



Partners' Attributions for Service Members' Symptoms of Combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Renshaw, K.D., Allen, E.S., Carter, S.P., Markman, H.J. & Stanley, S.M. (2014). *Behavior Therapy*, 45, 187-198.



483 civilian wives married to U.S. Army Active Duty husbands completed questionnaires to explore the impact of attributions of their spouses' PTSD symptoms and combat exposure on marital satisfaction. Symptom attributions were associated with marital satisfaction even when controlling for PTSD symptoms; external attributions were associated with more marital satisfaction and internal attributions with less marital satisfaction.

Key Findings:

- Spouses' attributions for their husbands' symptoms were associated with marital satisfaction, even when controlling for husbands' PTSD symptoms. Specifically, external attributions were associated with more marital satisfaction and internal attributions with less marital satisfaction.
- Internal attributions of husbands' PTSD symptoms moderated the association between PTSD symptoms and marital satisfaction, such that the association became stronger as wives tended to make more internal attributions.
- Wives' perceptions of more re-experiencing symptoms were associated with more external internal attributions. Wives' perceptions of more emotional numbing symptoms were associated with more internal attributions.
- Wives' perceptions of higher levels of combat exposure were associated with a greater tendency to make external attributions for Service members' PTSD symptoms.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs for wives of individuals with combat related PTSD might benefit from more specific information regarding how external events might contribute to PTSD symptoms.
- Programs supporting couples managing combat related PTSD could emphasize the legitimate roles of emotional numbing and withdrawal in PTSD, thereby attempting to help wives make more external attributions for those symptoms.
- Service members could be encouraged to share the totality of their symptoms to help attenuate the internal attributions their spouses may make.

Implications for Policies:

- Continued support for programs aimed at PTSD psychoeducation, particularly for significant others, may be beneficial.
- Resources could be provided to develop and evaluate interventions aimed at decreasing internal attributions and increasing external attributions for Service members' PTSD symptoms.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could assess pre-combat couple functioning measures and use a longitudinal design to address these questions more thoroughly.
- Additional research could be conducted in different samples of military couples to see if they replicate.

Background Information

Methodology:

- Wives of couples from a previous randomized clinical trial of a 14-hour marriage education intervention and 2-day workshop participated.
- They completed baseline and 2 year follow-up measures of spousal perceptions of PTSD and combat exposure, marital satisfaction, internal and external attributions of their spouse's behavior, and demographics.
- Correlations assessed the relationships between the measured variables. Regressions assessed partners' perceptions of Service members' four PTSD symptom clusters, including both internal and external attributions about symptom clusters.

Participants:

- 483 civilian wives of Active Duty U.S. Army husbands, M age=30.80 years (SD=6.12).
- 71% White non-Hispanic, 11% White Hispanic, 10% African American.
- For 52% of the sample, their highest degree was a high school diploma or GED.

Limitations:

- The portion of the sample that completed the follow-up questionnaire had high levels of marital satisfaction at baseline, and all were willing to participate in a marriage education seminar; results may be biased.
- The variables measured accounted for only a small portion of the variance in the outcomes; additional unmeasured factors are likely implicated.
- These results may not generalize beyond U.S. Army active duty husbands and civilian wives who participated in marriage enrichment programs.
- The researchers did not include baseline data which may have been helpful.

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					★★★☆☆