

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Emotional Intimacy Mediates the Relationship Between Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration in OEF/OIF/OND Veterans

Kar, H. L., & O'Leary, K. D. (2013). Emotional intimacy mediates the relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder and intimate partner violence perpetration in OEF/OIF/OND veterans. *Violence, 28*(5), 790-803.
doi:10.1891/0886-6708.vv-d-12-00080

SUMMARY: One hundred and ten partnered Veterans were recruited via letters to participate in a study examining if emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction mediated links with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or intimate partner violence (IPV). Results indicated that emotional intimacy with partners correlated negatively with PTSD and physical aggression in Veterans. In addition, low levels of marital satisfaction and prior history of intimate physical aggression were more likely to have intimate partner violence in their current relationship.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Results found that emotional intimacy (i.e., “feelings of closeness”) was negatively related with PTSD and physical aggression, so that Veterans with high perceived emotional intimacy were less likely to have PTSD and IPV symptoms.
- Prior past aggression and marital satisfaction were linked to current IPV, where couples with low levels of marital satisfaction and prior history of IPV were more likely to have current IPV.
- When comparing marital satisfaction and emotional intimacy, results found that emotional intimacy was more likely to lessen IPV and PTSD symptoms than marital satisfaction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes to educate military couples on how to enhance positive communication skills such as addressing conflict directly and respectfully
- 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
- Provide pre- and post-deployment support groups for partners and families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that address the unique challenges faced by couples with a deployed partner
- Promote reintegration programs that assist Service members' families in adjusting emotionally to the Service members' return from deployment
- Recommend training for service providers who work with military families around the possible effects of deployment on Service members' families

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants who visited the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center between January to May 2010 were recruited via a letter; 110 Veterans participated in the study, which consisted of a single session of assessments.
- Measures used to collect data comprised of assessing PTSD, conflict tactics and strategies, relationship functioning and satisfaction, as well as emotional intimacy.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to determine if emotional intimacy and relationship satisfaction were linked negatively or positively to PTSD or IPV.

PARTICIPANTS

- Sample included 110 cohabitating or married OEF/OIF Veterans who had been deployed at least once participated in this study.
- Participants' average age was 36.98 years ($SD = 9.93$); 62% were married and 38% cohabitating with a partner, with 49 participants having the same partner prior to deployment, 57 with different partners, and four did not disclose.
- Veterans were comprised of the following race/ethnicity backgrounds: White (68%), Latino (17%), Black (6%), and Other/Multiracial (9%).

LIMITATIONS

- Emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction was gathered from only Veterans, which may limit the ability to draw conclusions on the couple as a whole.
- Conclusions were based on a small or homogenous sample (i.e. Veterans in a committed relationship of six months or longer located in a small geographical area) may not be appropriate for the larger population (i.e., Veterans in short-term relationships or single, across sites).
- Findings may have limited reliability due to the duration between first deployment (up to three years prior) and survey assessments.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine links to partner aggression and its impact on Veteran's PTSD symptomology.
- Conduct the study with a larger, random sample to give more generalizability to conclusions
- Investigate both partners and Veterans on conflict tactics and emotional intimacy to gain a better understanding of dyadic functioning within couples with PTSD and IPV.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>