working with Military couples who have incidents of IPV

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support programs aimed at helping couples develop secure attachments, cope with PTSD symptoms, and reduce the risk of IPV
- Consider implementing awareness campaigns that educate Military couples about the impact of IPV on the family
- Encourage the development of trainings for Military personnel about the attachment styles and how they impact healthy relationships

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METHODS

- The sample consisted of male Service members and their female spouse who remained home during deployment.
- Participants were recruited via military leaders and community affiliated from Army bases and National Guard units in Kentucky.
- At least one member of the couple had to have deployed and the couple had to have been in a committed relationship with one another during the deployment to be included in the study.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 20 Military couples (85% Army; 15% National Guard).
- Average age of the Service members was 28.5 years (SD = 5.11) and 28.2 years (SD = 6.24) for the wives.
- Ethnic composition of the Service members was 75% White, 15% Black, and 10% Latino/Latina; while the ethnic composition of wives was 75% White, 15% combination of ethnicities or other, 5% Black, and 5% Latino/Latina.

LIMITATIONS

- The study contained a small sample size, which limits the ability to detect significant associations or effects of some variables that were examined.
- Given that the sample was small and primarily Army, the findings may not generalize to other branches and components of the Military.
- Due to the correlational nature of the study, causal statements cannot be made.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the relationship between attachment style, PTSD, and IPV prospectively and in larger, representative samples
- Examine the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions (e.g., couples therapy) focused on improving relationships in Military families
- Evaluate the relationship between attachment style, IPV, and other diagnoses (e.g., depression) in Military couples

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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