

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Association of Parental Status and Diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among Veterans of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom

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SUMMARY: Service members who are parents may have additional concerns during deployment about their family's well-being than non-parent Service members. The relationship between having dependent children and receiving a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was examined among OEF/OIF Veterans who used the Veterans Affairs (VA) department's care during 2006-2009. Veterans with dependent children were significantly more likely to have a PTSD diagnosis than those without children.

KEY FINDINGS:

- After controlling for mental health care utilization, parents of dependent children were almost 50% more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD than non-parents.
- The association between parenthood and PTSD was stronger for men than women.
- White race and Hispanic ethnicity were associated with an increased risk of PTSD.
- Among men, younger age was associated with higher odds of having PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer parenting classes for Service members living with PTSD
- Provide education and support groups for military parents living with PTSD (e.g., websites, brochures, mobile apps) to empower them as parents
- Offer classes for military youth whose parent has PTSD, providing information about the symptoms of PTSD and how children can cope during difficult times

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support military family programs, including programs for Service members with PTSD
- Recommend collaboration among child care providers and other community providers to allow Service members who are parents to access mental health appointments more easily
- Support programs in providing child-appropriate spaces (e.g., play areas, waiting rooms with children's books) to make it easier for parents to bring children to appointments

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METHODS

- Administrative records of OEF/OIF Veterans who used VA services between 2006 and 2009 were used to select those with dependent children.
- As a control group, Veterans without children were matched on age, gender, and demobilization month.
- Records were used to examine the associations between disability status, medical comorbidity, stress-related care, and mental health service use among Veterans.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 72,688 Veterans with an average age of 31.8 years (SD = 8.3); 50% had dependent children, 92% were male, and 29% were married.
- Veterans identified as 76% White, 19% Black, and 5% Asian American.
- The majority of the participants had a history of multiple deployments (53%).

LIMITATIONS

- Due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, causal conclusions cannot be drawn.
- Births of new children were not recorded; some of the non-parents likely became parents during the course of the study.
- Other unmeasured variables (e.g., combat exposure, treatment outside the VA) may have impacted the findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the association between motherhood and PTSD diagnoses using a larger sample of female Service members
- Examine mediating factors that contribute to the observed relationship between parenthood and PTSD
- Explore the experiences and needs of offspring of military parents living with PTSD

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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