

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Multiple  
Branches

## Resilience and Symptom Reporting Following Mild Traumatic Brain Injury in Military Service Members

Merritt, V. C., Lange, R. T., & French, L. M. (2015). Resilience and symptom reporting following mild traumatic brain injury in military service members. *Brain Injury*, 29(11), 1325-1336. doi:10.3109/02699052.2015.1043948

**SUMMARY:** Mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) often leads to post-concussional disorders and posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD) among military Service members. The study examined whether resilience may serve as a protective factor. Results indicated that participants who had higher levels of resilience were less likely to self-report postconcussional disorders and PTSD symptoms following mild TBI.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants with higher levels of resilience reported fewer post-concussion symptoms compared to participants who had lower resilience scores.
- There was also a negative correlation between participants' resilience level and PTSD symptom reporting.
- Resilience significantly predicted whether the sample would experience mild, moderate, or severe levels of post-concussional disorders, but only predicted the presence or absence of PTSD that was above moderate level.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate Service members about the risk and protective factors associated with mental health disorders
- Teach military family members about the warning signs of mild TBI, post-concussional disorders, and PTSD
- Provide outreach services that increase the awareness of available support to Service members with mild TBI

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage awareness campaigns regarding the importance of resiliency for Service members
- Offer handbooks to Service members to teach them resilience strategies prior to stress exposure
- Recommend professional development courses for professionals regarding the role of resilience as a protective factor against post-concussional disorders and PTSD

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited through a larger study, and they were divided into three resilience groups based on the Response to Stressful Experiences Scale: Moderate, High, and Very High.
- Within 12 months following mild TBI, participants completed the Neurobehavioral Symptom Inventory and PTSD Checklist-Civilian Version to determine their post-concussional disorders and PTSD symptoms.
- Correlational analysis were used to determine the relationships between resilience and symptom reporting

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 142 Service members who were diagnosed with mild TBI.
- Participants' average age was 27.6 years (SD = 7.9), and they were predominately male (89%); the majority of the participants were enlisted Service members (77%).
- The ethnic background and military branches of the participants were not reported in the article.

## LIMITATIONS

- The present study only examined resilience in Service member with mild TBI, therefore the results may be difficult to generalize to Service members who have more severe TBI or other types of injuries.
- Participants' post-concussional disorders and PTSD symptoms were evaluated within one year after injury, so it is unknown if the correlation between resilience and symptom reporting would change at other time points.
- The study relied on participants' self-report to determine their symptoms; objective measures of symptoms may make the study more comprehensive.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the relationship between resiliency and symptom reporting in patients who suffered from severe TBI or other injuries
- Limit the sample strictly to those tested within 1 month or 3 months following an injury to examine whether the relationship between resilience and reporting of post-concussional disorders or PTSD symptoms differs between the two time points
- Give the participants both self-report questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to get a more comprehensive picture of their symptoms

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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