



Impact of Vietnam Veterans' Arousal and Avoidance on Spouses' Perceptions of Family Life

Hendrix, C. C., Erdmann, M. A., and Briggs, K. (1998). Impact of Vietnam veterans' arousal and avoidance on spouses' perceptions of family life. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 26(2), 115-128.



53 Vietnam Veterans and their spouses were surveyed to understand how Veterans' arousal (agitation and hyperarousal) and avoidance of trauma triggers related to spousal perceptions of family functioning. Specific family functioning variables assessed included family adaptability, cohesion, communication, parenting, and satisfaction. High levels of Veteran arousal or avoidance related to poorer levels of family functioning.

Key Findings:

- Veterans' family functioning related to both the arousal and avoidance factors of PTSD.
- Spousal perceptions of high levels of Veterans' arousal were related to lower levels of family cohesion, adaptability, and communication.
- Spousal perceptions of Veteran avoidance were related to lower levels of family communication.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could teach skills in their classes to help Service Members improve their coping skills, both individually and within their family units.
- Programs serving military personnel managing PTSD may want to routinely include family members as part of their services.
- Programs could offer support programs for partners/spouses of Service members living with PTSD.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend assessment of family functioning as part of the intake process for PTSD support services.
- Policies could dedicate resources to fund support programs for spouses/partners and children of military personnel living with PTSD.
- Policies could recommend professional development for program staff to learn about the impact of PTSD on families and effective means of supporting family members.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Researchers could explore the range of effects of secondary trauma on family members.
- Research may use a longitudinal design to understand better how secondary trauma can impact partners and children of Veterans with PTSD over time.
- Research may attempt to replicate this study with Veterans who have served in more recent conflicts.



Background Information

Methodology:

- Participants were recruited via a national organization known to have many Veterans.
- Veterans completed measures of deployment-related arousal and avoidance.
- Spouses completed surveys about family functioning, specifically family cohesion and adaptability, communication, parenting, and couples satisfaction.
- Correlations and hierarchical regression models were used to analyze data.

Participants:

- Matched Vietnam Veteran-spouse pairs (N = 53) participated.
- Veterans' mean age = 45 (SD = 3), and spouses' mean age = 43 (SD = 6).
- Veterans reported an average of 2.6 children (SD = 1.1).

Limitations:

- All data is self-report.
- Researchers used assessment measures that were not standardized.
- The researchers did not control for several possible confounding variables such as financial stress, living arrangements, or social support.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★ ★ ★)	Appropriate (★ ★ ★)	Limited (★ ★ ★)	Questionable (★ ★ ★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★ ★ ★)	Appropriate (★ ★ ★)	Limited (★ ★ ★)	Questionable (★ ★ ★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★ ★ ★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★ ★ ★)	Limited Several Limitations (★ ★ ★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★ ★ ★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★ ★ ★)	Appropriate (★ ★ ★)	Limited (★ ★ ★)	Questionable (★ ★ ★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★ ★ ★