

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
National  
Guard

## Relationship Adjustment, PTSD Symptoms, and Treatment Utilization Among Coupled National Guard Soldiers Deployed to Iraq

Meis, L. A., Barry, R. A., Kehle, S. M., Erbes, C. R., & Polusny, M. A. (2010). Relationship adjustment, PTSD symptoms, and treatment utilization among coupled National Guard Soldiers deployed to Iraq. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(5), 560-657. doi:10.1037/a0020925

**SUMMARY:** An investigation of how posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms of National Guard Soldiers and their relationship distress predict utilization of a range of mental health services was conducted. This study used a longitudinal sample of National Guard Soldiers to survey Soldiers 2-3 months following return from deployment to Iraq and, then 12 months later. Overall findings suggest that PTSD symptom severity, but not relationship adjustment, uniquely predicted greater odds of utilizing individual-oriented mental health services.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- The strength of association between a PTSD symptom severity and the odds of using individual oriented treatment increased when Soldiers reported greater relationship adjustment.
- Greater relationship distress was significantly associated with greater odds of using family-oriented care, but the associations with PTSD symptoms were nonsignificant.
- The association between relationship distress and utilization of family-oriented services did not vary significantly with severity of a Soldier's PTSD symptoms.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Engage Soldiers and their partners in support groups that will help them adjust to life after deployment and become more aware of symptoms of depression and PTSD
- Provide workshops that assist returning Soldiers in supporting their post-deployment mental health needs
- Disseminate information on the importance of Soldiers and their families fostering healthy relationships and effective communication

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend collaboration between DoD programs and local community organizations to support programs that build on positive coping strategies and promote family resilience
- Support campaigns that bring attention to the needs of Soldiers and their post-deployment well-being
- Continue efforts with each military branch to provide supports for Soldiers' post-deployment mental health and well-being needs

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## METHODS

- Participants were drawn from a larger longitudinal project examining risk and resilience among 522 Minnesota National Guard Soldiers deployed to OIF.
- Data were collected on relationship functioning, PTSD symptoms, and utilization of treatment.
- Data analysis examined whether PTSD symptoms and relationship functioning at Time 1 predicted participant report of treatment utilization over the following year.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were included if they were married or in a romantic relationship lasting for more than 6 months.
- There were 281 participants who completed the time one survey and 223 whom completed the time two survey. Time two responders were more likely to be married and less likely to be enlisted than the nonresponders.
- The average age of the participants at time two was 34 years old, 90% were male, 94% identified as White, 88% had greater than a high school education, and 84% were enlisted.

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample included mostly White, young, male, National Guard Soldiers from the Midwest; therefore, the findings may not generalizable to other military populations.
- While response rates were high, there were several demographic differences between responders and nonresponders which may have influenced the results.
- OEF/OIF Veterans may be better educated on resources due to their participation in required reintegration programs, which may bias the results of the study.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate how Service members benefit from using family-oriented services for child behavior problems, adult mental health concerns, or marital therapy
- Explore further the potential influences of a high functioning intimate relationship on facilitating mental health care utilization among Soldiers with PTSD symptoms
- Examine the relationships between family involvement in PTSD treatment and Soldiers' engagement and retention in the treatment program

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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