

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Gender Differences in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among U.S. Navy Healthcare Personnel

MacGregor, A. J., Clouser, M. C., Mayo, J. A., & Galarneau, M. R. (2017). Gender differences in posttraumatic stress disorder among U.S. navy healthcare personnel. *Journal of Women's Health, 26*, 338-344. doi:10.1089/jwh.2014.5130

SUMMARY: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a prominent issue among Military personnel yet little is known about gender differences in PTSD. This study examined 667 women and 3,608 men U.S. Navy healthcare personnel who were assessed to identify for PTSD. Results showed that women had higher odds of screening positive for PTSD than men.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Compared to men, female healthcare personnel were more likely to screen positive for PTSD when demographics, psychiatric history, and deployment experiences are taken in to account.
- Combat exposure was strongly associated with more PTSD.
- Women have higher levels of emotional stress when caregiving for the traumatically wounded.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop preventions and interventions that teach stress management skills aimed at female Service members
- Offer support groups for families and military personnel who suffer from PTSD
- Provide workshops for Service members with mental health symptoms on warning signs and where to seek help

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that address the mental health needs of military personnel
- Recommend awareness campaigns to educate military service providers on the higher odds for women to screen positive for PTSD
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can promote positive mental health strategies for women in military healthcare positions

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

- Participants were 4,275 Navy healthcare personnel who were screened for PTSD.
- Data regarding participants' psychiatric history were gathered from inpatient and outpatient medical records.
- Analyses were conducted by comparing demographic information and deployment variables for men and women.

PARTICIPANTS

- The final study sample consisted of 667 female and 3,608 male participants who were Active Duty Navy healthcare personnel.
- Participants were categorized into two groups, 18-24 years old and 25 years and older.
- All participants were either deployed between one and 18 months to OIF/OEF, employed as a healthcare specialist per Department of Defense, and completed a Post-Deployment Health Assessment.

LIMITATIONS

- This study examined Navy personnel only therefore, the results of this study may not be generalized to other branches of the military.
- This study was not able to assess previous sexual trauma which is a predictor of PTSD among women. Therefore, this study was not able to determine the relationship between sexual trauma and PTSD in the population of healthcare personnel.
- PTSD was not clinically diagnosed because it used a screening instrument which allowed it to be administered at the end of deployment or on the return home. This is limiting to the results as participants may or may not have PTSD without a formal diagnosis.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine a wider variety of stressors that may impact PTSD diagnosis and determine whether PTSD is associated with gender
- Assess previous sexual trauma and assault among women as these are predictors of PTSD among women
- Examine how the healthcare occupation as opposed to other occupations may affect psychological symptoms of service providers

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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