

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Veterans' PTSD Symptoms and Their Partners' Desired Changes in Key Relationship Domains

LaMotte, A. D., Taft, C. T., Reardon, A. F., & Miller, M. W. (2015). Veterans' PTSD symptoms and their partners' desired changes in key relationship domains. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 7(5), 479-484.  
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**SUMMARY:** The relationship between symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in male veterans from different service eras and their female partners' desire for change in the relationship was examined. Veterans with higher PTSD symptom severity, particularly emotional numbing, had partners that reported desire for change in intimate and shared activities.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Veterans' re-experiencing symptom severity, emotional numbing symptom severity, and hyperarousal symptom severity were related to partners' reports of desire for more intimacy, with emotional numbing emerging as a unique factor.
- Veterans' re-experiencing symptom severity, avoidance symptom severity, emotional numbing symptom severity, and hyperarousal symptom severity were related to partners' reports of desire for more shared activities.
- No relationships were found between PTSD symptoms and desire for change in responsibilities.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to Service members and their partners regarding PTSD symptom severity and its influence on relationship satisfaction
- Provide opportunities for Service members and their partners to engage in shared activities that are sensitive to the needs of those experiencing symptoms of PTSD
- Offer support groups for Service members and their partners who are experiencing emotional numbing

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend regular screening for symptoms of PTSD in Service members
- Support efforts to increase awareness about the relationship between PTSD symptom severity and relationship satisfaction to Service members and their partners
- Continue to involve Service members' partners in programs that aim to help Service members reintegrate following deployment

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## METHODS

- Veterans were recruited from the Veterans Affairs Healthcare System in New Mexico and Boston through flyers, mailings, and provider referrals.
- To be eligible, Veterans had to have been living with an intimate partner for 12 months, have a history of at least one traumatic event and a PTSD diagnosis, and have a partner who was willing to participate.
- Male Veterans reported on their symptoms of PTSD and their female partners reported on desired changes in three relationship domains: intimacy, shared activities, and responsibilities.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Male Veterans (N = 249) from different service eras and their female partners participated in the study.
- The average age, including both male and female partners, was 51.9 years (SD = 11.2 years).
- Most of the participants (83%) were White, 10% were Black, 8% were Native American, 20% were Latino, and 10% were other races.
- More than half of the participants had served in the Army, 20% in the Marines, 16% in the Navy, 14% in the Air Force, and 4% in the Coast Guard.

## LIMITATIONS

- Findings are limited to male Service members; PTSD might have different effects on the relationships of female Veterans.
- PTSD symptoms accounted for only a small amount of the variation in partners' desire for change, indicating that desire for change is largely driven by other, unmeasured factors.
- Some aspects of relationship satisfaction were measured with a small number items, which could yield an incomplete understanding of this construct.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine other relevant aspects of intimate partnerships that were not addressed in this study, such as the use of intimate partner violence
- Conduct qualitative research to help identify other areas of relationship functioning that are particularly important to relationship dissatisfaction in the partners of Service members
- Replicate the current study with female Service members and in dual-Service member couples

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>