

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

One Day at a Time: The Experiences of Partners of Veterans With Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Mansfield, A. J., Schaper, K. M., Yanagida, A. M., & Rosen, C. S. (2014). One day at a time: The experiences of partners of veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 45(6), 488-495.
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SUMMARY: Partners of primarily Vietnam-era Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) provided written commentary on a mail survey on their day-to-day experiences of managing PTSD in the family. Partners' comments reflected their desire for additional mental health resources, education about PTSD, and skills to facilitate a healthier home environment. Approximately 20% of the comments referred to partners' coping skills, such as drawing upon their faith and social support in coping with PTSD.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Approximately 60% of the partners' comments mentioned a desire for additional mental health services, 50% pertained to interpersonal relationships, and 41% referred to partner/family reactions towards Veterans' PTSD.
- Coping skills were mentioned in 18% of the written comments, including spirituality and drawing upon social support.
- Participants with children living in the household were more likely to describe difficulties in their intimate relationships, including uncertainty about how to react to the Veteran's PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop classes that support partners and children living with Veterans with PTSD, providing them education and skills in facilitating a healthy family environment
- Offer workshops during deployments for partners to educate them on how to recognize possible signs of PTSD and to effectively support Service members upon homecoming
- Provide peer mentoring and support groups for partners to help them cope with changes within the home after their Veterans' homecoming

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage outreach to returning Service members and their families about PTSD and other mental health concerns, such as via public awareness campaigns like the National PTSD Awareness Day
- Strengthen collaboration between Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital and community-based mental health providers to form partnerships to care for families affected by PTSD
- Recommend that Service members be offered an individual consultation with a mental health professional during the transition from military to civilian life to educate them about family resources

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METHODS

- Data for this study were taken from a larger mail survey study conducted by the Veterans Affairs Pacific Island Health Care System.
- This study exclusively focused on the free text to the optional final question.
- Participants for the current study were recruited via referrals from Veterans participating in a larger study.

PARTICIPANTS

- Of the 455 intimate partners who completed surveys, 252 (55%) included written comments.
- Approximately 97% of participants were female, with a mean age of 57.6 years (SD = 10.4)
- Seventy-two percent of the partners had Veterans from the Vietnam War, and 18% from the Gulf War.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was potentially biased due to self-selection, both to participate in the study overall and to offer the additional written-in comments to the optional question.
- It was a fairly homogenous sample and recruited from one VA medical center, which limits the ability to generalize the findings.
- The open-ended responses to a general question yielded some ambiguous responses, and the nature of the data precluded researchers from gathering clarification.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with larger, more diverse sample that includes male partners, and partners of more recent Veterans
- Utilize qualitative methods such as focus groups or key informant interviews to allow for a more contextualized understanding of the partners' experiences
- Examine the challenges of managing parental PTSD and its effect on parenting and the parent-child relationship

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