

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Gender Role Stress Mediates Depression Among Veteran Men with Military Sexual Trauma

Juan, M.J.D., Nunnik, S.E., Butler, E.O., & Allard, C.B. (2017). Gender role stress mediates depression among veteran men with military sexual trauma. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 18(3), 243-250. doi:10.1037/MEN0000120

SUMMARY: In cultures that especially value a higher masculine gender role in men, such as the military, men may have an added risk for developing posttraumatic distress after a traumatic event. This study examined the relationship between military sexual trauma, masculine gender role stress, and posttraumatic distress among Veterans. Results suggest that aspects related to higher gender role stress (e.g., emotional expressiveness) are related to increased posttraumatic distress in survivors of military sexual trauma.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Veterans with histories of military sexual trauma reported higher gender role stress, and aspects of gender role stress were found to be associated with increased posttraumatic distress.
- Compared to Veterans with histories of other forms of interpersonal trauma, veterans with histories of military sexual trauma reported greater posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and depression severity.
- Military sexual trauma was found to be a predictor of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms regardless of whether gender role stress was analyzed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for Service members who have experienced military sexual trauma and their families
- Disseminate information regarding military sexual trauma by incorporating it into existing education, activities, and curriculum regarding posttraumatic stress disorder
- Provide information for Service members and their families regarding where to help the Service member find help for posttraumatic distress after experiencing military sexual trauma

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development of programs that promote Service members to express their emotions
- Continue to support programs for the identification and prevention of military sexual trauma
- Continue to support education for professionals, Service members, and their families regarding the effects of trauma, specifically military sexual trauma

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METHODS

- Veteran men were recruited after seeking services from a Veteran's Affairs (VA) specialty clinic for interpersonal trauma and symptoms of posttraumatic stress.
- Participants completed a demographics questionnaire and several symptom/functioning measures at their initial intake visit.
- Military sexual trauma was defined as sexual assault or threatening sexual harassment that occurred while the Service member or Veteran was serving in the military.
- Researchers analyzed specific aspects of gender role stress and their relation to military sexual trauma and posttraumatic distress and compared results between those who experienced military sexual trauma and those who experienced other forms of trauma.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 104 Veteran men.
- Half of the men had a history of military sexual trauma whereas the other half experienced interpersonal violence but not military sexual trauma.
- The men were primarily White, Black, or Latino, had an average age of 47 years old, and a majority were unemployed (approximately 70%).

LIMITATIONS

- Due to the cross-sectional design of the study there is not a clear direction of effects between gender role stress and emotional inexpressiveness; meaning, it cannot be determined whether emotional inexpressiveness caused higher gender role stress or, conversely, whether higher gender role stress led to more emotional inexpressiveness.
- The data collection and analyses limited the ability to determine which form of trauma was associated with the highest level of posttraumatic distress, which made it difficult to understand the impact of various assaults.
- Data were collected using self-report measures, increasing the chances for response biases.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Consider a longitudinal design to better assess causality between gender role stress and emotional inexpressiveness
- Use a qualitative approach to disentangle factors associated with gender role stress
- Continue to examine the roles of gender identity and masculinity in the military

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