

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
National
Guard

Intimate Relationships Among Returning Soldiers: The Mediating and Moderating Roles of Negative Emotionality, PTSD Symptoms, and Alcohol Problems

Meis, L. A., Erbes, C. R., Polusny, M. A., & Compton, J. S. (2010). Intimate relationships among returning soldiers: The mediating and moderating roles of negative emotionality, PTSD symptoms, and alcohol problems. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 23*(5), 564-572. doi:10.1002/jts.20560

SUMMARY: One of the greatest concerns assessed among Service members relates to the consequences deployment may have on their relationships. This study examined how Service members' alcohol abuse contributes to the relationship between negative emotionality, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and relationship quality. Results indicate that negative emotionality predisposes combat-exposed soldiers to more severe PTSD symptoms which, in turn, contributes to poorer intimate relationship quality.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members who reported negative emotions experienced more severe PTSD and lower relationship quality.
- The high presence of negative emotions experienced by Service members had no direct effect on relationship quality.
- When Service members indicated probable alcohol dependence, they tended to have lower relationship quality and more severe PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Enhance curriculum related to healthy coping behaviors that may prevent alcohol abuse
- Include modules in workshops that educate on how relationship problems develop and what factors contribute to strengthening or weakening the relationship quality
- Offer support groups for Service members with PTSD and their spouses to increase social support and decrease relationship distress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that Service members who are at risk for relationship distress be identified prior to deployment
- Continue to support programs for Service members and their families throughout the deployment cycle
- Support trainings for professionals who work with military families to better understand how PTSD symptoms are associated with relationship distress

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METHODS

- Participants were drawn from the Readiness and Resilience in National Guard Soldiers project, a study of 522 Army National Guard Soldiers deployed to Iraq.
- A survey was sent one month prior to deployment and again two to three months after returning from deployment.
- The researchers analyzed the association between negative emotionality, PTSD, and relationship quality and how those associations were affected by the presence or absence of alcohol use.

PARTICIPANTS

- The participants in the study were 310 Army National Guard Soldiers deployed to Iraq who were in a romantic relationship.
- The average age was 31 years old (SD=9) and the race was primarily White (86%).
- Of the 308 qualified respondents, a majority were male (90%).

LIMITATIONS

- Pre-deployment relationship functioning was not assessed to determine what differences occurred post-deployment.
- A small number of female Service members were represented in this study making it difficult to assess gender differences.
- Researchers examined PTSD symptom severity, rather than the presence or absence of diagnosis so the findings may not generalize to those with a PTSD diagnosis.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess Soldiers' relationship functioning prior to deployment to examine changes post-deployment
- Expand sample population to include different military branches in order to generalize findings
- Examine the impact of gender on the relationship between PTSD, alcohol abuse, and relationship quality

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