



Supporting  
Military Families  
Through Research  
and Outreach

# PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

## The Mental Health of Partners of Australian Vietnam Veterans Three decades After the War and Its Relation to Veteran Military Service, Combat and PTSD

O'Toole, B.I., Outram, S., Catts, S.V. & Pierse, K.R. (2010). The mental health of partners of Australian Vietnam Veterans three decades after the war and its relation to Veteran military service, combat, and PTSD. *The Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, 11, 841-845.



240 male Australian Vietnam Veterans and their female partners participated in a study to examine rates of psychiatric diagnoses in the female partners. These rates were then compared with national official population statistics and used to assess the impact of Veterans' military and war service on partner mental health. Veteran psychiatric disability and aspects of his war experience independently contributed to partners' risk of mental disorder.

### Key Findings:

- Partner use of medications for anxiety was related solely to Veteran combat, while partner use of antidepressants was related to Veteran depression, agoraphobia, and noncombat PTSD.
- Depression was higher for partners of Veterans who had more combat exposure.
- Severe depression was higher for partners of Veterans who experienced a battle casualty or who themselves had recurrent severe depression or agoraphobia.
- Partners experienced higher levels of PTSD than general population rates, and the only Veteran predictor was Veterans' noncombat PTSD.

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs could provide support to female partners of Veterans to assist them in addressing their own mental and physical health needs.
- Programs could use both face-to-face methods as well as communication via social media and the internet.
- Programs could educate Veterans and their families about the importance of all family members getting proper treatment, especially partners of Veterans with psychiatric concerns.

### Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend military installations host awareness campaigns, encouraging Service members and their partners to engage in regular self-care and to keep healthcare appointments.
- Policies could continue to allocate funds to address for the physical and mental health care of Veterans' families.
- Policies could recommend routine screening of mental health functioning among spouses of Service members.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Longitudinal research could measure Veteran and partner characteristics and psychiatric issues pre- deployment and follow people over time.
- Future studies could explicitly examine the perceived barriers for partners of Veterans in addressing their own health needs.
- Future research could attempt to replicate this study with Veterans who have served more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Research could examine these variables among female Service members and their male partners/spouses.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit [reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu](http://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu)

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## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Male Veterans who had been participating in a longitudinal study (selected from a random sample from Army records) and their female partners were invited to participate.
- 65% of female partners who were contacted consented.
- Veterans and their partners completed the Composite International Diagnostic Interview and Veterans completed the Clinical Administered PTSD Scale.
- Statistical analyses calculated the odds ratios of psychiatric diagnoses and concerns from demographic data, health behaviors, medication use, and other psychiatric diagnoses.

### Participants:

- 240 male Australian Vietnam Veterans and their female partners participated.
- 78% of Veterans were married, 9% divorced, 5% unmarried.
- Average relationship length=31.50 years (SD=11.50 years).
- Average partner age=57.80 years (SD=7.80 years).

### Limitations:

- All data are cross-sectional; causal conclusions are inappropriate.
- Information about recruitment rates were not provided.
- Little demographic information was presented.

## Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★☆)	Limited (★☆☆)	Questionable (☆☆☆)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★☆)	Limited (★☆☆)	Questionable (☆☆☆)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★☆)	Limited Several Limitations (★☆☆)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (☆☆☆)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★☆)	Limited (★☆☆)	Questionable (☆☆☆)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★☆☆