

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Associations Between Prior Deployments and Marital Satisfaction Among Army Couples

Karney, B. R., & Trail, T. E. (2017). Associations between prior deployments and marital satisfaction among Army couples. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79 (1), 147-160. doi:10.1111/jomf.12329

**SUMMARY:** The deployment of a spouse who serves in the military can place additional stress on a marriage. This study sought to examine the explicit relationship between prior deployments, combat exposure, and symptoms of PTSD on couples' level of marital satisfaction. Findings revealed that more deployments, especially combat-related, lowered marital satisfaction among military couples.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Marital satisfaction was lower among couples who had experienced one or more deployments.
- Soldiers who deployed to a combat zone and were exposed to traumatic events during combat were more likely to report lower marital satisfaction.
- Combat exposure was directly related to PTSD symptoms and PTSD was directly related to marital satisfaction; couples were less satisfied with their marriages when the Service member reported more PTSD symptoms.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer opportunities for military couples, such as “date nights,” to increase marital satisfaction, especially before or after a recent deployment
- Provide resources for Service members and their families on ways to cope with traumatic events experienced during deployment
- Distribute information regarding PTSD symptoms and resources for support to military families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based services that work with Service members who have experienced combat exposure and traumatic events related to deployment
- Continue to support programs and resources for minimizing PTSD symptoms in Service members
- Support bringing awareness to the effects of combat exposure and PTSD among professionals who serve military families

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## METHODS

- The sample was randomly selected from a longitudinal survey, the Deployment Life Study; couples where both Service members (Army branch only) and spouses participated were included.
- Data were collected via telephone interviews and online surveys assessing marital satisfaction, exposure to combat trauma, symptoms of PTSD, and prior engagement in deployment.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between prior deployment, combat trauma, symptoms of PTSD, and dyadic marital satisfaction.

## PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 1,358 married Army couples were included in this study; Soldiers were mostly male (92%) and spouses were mostly female (92%).
- A majority of the sample (75% Soldiers; 74% spouses) was White, while 9% of Soldiers were Black (8% spouses), 9% Latino (10% spouses), 1% Asian-American (2% spouses), and 6% indicated other (5% spouses).
- Ages of study participants was not provided.
- Eighty percent of Soldiers served Active Duty, while 5% served in the Reserves, and 15% National Guard.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study assessed marital satisfaction at one time point, therefore it is difficult to determine the long-term effects of PTSD symptoms and combat exposure on marital satisfaction.
- Only married couples from the Army were included in this study; this limits generalizability to other couples from various military branches.
- The study took a combined average marital satisfaction rating from both the Service member and spouse, thus may limit the ability to determine the true satisfaction of each individual in the couple.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine additional factors, outside of PTSD symptoms and combat trauma, related to couples' marital satisfaction
- Determine the long-term effects of deployment on marriages; comparing those who are married to those who have recently divorced
- Develop a more comprehensive measure for marital satisfaction to determine the true rating for each individual's level of satisfaction

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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