

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Psychological and Marital Distress in Spouses of Vietnam Veterans: Importance of Spouses' Perceptions

Renshaw, K. D., Rodebaugh, T. L., & Rodriguez, C. S. (2010). Psychological and marital distress in spouses of Vietnam veterans: Importance of spouses' perceptions. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 24(7), 743-750.
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SUMMARY: An examination of how variables related to Veterans' spouses' perceptions may play a role in their own distress was conducted. More specifically, the study investigated spouses' perceptions of combat Veterans' PTSD symptom severity and what relationships there are to their own well-being. Overall, findings suggest a relationship between spouses' perceptions of Veterans' PTSD severity and their well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Spouses' perceptions of Veterans' symptom severity were associated with spouses' psychological and marital distress; furthermore, spouses' perceptions had an effect upon Veterans' self-reported PTSD severity on spouses' distress.
- For spouses who provided complete data with regard to their perceptions of Veterans' PTSD, distress was highest when they perceived high levels of symptoms but Veterans reported low levels.
- There wasn't a relationship between spouses' perceptions and Veterans' self-report of symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue providing training opportunities for professionals working with Service members and their families to learn ways to develop structures that support families' well-being
- Engage Service members' families and friends in workshops on how to support loved ones with PTSD and associated symptoms
- Disseminate information to destigmatize depression and PTSD to Service members, their friends, partners, and communities

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of structured workshops for Service members and their partners to provide support for PTSD and related symptoms
- Encourage awareness among professionals working with Service members families and communities about the effects of trauma experiences on the well-being of Service members and their families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through the Family Interview Component of the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study.
- Veterans were interviewed on topics such as combat experiences, postwar experiences, and psychological functioning. Spouses were interviewed with a focus on their perception of family and marital adjustment.
- Analysis explored whether the association of Veterans' self-report of PTSD symptoms with spouses' psychological and marital distress was mediated by spouses' perceptions of Veterans' PTSD symptoms.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 375 male and 90 female Veterans who served in the Vietnam War and their opposite sex spouses or partners.
- Veterans' ages ranged from 33 to 62 years old; 23.5% were Black, 27.7% Latino, and 48.8% White or other. Spouses' ages ranged from 21 to 73 year old; 19% were Black, 18.6% Latino, and 62.4% White or other.
- Ninety-four percent of couples were married, and the average length of marriage was 14 years.

LIMITATIONS

- There were significant differences between spouses with complete data and those with missing data; therefore, results should be interpreted with caution.
- The study only included Vietnam Veterans as such the generalizability of the findings to other Veterans needs to be given careful consideration.
- Interviews of Vietnam Veterans and their spouses were conducted more than ten years after the war ended; therefore, passage of time might have affected their symptomatology and marital relationships in multiple ways.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate what supports military families and their partners need most during reintegration
- Explore Service members' spouses perceptions on their well-being in relation to their own well-being and mental health
- Probe into mechanisms by which Service members' partners become distressed or resilient to the Service members' psychological distress

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