

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Increasing Marital Satisfaction as a Resilience Factor Among Active Duty Members and Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)

Ponder, W. N., Aguirre, R. T., Smith-Osborne, A., & Granvold, D. K. (2012). Increasing marital satisfaction as a resilience factor among active duty members and veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). *Journal of Family Social Work, 15*(1), 3-18. doi:10.1080/10522158.2012.640815

SUMMARY: Online survey data were used to examine how combat exposure, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), medication for mental health issues, combat injuries, length of time stateside, participation in mental health services, and deployment length influenced Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Veterans' marital satisfaction. Results indicate that only some of the variables examined influenced Veterans' marital satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Fewer PTSD symptoms were associated with increased marital satisfaction. Greater length of time stateside post-deployment was positively associated with marital satisfaction.
- None of the other variables measured (e.g., extended deployment, combat exposure) were related to marital satisfaction.
- Compared to prior research, a higher proportion of respondents were relationally distressed (low relationship satisfaction) (40%) and met the cutoff for PTSD diagnosis (35%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military couples regarding the possible mental health issues associated with deployment and combat exposure and how these issues can influence relationship functioning
- Offer workshops to military couples to enhance positive communication skills to increase relationship satisfaction
- Disseminate information regarding the resources available to military families coping with adjustment issues and mental health concerns following deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration among military and community-based programs and services to provide support and treatment for Service members who are experiencing PTSD symptoms
- Continue to support programs and services that increase awareness of and access to routine mental health screening with Service members following deployment
- Recommend professional education including information on military culture and deployment for professionals who work with Service members and their families

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METHODS

- Online surveys were posted to Veteran service organizations private discussion boards and chat rooms or via email to possible participants.
- Only OIF/OEF Veterans with verified status were included in the study.
- Service branch (Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy) and component (Reserve, Guard, Active Duty) and component (Reserve, Guard, Active Duty) were not assessed.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 113 married Veterans completed the survey; most were male (85%), White (89%), and were on average 36 years old.
- Over half (52%) of Veteran participants deployed more than once and the average deployment time across multiple deployments was 16.8 months (SD = 8.6).
- Forty-eight percent of Veterans experienced moderate to heavy combat exposure.

LIMITATIONS

- The use of a web-based survey may limit generalizability; those who participate in an online survey may be different from those who do not in ways that affect the data.
- No data regarding relationship satisfaction was collected from Veteran spouses, limiting what can be ascertained regarding marital satisfaction.
- The survey did not collect information regarding service branch (Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy) and component (Reserve, Guard, Active Duty) which could influence results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how PTSD and length of time stateside are related to marital satisfaction long-term
- Utilize a larger and more representative sample of Service members and their spouses and assess additional important variables (i.e., age, ethnicity, military branch, and component)
- Investigate if marital satisfaction can serve as a protective factor against PTSD or other mental health issues following a deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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