

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Posttraumatic Stress, Family Adjustment, and Treatment Preferences Among National Guard Soldiers Deployed to OEF/OIF

Khaylis, A., Polusny, M. A., Erbes, C. R., Gewirtz, A., & Rath, M. (2011). Posttraumatic stress, family adjustment, and treatment preferences among National Guard soldiers deployed to OEF/OIF. *Military Medicine*, 176(2), 126-131. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-10-00094

SUMMARY: Self-reported data were used to assess posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, relationship and parenting concerns, and treatment preferences among National Guard members who were recently redeployed from Iraq or Afghanistan. Many of the Guard members screened positive for PTSD, which negatively influenced relationship satisfaction. Guard members also preferred family-based treatment to individual treatment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Nearly half of the participants screened positively for PTSD (as assessed by primary health providers).
- Among participants in relationships, half screened positive for PTSD. In addition, relationship satisfaction was significantly associated with PTSD symptoms: those who reported less satisfaction also reported more PTSD symptoms.
- For both Service members in relationships and those who were parents, the percentage of participants willing to consider couple/family counseling was significantly greater than the percentage willing to consider individual counseling.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop family-based interventions tailored to address post-deployment mental health and co-occurring family problems
- Offer family therapy options for Service members coping with PTSD symptoms
- Provide pre- and post-deployment education to Service members and their families regarding PTSD and its effects on relationships and parenting

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to educate National Guard members and their families about the post-deployment care options available, including family/couples and individual counseling
- Recommend education to family counselors regarding military related PTSD and how to work with military families
- Continue to support programs that help Service members and their families coping with PTSD symptoms

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METHODS

- Self-report questionnaires assessed PTSD symptoms, relationship concerns, and treatment preferences among National Guard members who were recently redeployed from Iraq or Afghanistan.
- Participants were recruited during post-deployment Solider Readiness Programs.
- No other recruitment information was provided.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 97 Army National Guard members.
- The sample was 93% male, with a mean age of 28.5 years (SD = 6.3).
- Participants were ethnically homogeneous (90% White, 3% Latino/Latina, 3% Asian-American, 2% Black, 1% American Indian, 1% Other).

LIMITATIONS

- Selected participants may differ from non-participants in a way that is not measured, but affected the outcome variables. For instance, those soldiers that participated may be functioning better than those that did not participate.
- Only Army National Guard members who had been previously deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan were included in this study, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other components or branches.
- Other aspects of the outcome may be missed because only one informant (i.e., the Service member) was used.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the efficacy of family and couples counseling as a primary treatment for relationship distress, PTSD, and related post-deployment problems
- Examine strategies for improving Service members knowledge about and willingness to access available services
- Continue to investigate the different sources of support (e.g., life coaches, counselors, pen pals) for Service members and its influence on PTSD symptom severity

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