

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Predictors of Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans' Engagement in Mental Health Treatment

Hearne, C. R. M. (2013). Predictors of Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans' engagement in mental health treatment. *Military Medicine*, 178(11), 1183-1187. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-13-00245

SUMMARY: Medical records of 429 Veterans were examined to determine predictors of initial engagement and treatment retention in mental health services at a southwestern VA medical center. The data were obtained from post-deployment intake surveys of Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) between September 2007 and January 2010. Results showed the best predictor for initial engagement and retention in mental health services was the number of diagnoses; the higher the number of diagnoses, the more likely Service members were to engage and stay in treatment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Based on the chart review, 72% of the sample (429 out of 600 Veterans) was diagnosed with some psychiatric disorder.
- Of those with a diagnosis, 53% of the Veterans attended at least one appointment within the year. However, only 26% of the Veterans attended eight or more appointments within the year.
- Factors which strongly predicted initial engagement include multiple psychiatric diagnoses, higher poly-trauma exposure, and longer length of time since military separation.
- Treatment retention was positively associated with Veteran age and number of psychiatric diagnoses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Facilitate outreach efforts to ensure Service members and their families are aware of potentially useful services
- Offer pre- and post-deployment support groups for deployed Service members and their families
- Engage Service members and their partners in classes that aim to increase communication and conflict-resolution skills prior to and after deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development and evaluation of novel treatment engagement and retention strategies
- Continue to support programs that address the unique challenges faced by military families with a deployed Service member
- Recommend training for community providers to educate them about unique factors that contribute to marital strain for military couples

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.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Electronic medical records of 429 OIF/OEF Veterans were reviewed from a large southwest VA medical center.
- The Mental Health Assessment and a semi structured interview was used to measure Veterans' psychiatric medical history.
- Statistical analyses were used to determine predictors of initial engagement and to analyze variables to predict sustainability of engagement.

PARTICIPANTS

- Four hundred twenty-nine Veterans from OIF/OEF who completed the post-deployment intake between September 2007 and January 2010 participated in the study.
- Ninety percent of the sample were male. The following was the race/ethnicity of the sample: 44% Latino, 39% White, 10% Native American, 4% Black, 2% Asian-American, and 1% Other.
- No information was presented about specific military branches or military ranks.

LIMITATIONS

- Results should be interpreted with caution because the rate of mental health diagnosis in the sample was twice that of the national OIF/OEF Veteran populations.
- Ability to generalize the data was limited because participants were already authorized to receive treatment at the VA and agreed to attend the intake clinic.
- Veterans not included in the sample (those not seeking care at the VA, unwilling to engage in treatment, etc.) may be significantly different than those who did participate in the study and this potential difference was not accounted for in the analyses.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine factors that improve initial engagement and retention across a broader range of Service members and in different settings, both the VA and the private sector
- Replicate this study using different subgroups of Service members, such as women, Service members from different military branches, etc.
- Gather qualitative data (e.g., interviews) that explores Service members' reasons for engaging or not engaging in mental health services

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>