

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## The Association Between Deployment-Related Posttraumatic Growth among U.S. Army Soldiers and Negative Behavioral Health Conditions

Gallaway, M. S., Millikan, A. M., & Bell, M. R. (2011). The association between deployment-related posttraumatic growth among U.S. Army Soldiers and negative behavioral health conditions. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 67*(12), 1151-1160. doi:10.1002/jclp.20837

**SUMMARY:** Recently deployed Soldiers were surveyed to assess the relationship between posttraumatic growth (recognized benefits from overcoming a very challenging life circumstance), combat exposure, and negative behavioral health conditions (suicidal ideation, alcohol misuse, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and adjustment problems). Reporting a higher number of combat experiences directly correlated with greater posttraumatic growth.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Among previously deployed Soldiers, those reporting moderate and high numbers of combat experiences also reported significantly higher overall post traumatic growth compared to those who reported low combat exposure.
- Soldiers reporting recent suicidal ideation reported significantly lower post traumatic growth.
- Post traumatic growth levels did not differ whether or not PTSD, adjustment reactions, depression, or problematic alcohol use were reported.
- The highest average post traumatic growth scores were observed in the appreciation of life and personal strength subscales.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes for Service members and their families about potential growth that can emerge from experiencing traumatic situations
- Develop modules about recognition and support of post traumatic growth, including how family members may support one another in fostering this growth
- Disseminate information regarding possible symptoms of mental health problems Service members may face after deployment and where individuals and families can find help for those problems

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage programs that assess areas of functioning after combat exposure to expand the domains assessed to include posttraumatic growth
- Promote reintegration programs that include attention to assisting Service members' family in adjusting to the Service member's return
- Recommend training for community providers to educate them about unique factors that contribute to mental health issues for military couples

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## METHODS

- At the request of the senior mission commander due to a cluster of violent behavior, a public health field investigation was initiated in a U.S. Army infantry brigade combat team during a three week-soldier readiness processing.
- Participants who reported a prior combat deployment answered survey questions about post traumatic growth, demographic variables, combat experiences, history of behavioral health diagnoses, suicidal ideation, and alcohol use.
- Average post traumatic growth scores were compared to previously reported post traumatic growth scores in other samples, and statistical analyses were conducted to determine differences in means and standard deviation across subgroups.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 1,834 Soldiers (92% male).
- Of the participants, 66% were White, 12% were Black, 12% were Latino, while 61% married.
- Forty-five percent of the sample completed some college/AA degree, 33% received a high school diploma, and 11% completed a GED.
- Participants' rank was as follows:, 45% E1-E4, 39% E5-E6, and 8% E7-E9.

## LIMITATIONS

- The data were cross-sectional and no causal conclusions can be drawn.
- The data may not generalize to other samples, particularly given that this brigade was having violence problems and may not be representative of U.S. military personnel.
- All behavioral health conditions were self-reported and relied on a one item measure of recall of various domains.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with a broader sample of Soldiers and Service members from other service branches
- Conduct prospective research to explore the causal link between the experience of combat trauma and more post traumatic growth
- Examine gender differences in the experience of post traumatic growth among Service members

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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