

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Barriers to Mental Health Treatment for Military Wives

Lewy, C. S., Oliver, C. M., & McFarland, B. H. (2014). Barriers to mental health treatment for military wives. *Psychiatric Services, 65*(9), 1170-1173. doi:10/1176/aapi.ps.201300325

SUMMARY: Military wives face numerous stressors (e.g., frequent moves, spouse's deployment) that may impact their mental health and also face several barriers to treatment. A sample of military wives was surveyed in order to describe their mental health needs and treatment barriers. Participants reported significant unaddressed mental health needs and listed many barriers to treatment (e.g., scheduling, confidentiality concerns, lack of knowledge of resources) as more problematic than for women in the general population.

KEY FINDINGS:

- A majority of participants reported either mild (27%) or severe depression (51%), and 37% reported serious overall psychological distress.
- Many military wives reported mental health treatment needs that had gone unmet (44%).
- Participants reported several barriers to treatment included inability to attend daytime appointments, concerns about confidentiality, inability to find a counselor, and stigma surrounding mental health concerns; these barriers were endorsed by a much greater percentage of military wives than by women in a national survey.
- Thirty five percent of military spouses were concerned that providers would not understand their unique needs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military spouses about mental health disorders, including information about symptoms and treatment and education to decrease stigma
- Disseminate information to military couples about mental health disorders and how to identify symptoms in their partner and help their partner seek treatment
- Offer classes for military wives about stress management and health-promoting behaviors (e.g., healthy sleep, regular exercise)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development courses for community providers about military culture and the ways it may impact mental health and seeking treatment
- Encourage the development of programs that provide support (e.g., transportation, childcare) for military spouses attending mental health treatments
- Promote campaigns on military installations to decrease the stigma of mental health treatment

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Military wives experiencing symptoms of depression and general psychological distress were recruited through social networking and through flyers distributed at Oregon armories.
- Participants completed online questionnaires assessing depression, general psychological distress, and barriers to receiving mental health services.
- Descriptive statistics regarding military wives' mental health needs and barriers were calculated; military wives in the current sample were also compared with women in a national sample of the general population.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 569 wives from 45 states and 8 countries with an average age of 29 years.
- Military wives identified as White (85%), Black (2%), Asian American (3%), Native American (2%), Latino (7%), or another race (1%).
- Participants were primarily living in the U.S. (94%) and the majority had husbands in the Army (58%) and who were Active Duty (87%) and enlisted (83%).

LIMITATIONS

- Women who chose to participate may have differed from those who did not, particularly with respect to internet access and connection to military support groups.
- Participants were significantly more likely (46%) to have deployed husbands than military spouses overall (6%), limiting the generalizability of the findings.
- The number of women who started but did not complete the survey was not reported, and women who completed the survey may have differed from women who did.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore military spouses' opinions on how to make mental health care more accessible and less stigmatized
- Examine military husbands and how their mental health concerns and barriers to care may differ from military wives
- Examine how the mental health concerns and treatment seeking of Service members may effect the mental health concerns and treatment seeking of military spouses

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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