

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Depressive Symptoms and Mechanisms of Relational Turbulence as Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction Among Returning Service Members

Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A. (2011). Depressive symptoms and mechanisms of relational turbulence as predictors of relationship satisfaction among returning service members. *Journal of Family Psychology, 25*(4), 470-478.
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SUMMARY: This study evaluated relational uncertainty and interference from partners as potential mechanisms linking depressive symptoms with relationship satisfaction. Self-report data were collected from Service members across all branches living in 27 states who had returned home from deployment within the past six months. Findings suggest there is a relationship between depressive symptoms and relationship satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members who experienced depressive symptoms reported less relationship satisfaction and more relational uncertainty and interference from partners.
- Self-uncertainty and interference from partners mediated the negative association between Service members' depressive symptoms and their relationship satisfaction.
- Relationship satisfaction decreased the longer that Service members were home from deployment, even after controlling for relationship uncertainty and interference from partners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops that prepare Service members for the stress of reentry (effects of which could be delayed), paying particular attention to specific relationship issues such as relational uncertainty and interference by partners
- Help military couples during the deployment cycle, particularly those experiencing depressive symptoms, work through issues of relational uncertainty and create strategies to avoid disrupting daily routines that may impact their relationship satisfaction
- Develop activities for military parents and their children that integrate education about mental health, stress, and coping skills

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support longitudinal research examining the direction of the associations between depressive symptoms, relationship uncertainty, and relationship satisfaction
- Continue to support the implementation of programs specifically aimed at assisting couples through the various stages of deployment
- Encourage the collaboration between military-related and community-based programs that assist Service members and their families with issues related to post-deployment adjustment

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METHODS

- Self-report data were gathered from U.S. Service members who had recently returned from deployment were used in the analyses.
- Participants were recruited via email and postings in online forums. They completed online surveys about depressive symptoms, how certain they were of their relationship stability (relation uncertainty), how much their partners interfered with their plans and schedule (interference from partners), and relationship satisfaction.
- Statistical analyses examined if depressive symptoms, relational uncertainty, interference from partners, and relationship satisfaction were associated.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 220 Service members who were predominately male (84%), White (80%), with an average age of 33 years (SD = 8.45).
- Most participants were Active Duty (58%) and represented the following service branches: 64% National Guard, 28% Army, 3% Air force, 3% Navy, and 2% Marines.
- Most participants were married (83%), lived with their partner (89%), and a small percentage (7%) were part of a dual-career military couple.

LIMITATIONS

- Selected participants may differ from non-participants in a way that is not measured, but affected the outcome variables. For example, those who participated may be functioning better (or worse) than those who did not.
- This is a cross-sectional study and, therefore the analyses and findings cannot determine the direction of effects.
- The sample consisted primarily of White males, which decreases generalizability to female Service members and Service members of other races.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the influence of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms on Service members' relationship satisfaction
- Gather information from both partners in a relationship as well as longitudinal data
- Examine different coping strategies among military families and how they impact the challenges of reintegration

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