

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Multiple Deployments and Combat Trauma: Do Homefront Stressors Increase the Risk for Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms?

Interian, A., Kline, A., Janal, M., Glynn, S., & Losonczy, M. (2014). Multiple deployments and combat trauma: Do homefront stressors increase the risk for posttraumatic stress symptoms? *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 27*(1), 90-97.
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SUMMARY: This study examined the role of homefront stressors (such as family or occupational problems) in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms prior to and after a new Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) deployment for 196 U.S. National Guard Soldiers. A pattern of chronic homefront stressors both pre- and post-deployment was associated with a higher risk of post-deployment PTSD symptoms.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Homefront stressors included marital problems, divorce/marital separation, problems with children, loss of job or business, and serious financial problems. Homefront stressors prior to the new deployment (Time 1) and post-deployment stressors (Time 2) predicted post-deployment PTSD symptoms.
- When examined together, pre-deployment homefront stressors no longer significantly predicted post-deployment PTSD symptoms.
- Soldiers with both pre- and post-deployment homefront stressors showed the greatest risk of PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop services to address both pre- and post-deployment homefront stressors
- Host classes for Service members and their families that teach coping skills related to relationship functioning, parenting, financial well-being and occupational functioning
- Offer workshops during reintegration to help families and Service members adjust to the Service member's return, especially when the deployment has included combat exposure

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that help military families address homefront stressors and increase family readiness
- Continue to support programs that address the unique challenges faced by deployed Service members and their families
- Recommend partnerships among military-based and community-based programs to help military families feel more comfortable participating in services and accessing resources that are not on installations

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METHODS

- National Guard Soldiers filled out surveys prior to (Time 1) and after (Time 2) a 2008-2009 OEF/OIF deployment; only those who completed both surveys and experienced a deployment between Time 1 and Time 2 were included in these analyses.
- Measures of post traumatic stress symptoms, homefront stressors, previous (to Time 1) noncombat trauma, warzone stressors, unit cohesion (at Time 2), and military preparedness (at Time 1) were assessed.
- Statistical analyses examined relationships between demographic and military characteristics with Time 2 PTSD symptoms and Time 1 and Time 2 homefront stressors, to explore how sample characteristics and homefront stressors explained Time 2 PTSD symptoms.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 196 National Guard Soldiers who had previously deployed for OEF/OIF and were preparing for a new deployment in 2008-2009.
- The sample was predominately male (86%) and 57% were ages 26-35 years, while 31% were 40 years old and older. Almost half of the sample was married (47%) and 38% were never married; 53% had no children.
- Among the sample, 42% were White, 26% were Black, and 24% were Latino/Latina.
- Ninety-one percent of the participants had one previous OEF/OIF deployment, while 10% had more than one previous OEF/OIF deployment.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample consists only of National Guard Service members and findings may not generalize to other military branches.
- Attrition and lack of matching between Time 1 and Time 2 surveys could have biased the results.
- The time frame after deployments previous to Time 1 was inconsistent with some occurring four years prior.
- Only self-report measures of PTSD symptoms were used instead of a more rigorous clinical interview.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies focusing on the post-deployment period and homefront stressors may help assess the bidirectionality of homefront stress and PTSD symptoms
- Replicate these findings with Active Duty Service members from multiple service branches
- Gather data from military families to better understand their experiences during deployment and reintegration

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