

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Interpersonal Conflict and Referrals to Counseling Among Married Soldiers Following Return From Deployment

Gibbs, D. A., Clinton-Sherrod, M., & Johnson, R. E. (2012). Interpersonal conflict and referrals to counseling among married soldiers following return from deployment. *Military Medicine*, 177(10), 1178-1183. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-12-00008

SUMMARY: The records of married Army Soldiers were examined to consider the correlates of self-reported interpersonal conflict with a spouse, family member, close friend, or co-worker. In addition, Soldiers were asked about their interest in assistance and referrals for services. Soldiers who reported health problems, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and alcohol abuse were more likely to report interpersonal conflict. Race and rank were also associated with increased concerns with interpersonal conflict. Many Soldiers were already receiving services or were referred to service programs.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Eighteen percent of Soldiers reported interpersonal conflict concerns.
- Black and Latino/Latina Soldiers were more likely to report interpersonal conflict concerns than White Soldiers; junior enlisted officers were most likely to report these concerns.
- Soldiers with poorer pre-deployment physical health, PTSD symptoms, depression, and alcohol abuse concerns were more likely to report interpersonal conflict.
- Among Soldiers reporting interpersonal conflict, 22% were already receiving services for mental health issues, anger, or social or family conflict; 11% of Soldiers were referred to a service program, such as Military One Source (9%), family support and community services (2%), and chaplain services (1%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes to Service members and their families to enhance interpersonal communication skills to reduce incidents of interpersonal conflict
- Host couples retreats for Service members and their spouses that offer relationship enrichment activities
- Disseminate information regarding the resources available to Service members coping with interpersonal conflict and ways to effectively work through interpersonal issues

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that help Service members and their families cope effectively with mental health problems
- Encourage routine screening of all Service members for interpersonal conflict issues
- Recommend education to service providers working with military families regarding the procedures for reporting interpersonal violence

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Data from Post-Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA), which was conducted between February and December 2008, were utilized for the current study.
- The PDHRA is administered three to six months post-deployment.
- The current study only included data from married Army Soldiers who returned from an OEF/OIF deployment.

PARTICIPANTS

- Data from 20,166 Army Soldiers were examined; 38% were noncommissioned officers, 29% were junior enlisted, 20% were officers, and 14% were senior noncommissioned officers.
- The majority of participants were male (92%), White (64%), and between the ages of 25-34 years (49%).
- Over half (57%) of the Soldiers reported one OEF/OIF deployment, 30% reported two deployments, and 13% reported three or more deployments.

LIMITATIONS

- Only one item assessed interpersonal conflict, which may not have captured the diversity of interpersonal violence concerns.
- Reasons for referral were not documented; the absence of referral could be due to lack of resources rather than an insufficient response to Soldiers concerns.
- Soldiers reports of behavioral health issues may be underestimates due to concerns about career repercussions.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize a validated measure of interpersonal conflict in order to more fully understand the factors associated with interpersonal conflict concerns
- Explore the relationships among interpersonal conflict, mental health problems, and interpersonal violence
- Include measures of partners perceptions of interpersonal conflict

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