

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Exploring the Post-Deployment Reintegration Experiences of Veterans with PTSD and Their Significant Others

Freytes, I. M., LeLaurin, J. H., Zickmund, S. L., Resende, R. D., & Uphold, C. R. (2017). Exploring the post-deployment reintegration experiences of veterans with PTSD and their significant others *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 87(2), 149-156. doi:10.1037/ort0000211

**SUMMARY:** While many Veterans experience reintegration without major problems, a sizable portion struggle with difficulties, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI), during the transition back to their families and communities following deployment. This study is a qualitative investigation of Veterans with PTSD or TBI and their significant others' perceptions of family functioning. Findings indicate that deployment led to changes in family functioning that persisted for years following reintegration.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Couples who sought professional help during the post-deployment period credited that help with making a positive difference in their outcomes.
- Most couples reported communication challenges during the early part of reintegration that improved over time.
- Commitment to the relationship and development of new coping strategies emerged as the most significant factors in sustaining long-term marriages following a deployment.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to military families regarding the long-term impact of deployment on couples' relationships
- Provide education to military couples to enhance positive communication skills such as addressing issues directly and taking the other's perspective
- Offer post-deployment support groups to couples well beyond the 6-month reintegration period

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that address the challenges of reintegration faced by couples
- Encourage the training of professionals to better identify Service members and significant others who have difficulties communicating post-deployment
- Recommend education for service providers around the possible changes felt in the post-deployment relationship for both the Service member and the significant other

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## METHODS

- Veterans were recruited from a Veterans Affairs medical center in the Southeast U.S. through flyers, databases, and clinician referral.
- Couples were considered eligible if the Veteran served in OEF/OIF and currently had a diagnosis of PTSD or mild TBI. Furthermore, couples must have been married or living together prior to enrollment in the study.
- Each Veteran and significant other participated in separate face-to-face qualitative interviews that lasted about 1.5 hours using an adapted version of a semi-structured interview guide.
- Qualitative analyses resulted in four themes emerging from the data: individual changes, coping strategies, relationship changes, and a "new normal."

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 24 individuals (12 Veterans and 12 significant others) who completed the in-depth interviews.
- All the Veterans in the sample were male, and ranged in age from 28-62 years (M = 47 years, SD = 9.14); All the significant others were females who ranged in age from 29-60 years (M = 44 years, SD = 9.03).
- All of the couples were married (half for 15 years or longer), and nine of the couples had children. Of the 24 individuals in the sample, 42% were Black, 33% were White, and 25% were Latino.
- Veterans had been home following deployment for between two to 11 years (M = six years).

## LIMITATIONS

- The small sample size and use of a convenience sample means the results may not generalize to the larger military population.
- Only male Veterans who were married were included in the sample, so the findings may not extend to other demographics.
- The authors did not return to participants with their findings to check whether their interpretations were correct, which may affect the validity of the findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit a larger sample of randomly selected couples
- Expand criteria to include female Veterans, unmarried couples, and dual-military families
- Return to participants with initial findings to ensure everything was interpreted correctly

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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