



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Intimate Relationship Problems: A Meta-Analysis

Taft, C. T., Watkins, L. E., Stafford, J., Street, A. E., & Monson, C. M. (2011). *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 79, 22-33. <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/ccp/79/1/>



This meta-analysis examined the relationship between Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and intimate relationship problems (specifically: 1) intimate relationship discord, 2) intimate partner physical aggression perpetration, and 3) intimate partner psychological aggression perpetration), synthesizing the current research on the issue.

Key Findings:

- Across studies, PTSD had a moderate impact on all three intimate relationship problems, suggesting that there is a real and meaningful effect of PTSD on intimate relationship problems. In addition, when PTSD symptoms were more severe, they were even more strongly associated with physical aggression perpetration.
- PTSD had a stronger negative impact on both intimate relationship discord and physical aggression in studies with military samples, compared to studies that used a civilian population.
- PTSD was more strongly associated with intimate relationship problems when men were experiencing PTSD, compared to women.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs should continue to include education about PTSD and healthy coping strategies for Service members and their relationship partners.
- Programs could include both the military Service member and their relationship partner; this may help alleviate potential relationship problems.
- Programs could include modules and/or workshops on the link between PTSD and intimate relationship problems and provide tools to Service members and partners on how to cope with such potential problems.

Implications for Policies:

- Military Service members should continue to be screened for PTSD symptoms, and referred to counseling services as needed.
- Service and program providers should be appropriately prepared to meet the needs of military Service members.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research on the association between PTSD and intimate partner problems should focus on *how* PTSD influences intimate relationships, providing a clearer picture of mechanisms by which PTSD impacts Service members and families.
- Future research should examine how individual differences in PTSD coping behaviors influence the relation between PTSD and intimate relationship problems.
- Additional research that takes into account the intraindividual characteristics of the intimate relationship partner would provide more insight into how couples can better cope with PTSD symptomology.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit <http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu>



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Background Information

Methodology:

- This study was a meta-analysis of 31 studies that examined the association between PTSD and intimate relationship problems.
- This article included studies with both military and civilian populations. No specific branch information was provided.

Participants:

- Across studies in this meta-analysis, average age of participants was 38.89 years,.
- Samples in the studies ranged in age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Limitations:

- Without pretests or comparison to a control group, there is no clear evidence of the direction of effects found in the included studies. In other words, it is possible that PTSD causes intimate relationship problems, that intimate relationship problems exacerbate PTSD symptoms, or that a third or more factors cause both.
- Only three aspects of intimate relationship problems were examined in this article; PTSD may have a different association with different types of problems (e.g., dissatisfaction, negative communication).

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★

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