Associations Between Prior Deployments and Marital Satisfaction Among Army Couples


**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

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