



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Emotional Disclosure and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms: Veteran and Spouse Reports

Hoyt, T. & Renshaw, K.D. (2014). Emotional disclosure and posttraumatic stress symptoms: Veteran and spouse reports. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 21, 186-206.



80 male Veterans and their spouses from the Utah National Guard/Reserves completed questionnaires examining the utility of emotional disclosure by combat Veterans to listeners with previous combat experience (e.g., fellow Service members and Veterans) and those without past combat exposure (e.g., family members, civilian friends). Greater disclosure of positive emotions regarding combat deployment to civilian support people predicted lower rates of PTSD. Greater disclosure to others who had experienced combat predicted greater symptoms of PTSD.

Key Findings:

- Veterans were more likely to disclose positive emotions than negative emotions.
- Higher rates of positive emotion disclosure to civilians predicted lower rates of PTSD.
- Veterans were more likely to disclose emotions to those with shared experiences (fellow combat Veterans) than those without shared experiences.
- Disclosure of negative emotions was significantly more likely to support persons who had also experienced combat than to civilians.
- Positive disclosure was equally likely across listeners (those who had and had not experienced combat).

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could include information in their classes about the potential benefits (for the Service member and his/her close relationships) of sharing positive aspects of deployment.
- Programs may wish to offer classes for partners/wives of Service members with PTSD about how to respond in a supportive manner to disclosures about combat or deployment.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend continued support for programs that promote communication within couples.
- Policies could offer funding for social venues and activities for Service members and Veterans who have experienced combat, providing forums in which individuals can share stories and provide mutual support.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could assess a possible progression of disclosure over time and its effects.
- Additional research could measure actual disclosure (in addition to self-reported disclosure).
- Future studies could attempt to tie emotional disclosure to specific events to better understand how these processes work.

Background Information

Methodology:

- Participants were a subset of a larger study of members of the Utah National Guard/Reserves who deployed to OIF/OEF and their spouses.
- Both members of the couple completed assessments twice, 3 months following deployment (Time 1) and 4-6 months after Time 1 (Time 2).
- Participants were recruited during post-deployment workshops and were paid \$15 for their time.
- Participants completed measures of Veterans' combat exposure, PTSD symptoms, social support, and likelihood of disclosure.
- Sequential multiple regression was used to examine the prediction of PTSD symptoms by emotional disclosure while controlling for other variables.





Participants:

- 80 male Veteran and female spouse couples.
- Veteran characteristics: 89% White, 98% full time employed/student, 56% associate degree or higher, 68% deployed as part of OIF, 32% OEF. Mean time since deployment at Time 1=3.90 months (SD=1.30), Mean time since deployment at Time 2 = 9.40 months (SD=1.20).
- Spouse characteristics: 93% White, 40% employed full time/student, 56% associate degree or higher.
- Mean years married = 11.75 (SD=8.55), Mean number of children = 2.1 (SD=1.6).

Limitations:

- The Reserves and Guard sample is primarily White, married, and male and is drawn from one state (Utah). Thus, the findings may not generalize to other samples.
- The measures were all self-report which contains biases, especially for the variable of disclosure.
- Predeployment mental health data was unavailable which may be important.

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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					