

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

From Serving in the Military to Serving Loved Ones: Unique Experiences of Older Veteran Caregivers

Monin, J.K., Levy, B.R., & Pietrzak, R.H. (2014). From serving in the military to serving loved ones: Unique experiences of older veteran caregivers. *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 22(6), 570-579. doi:10.1016/j.jagp.2012.11.023

SUMMARY: It is unknown how caregiving Veterans' differ from non-caregiving Veterans. A survey was conducted to evaluate how caregiving strain and perceived reward varied among a sample of older Veterans. Results suggest that the caregiving context, including the number of hours and relationship type, as well as the caregivers' attitudes and previous combat exposure, contributed to the perceived strain and reward of caregiving.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Previous combat exposure was associated with less emotional strain associated with caregiving among Veterans.
- Veteran caregivers who cared for their grandchildren perceived higher levels of caregiving-related reward compared to Veterans who provided care to individuals other than grandchildren.
- Of the Veteran caregivers, 39% reported at least some physical strain and 53% reported at least some emotional strain as a result of their caregiving role.
- Higher levels of overall gratitude and happiness and higher levels of perceived support were associated with increased perceptions of caregiving-related rewards.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Facilitate support groups for Service members who are caregivers to offer adaptive coping skills in an effort to reduce the emotional strain associated with caregiving
- Provide information to Service member caregivers about the resources available to support caregiving
- Increase the availability of stress-relieving activities for Service members, offering caregivers an occasional break from their caregiving duties

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of resources for Service members designed to alleviate caregiver burden
- Continue to support initiatives, including support groups, hotlines, and interventions, that alleviate caregivers' burdens
- Recommend education for community providers including information on the physical and emotional impact that being a caregiver can have on a Service member.

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from The National Health and Resilience in Veterans sample, from which a random sample was taken by contacting Veterans via the mail.
- In order to qualify to participate, participants must have self-identified themselves as a Veteran with prior service in the U.S. Armed Forces, Military Reserve or National Guard, and have been 60 years or older.
- Participants completed an online survey which collected data on demographics, combat exposure, health, cognitive status, psycho-social factors, and care-giving physical strain, emotional strain, and reward.
- Researchers analyzed whether different aspects of caregiving were related to caregiving strain and rewards.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 2,025 U.S. Veterans participated in the study, of which 431 reported caregiving for another on a regular basis and 1,585 were non-caregivers.
- The participants were 60 years of age or older (M = 71 years old). The majority of the participants were White (89%), had some college education or higher (86%), were married (80%) and lived in a metropolitan area (84%).
- The majority of caregiving Veterans served in the Army (41%), while others served with the Navy (25%), Air Force (23%), Marine Corps (8%) and other branches (2%). Of those surveyed, 40% experienced combat.

LIMITATIONS

- The majority of participants were white and educated, limiting the ability to generalize findings to Service members of different races and educational backgrounds.
- The severity and type of medical conditions of the care recipients was unknown, which could have influenced the results.
- Data were cross-sectional, so causation cannot be inferred.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit a more diverse sample in order to increase the ability to generalize findings
- Collect information on the type of caregiving, including the medical condition and severity, in order to present a more accurate picture of which types of caregiving are associated with increased strain and rewards
- Collect data at multiple time points to better understand the relationship between variables and caregiver burdens and rewards over time

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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