

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Relationship Distress in Partners of Combat Veterans: The Role of Partners' Perceptions of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms

Renshaw, K. D., & Caska, C. M. (2012). Relationship distress in partners of combat Veterans: The role of partners' perceptions of posttraumatic stress symptoms *Behavior Therapy*, 43(2), 416-426. doi:10.1016/j.beth.2011.09.002

SUMMARY: An examination of partners' perceptions of Veterans' posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms was conducted. More specifically, this included investigating the simultaneous associations of the partners' distress with their perceptions of Veterans' re-experiencing, withdrawal or numbing, and hyperarousal symptom clusters. Two separate groups of partners of Veterans were included in the study. The first sample consisted of 258 partners of Operation Enduring- and Iraqi Freedom-era Veterans and the second sample consisted of 465 partners of Vietnam-era Veterans.

KEY FINDINGS:

- In both studies partners' perceptions of withdrawal or numbing symptoms were associated with greater relationship and psychological distress.
- Perceptions of re-experiencing symptoms were unrelated to psychological distress and significantly associated with lower levels of relationship distress.
- Perceptions of hyperarousal symptoms demonstrated positive associations with relationship and/or psychological distress in both studies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue providing training opportunities for professionals working with Service members and their families to learn more about ways to develop supportive structures that facilitate families' well-being
- Engage Service members' families and friends in workshops on how to support loved one's 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
- Recommend collaboration between DoD programs and local community organizations to support programs for Service members and their families that address mental well-being

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.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- In the first study participants were recruited at a couple-based, marriage enrichment workshop; whereas, the second study recruited participants from the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study.
- In the first study partners completed an adapted version of the PTSD Checklist, Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, and the Relationship Assessment Scale. In the second study partners completed the Mississippi Scale for Combat-Related PTSD, the Marital Problems Index, and the Psychological Distress Index.
- Analysis explored associations of partners' perceptions of Veterans' symptoms with partners' psychological and relationship distress.

PARTICIPANTS

- In the first study, 98.4% of participants were married and the majority were female (98.4%) and White (91.7%).
- In the second study 80.6% of the partners were female; 19% were Black, 19% were Latino, and 62% were White or other. Ninety-four percent of the couples were married.
- In the first study 218 of the Service members had deployed overseas at least once between 2001 and 2008.

LIMITATIONS

- The data in both samples were cross-sectional; thus, no conclusions regarding causality of effects can be drawn.
- The sample in the first study was highly homogenous, with partners being mostly female, White, and from the same geographic region which limits generalizability.
- In the second study 35.7% of the partners had more than three items missing from the data collected; and while it was addressed in the analyses of the data, with the potential that the missing data was not at random, the results need to be interpreted with caution.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate how Veterans' mental health diagnosis and social support are interrelated and influential to partners of Service members' psychological distress
- Explore in depth Service members' perspectives on their partners well-being in relation to their own wellbeing and mental health
- Probe into mechanisms by which Service members' partners become distressed by or resilient to the Service members' psychological distress

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>