

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## The Impact of Infidelity on Combat-Exposed Service Members

Kachadourian, K. L., Smith, B. N., Taft, C. T., & Vogt, D. (2015). The impact of infidelity on combat-exposed service members. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 28*(5), 418-425. doi:10.1001/jts.22033

**SUMMARY:** During frequent and lengthy deployments, infidelity may be a concern for Service members and their significant others. This study examined how combat-exposed Service members' experiences of infidelity during deployment were associated with post-deployment mental health. Findings suggest a relationship between infidelity and increased mental health symptoms.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Compared to those who did not report infidelity, those who did had higher levels of posttraumatic stress symptomatology (PTSS) and depression symptom severity.
- Reported infidelity lead to more post-deployment life stressors which were associated with an increase in mental health problems.
- The strength of the relationship between infidelity and post-deployment mental health were similar for men and women.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer relationship workshops for military couples who are vulnerable to acts of infidelity
- Offer support groups for military couples coping with infidelity issues
- Collaborate with community-based professionals to provide additional support to military couples who report or have infidelity concerns

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote training for mental health professionals on how to best help Service members process emotions around relationship concerns to alleviate their distress
- Recommend that treatment of mental health concerns include attention to relationship issues that may exacerbate symptoms
- Suggest that Service members be assessed for relationship concerns after combat exposure in order to support their mental health

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## METHODS

- A random sampling of 3,053 potential participants were selected from a Defense Manpower Data Center roster; 19% responded and were eligible to participate.
- Researchers mailed surveys to measure infidelity experiences and concerns, PTSS, depression symptom severity, postdeployment stressors, and social support.
- The data collected were analyzed to determine the relationship between infidelity experiences during deployment and postdeployment mental health.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 571 (392 men, 337 women) who had deployed and expressed infidelity concerns.
- The majority of participants were White (77%), and had a mean age of 35.83 years.
- Seventy-seven percent of the sample self-identified as White, 10.9% as Black, and 11.1% as Latino/Latina.
- Fifty-six percent of participants were deployed from Active Duty and 44% from the National Guard or Reserves; most participants were Army (67%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Due to self-report measures, participant responses may have been affected by their current mental health and relationship status.
- Because of the cross-sectional nature of this study, cause and effect could not be determined among the variables.
- Researchers did not clarify the details on the upsetting deployment-related events leading to a wide variety of responses not necessarily related to combat exposure, which could influence the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the effect of Service members engaging in infidelity themselves
- Explore the differences between other types of infidelity (e.g., sexual vs. emotional)
- Evaluate this relationship with different types of couples (e.g., married vs. unmarried, heterosexual vs. homosexual)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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