

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Experience of Women Veterans Coming Back From War

Maiocco, G., & Smith, M. J. (2016). The experience of women veterans coming back from war. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 30*(3), 393-399. doi:10.1016/j.apnu.2016.01.008

SUMMARY: Female Veterans who were deployed often face unique challenges compared to their male counterparts. Eight female Veterans were interviewed in the study, and they told stories about their experiences coming back from war. Results revealed that participants experienced mental health issues, and they benefited from telling stories because of the relief that occurred when they recounted their experiences.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Six themes were extracted from the participants' stories: "arriving with mixed sentiments"; "evolving to a changed view of self"; "permeating aggravation"; "confounding broken relationships, frequent deployments, and change in military status"; "remembering war experiences"; and "seeking opportunity for what is possible".
- The participants mentioned struggling with familial and interpersonal relationships.
- All of the women reported some of the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and indicated that social support was a protective factor against PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for female Service members that promote story sharing and social interaction
- Provide information to female Service members about potential challenges they may encounter, and military and civilian resources they may use
- Educate military families about the importance of social support from other families, friends, and community

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professionals who work with Service members participate in trainings on the special challenges faced by female Service members
- Raise awareness of the importance of communication and mutual support for the well-being of military families
- Continue to support programs for Service members and their spouses about positive coping strategies to manage conflicts

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a university community by flyers and emails.
- Participants were interviewed individually, and shared stories about their experience coming back from war.
- Each story was transcribed and analyzed for main themes of the participant's experience.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included eight female Veterans or Reserves who served in combat support roles in Iraq and/or Afghanistan 24-48 months ago.
- The participants' ages were between 24 and 55 years (M = 37 years).
- All of the participants were White; most of them served in Air Force (N = 6), followed by Marine (N = 1) and Army (N = 1).

LIMITATIONS

- The sample size was small, therefore results are hard to generalize to the larger population of female Service members.
- Participants had returned from war for over one year when they were interviewed, so results of the study may not reflect their experience immediately after coming back.
- Participants' self-reported health problems were not confirmed by medical record review.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit a larger number of participants to increase the generalizability of the results
- Conduct studies with Veterans who are at different stages of reintegration so that their feelings at different stages could be examined
- Design a longitudinal study to investigate the potential change of Veterans' feelings over time, and examine factors that may contribute to their well-being

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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