

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## The Impact of Individual Trauma Symptoms of Deployed Soldiers on Relationship Satisfaction

Goff, B. S., Crow, J. R., Reisbig, A. M. J., & Hamilton, S. (2007). The impact of individual trauma symptoms of deployed soldiers on relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(3), 344-353. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.21.3.344

**SUMMARY:** Male Soldiers and their wives/partners completed self-report questionnaires shortly after the Soldier's return from an Iraq or Afghanistan deployment. This study explored the relationship between combat-related traumatic stress and relationship satisfaction. Findings indicate that Soldiers' exposure to traumatic experiences has a negative impact on relationship satisfaction.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Soldiers with high levels of trauma exposure reported lower relationship satisfaction than peers with less trauma experience.
- Spouses of Soldiers who had experienced high levels of trauma also reported lower relationship satisfaction.
- Soldiers' sleep disturbances and sexual problems predicted 29% of the variance in Soldiers' relationship satisfaction.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide reintegration workshops for military couples that include information regarding the possible implications of combat-related stress and trauma on relationship satisfaction
- Offer relationship enrichment workshops both before and after deployment to bolster couples' connection and ability to manage the challenges associated with deployment
- Publicize information regarding services available to Service members and their families throughout the deployment cycle

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support reintegration programs as a means of strengthening military families following a deployment
- Support family-based services that teach skills in communicating about deployment-related topics and enhancing intimacy after military-related separations
- Recommend training for service providers working with military families regarding the common issues family face throughout the deployment cycles

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## METHODS

- In 2004 and 2005, couples were recruited from small Midwest cities close to Army posts.
- Participants were recruited via public fliers; newspaper ads; and referrals from Army family readiness groups, chaplains, and other military sources, including previous research participants.
- Couples had to have been in their relationship at least a year (average length = 5.31 years), deny any substance abuse, or history of domestic violence.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Forty-five couples completed questionnaires; couples consisted of male Soldiers recently returned from an Iraq or Afghanistan deployment (average deployment length was 10.0 months) and their female spouses/partners.
- Soldier's average age was 31.18 years (SD = 6.90), and spouse's average age was 29.36 (SD = 6.27).
- The majority of spouses (78%) and Soldiers (82%) were White.
- Soldiers were predominantly enlisted (69%), followed by commissioned officer (27%), and warrant officers (4%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample size was small and largely homogeneous, making generalizability of findings uncertain.
- The self-report nature of the questionnaires allows the possibility of a social desirability bias for Soldiers and their partners.
- The average relationship length was five years; patterns of associations may be different for families who have been in a committed relationship for a longer period of time.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Elucidate the associations between sleep disturbance, sexual problems and relationship satisfaction
- Include questions about a wider range of stressful traumatic events in addition to those directly related to combat exposure
- Explore if similar results are found among couples where the Wives deployed and the male partner remained at home

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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