

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Veteran PTSS and Spouse Relationship Quality: The Importance of Dyadic Coping

Lambert, J. E., Hasbun, A., Engh, R., & Holzer, J. (2015). Veteran PTSS and spouse relationship quality: The importance of dyadic coping. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 7(5), 493-499. doi:10.1037/tra0000036

SUMMARY: Posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) may impact marital relationships. This study examined the possible role of coping styles in the association between PTSS and relationship quality. Results indicated that certain types of coping mitigated the negative association between PTSS and relationship quality.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Higher Veteran PTSS was associated with lower relationship quality only when the Veteran's spouse reported that the Veteran provided little support in the relationship.
- There was no association between PTSS and relationship quality when spouses reported that the couples engaged in collaborative coping strategies.
- Spouses were less likely to report using collaborative coping strategies when Veterans had high PTSS.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes aimed at increasing collaborative coping skills for Service members who exhibit PTSS and their spouses
- Identify couples who may be experiencing relationship difficulties in the face of PTSS and provide information to them regarding options for support or treatment
- Develop workshops for new Service members and their spouses to increase communication skills and to mutually cultivate positive coping strategies

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that support for Service members who have experienced trauma includes attention to relationship factors
- Continue to support programs aimed at strengthening couples' communication and resilience
- Promote education regarding the protective role of collaborative coping within marital relationships for providers who work with Service members

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a support center for military families and two clinics that provided individual and couples' therapy for Veterans.
- Each member of the couple completed a packet of questionnaires with information regarding PTSS, relational coping strategies, relationship adjustment, and demographics.
- Data were analyzed to evaluate the impact of coping strategies on the association between PTSS and relationship adjustment.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 56 civilian women and their Veteran husbands who had experienced at least one combat-related deployment.
- The women were primarily White (75%) with an average age of 28 years old (SD = 6.85) and their husbands were also primarily White (72%) with an average age of 29 years old (SD = 6.95). No other information was provided regarding the racial or ethnic composition of the sample.
- Most of the husbands served in the Army (79%). Information about other branches represented was not included.

LIMITATIONS

- A self-report measure of PTSS was used, so it is unclear whether these results extend to individuals with clinical diagnoses of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- All couples included in the study consisted of a female civilian spouse and a male Veteran, so results cannot be extended to other types of couples.
- It is unknown whether these individuals were Active Duty Service members or members of the Reserve Component, so it is unclear the populations to which these results can be extended.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the possible protective role of support and coping in individuals who are still serving in the military
- Examine this association in populations with a clinical diagnosis of PTSD
- Follow couples over time to determine the impact of other life events, such as subsequent deployment or combat exposure, on this association

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