

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Marital Satisfaction Before and After Deployments Associated With the Global War on Terror

McLeland, K. C., Sutton, G. W., & Schumm, W. R. (2008). Marital satisfaction before and after deployments associated with the global war on terror. *Psychological Reports, 103*(3), 836-844. doi:10.2466/pr0.103.3.836-844

SUMMARY: The relationship between symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in male Veterans from different service eras and their female partners' desire for change in the relationship was examined. Veterans with higher PTSD symptom severity, particularly emotional numbing, had partners that reported desire for change in intimate and shared activities.

KEY FINDINGS:

- There was no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and the five deployment groups.
- Marital satisfaction for pre-deployment and post-deployment military groups did not differ.
- Service members who anticipated an upcoming deployment or recently returned from deployment reported less marital satisfaction than individuals (Service members and civilians) not involved in military deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide pre- and post-deployment marriage support, given that relationship satisfaction may be lower at these times
- Offer pre- and post-deployment workshops to educate Service members and spouses about coping mechanisms and interpersonal strategies that can help increase marital satisfaction
- Implement family support groups for military families that experience marital conflict and are considering divorce

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Urge the use of marital counseling as part of the reintegration process for Service members and their families
- Develop initiatives to disperse education materials to military families at each stage of the deployment cycle that discuss warning signs of marital conflict and how to access support services
- Encourage collaboration with community-based mental health service providers to assist military families who are undergoing a divorce

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METHODS

- Self-report data were gathered from civilians as well as Active Duty and Reserve (Army, Navy, and Marine Corps) Service members. Detailed recruitment methods for this study were not provided.
- Participants provided their demographic data and completed the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale.
- Differences in marital satisfaction were measured across five different groups: civilian (n = 23), military (not alerted, not deployed, n = 6), military (alerted, not deployed, n = 13), military (alerted and mobilized for deployment, n = 4), and military (post-deployment, n = 74).

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included two different groups surveyed at different times; group one included 46 male civilians (n = 23) and Reserve members (n = 23) and the second included 74 recently returned Active Duty Army members.
- The Reserve members in group one were Army National Guard (n = 13), Marine Corps Reserve (n = 5), Army Reserve (n = 3), or Navy Reserve (n = 2). No other demographic data for group one was provided.
- The majority of participants in group two were White and were on average 30.7 years old (SD = 6.9 years).

LIMITATIONS

- The inclusion of civilian and Service member data in analyses make it difficult to understand differences between the samples.
- There is a lack of information about sampling procedures and low numbers of participants in each group which raises concerns about potential generalizability of results.
- The pre-deployment sample included only Reserve personnel and the post-deployment sample included only Active Duty personnel, presenting possible confounds in comparisons.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include larger samples that have greater variability in gender composition
- Utilize a longitudinal design to assess individual changes across time
- Examine whether military spouses' marital satisfaction changes across the deployment cycle

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