

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Social Skills Deficits as a Mediator Between PTSD Symptoms and Intimate Partner Aggression in Returning Veterans

LaMotte, A. D., Taft, C. T., Weatherill, R. P., & Eckhardt, C. I. (2017). Social skills deficits as a mediator between PTSD symptoms and intimate partner aggression in returning Veterans. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 31(1), 105-110. doi:10.1037/fam0000215

SUMMARY: Veterans' posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms may be related to intimate partner aggression, although the underlying mechanisms are unclear. The effect of social skills deficits on the associations between PTSD and intimate partner aggression was examined in the study. Results indicated that social skills deficits partially explained the relationship between PTSD and psychological, but not physical, intimate partner aggression.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Social skill deficits helped to explain the associations between PTSD symptoms and psychological intimate partner aggression.
- Social skill deficits did not explain the associations between PTSD symptoms and physical intimate partner aggression.
- Emotional numbing was the only PTSD symptom cluster related to social skill deficit.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for Service members who have PTSD symptoms and show risk of perpetrating intimate partner aggression as a way to mitigate this risk
- Develop courses and workshops that teach military families how to increase social skills and solve marital conflicts
- Educate health providers about the associations between social skills deficit, PTSD, and intimate partner aggression

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness for the association between PTSD symptoms and intimate partner aggression in Service members
- Support the development of workshops that increase Service members' social skills in marital relationships
- Encourage training for professionals who work with military families on warning signs of PTSD and intimate partner aggression

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METHODS

- Participants were Veterans from the greater Boston, Massachusetts area; the method of recruitment was not indicated.
- Some Veterans who showed no relationship distress were put on the waiting list in order to make sure roughly half of the sample was in a distressed relationship.
- PTSD symptoms were evaluated by clinicians, intimate partner aggression was reported by Veterans and their partners, and social skills deficits were assessed by answering questions regarding hypothetical scenarios that may cause marital conflicts.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 92 male Veterans who were married or living with a partner and had been exposed to combat.
- The average age of the Veterans was 40.37 years (SD = 9.63).
- The majority of participants were White (78%), followed by Black (10%), Latino (2%), Asian American (2%), Native American (3%), and others (5%).

LIMITATIONS

- Only male Veterans were included in the study, therefore the results cannot be generalized to female Veterans.
- Intimate partner aggression was self-reported and reported by partners, therefore its actual occurrence may be higher than reported.
- The cross sectional nature of the study made it impossible to determine causality between variables.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include female and male Veterans so the results of the study can be applied to both genders
- Obtain intimate partner aggression records not only from the couples but also from other sources, such as hospitals and social service agencies
- Conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the potential causal relationships among PTSD symptoms, intimate partner aggression, and social skills deficits

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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