

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Family Functioning in Recent Combat Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Alcohol Misuse

Possemato, K., Pratt, A., Barrie, K., & Ouimatte, P. (2015). Family functioning in recent combat veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol misuse. *Traumatology*, 21(4), 267-272. doi:10.1037/trm0000037

SUMMARY: Post-deployment can be a challenging time for Service members and their families. The relationships between family functioning and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcohol use in Veterans were explored. Results suggest that existence of alcohol use and individual PTSD symptoms can have a negative impact on different aspects of family functioning.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Veterans' who had better functioning in romantic relationships also reported less "emotional numbing" as a PTSD symptom.
- Better relationships with extended family members were associated with lower amounts of Veterans' excessive alcohol use and months since deployment.
- Veterans with symptoms of depression have poorer family functions with immediate family members than with extended family members.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate Service members about the impact of excessive alcohol use on family functioning
- Offer support groups for military couples who are affected by symptoms of PTSD
- Continue to provide resources for Service members struggling with PTSD and depression long after deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development of ongoing programs for Service members with PTSD and depression after deployment
- Continue to support programs that provide assistance to military families struggling with the impacts of PTSD and depression post-deployment
- Recommend education for service providers on the effects of alcohol use on family well-being, particularly during the post-deployment period

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants for this study were recruited from a longitudinal study from Veterans Affairs Primary Care. Inclusion criteria included OEF/OIF combat experience, concerning alcohol use behaviors, and symptoms of combat-related PTSD.
- Structured interviews were conducted to collect data on PTSD symptoms, alcohol use, depression, and family functioning.
- Data were examined to understand the connection between mental health variables, alcohol use, and family functioning.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 137 Veterans that served in OEF/OIF with an average age of 30 years old ($SD = 7.2$).
- The majority of participants were men (88%). Most (82%) of the participants were White.
- Army Veterans made up a large proportion of this study (68%). A breakdown for the other service branches was not included. Many of the participants were former Reservists or members of the National Guard (52%).

LIMITATIONS

- The sample only included Veterans with excessive alcohol use and PTSD.
- Long-term effects of combat related mental health issues on family functioning are unknown because interviews were conducted only once.
- There were low levels of participation among females and non-White Veterans, limiting the generalizability of this study.
- This study was only correlational, therefore causation cannot be implied from the findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Create a longitudinal study to further understand how alcohol use and PTSD affect family functioning over time
- Replicate this study in a larger sample size that includes a multitude of mental diagnoses
- Explore how PTSD symptoms impact parental functioning in Active Duty military families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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