

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Psychological Resilience in OEF-OIF Veterans: Application of a Novel Classification Approach and Examination of Demographic and Psychosocial Correlates

Pietrzak, R. H., & Southwick, S. M. (2011). Psychological resilience in OEF-OIF veterans: Application of a novel classification approach and examination of demographic and psychosocial correlates. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 133(3), 560-568. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2011.04.028

SUMMARY: Data from the Connecticut OEF/OIF Veterans Needs Assessment Survey was utilized to examine the association between demographic and psychosocial aspects of resilience and combat-related stress. Findings revealed that being in a significant relationship and having partner support are protective factors.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Of the three groups, the resilient group (23% of the sample) reported high levels of combat exposure, but had minimal posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms.
- The resilient group was also more likely to be married or living with a partner, in Active Duty, and less likely to have depression.
- Resilient Veterans reported less alcohol use problems, lower psychological difficulties, and greater psychological resilience and social support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop and test the efficiency of evidence-based prevention and intervention programs to help OEF/OIF Veterans and their families overcome military-related stressors
- Create supportive workshops for OEF/OIF Veterans who have combat-related PTSD to promote resiliency
- Continue to include military family members in the education of resilience-based programming to bolster family support

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs, the Veteran Affairs system, and community-based organizations to support a smooth transition for departing Service members
- Recommend that programs for Service members leaving the military provide information about professional support for mental health related issues and VA benefits for Veterans
- Recommend clinical assessment of psychological disorders in Service members prior to deployment and discharging from the military

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METHODS

- Recruitment of OEF/OIF Veterans came from notification of Service members departing from the military and were sent to the Commissioner of VA in Connecticut.
- A sample of 1,050 Connecticut OEF/OIF Veterans Needs Assessment surveys were sent via mail; 285 were returned.
- Veterans were assessed on the following eight measures: exposure to combat, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, depression, alcohol use problems, psychosocial functioning with family and friends, psychological resilience, amount of assistance and encouragement received by unit leaders, unit members, and the military in general during war, and post-deployment social support.
- Surveys were completed approximately 27 months following return from deployment.

PARTICIPANTS

- The study sample consisted of 272 OEF/OIF Veterans with an average age of 35 years (SD = 0.4).
- A majority of the participants were White (89%) and completed at least some college education (82%).
- Veterans were of multiple branches, both Active (28%) and Reserve and Guard (72%) components.

LIMITATIONS

- Since the study sample consisted of mainly White, Reserve and Guard Veterans, findings are difficult to generalize to a more diverse sample.
- OEF/OIF Veterans who participated in this study were drawn from Connecticut, thus, limiting the generalizability of study findings to the broader population of OEF/OIF Veterans.
- The cross-sectional design of the study prohibits drawing strong causal conclusions.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study in a larger, more representative sample of OEF/OIF Veterans
- Examine the long-term effects of combat-related stress and resiliency of OEF/OIF Veterans across time
- Recruit both OEF/OIF Veterans and their families to assess resiliency in how couples react to military-related stressors

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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