The Center for Research and Outreach

Putting Research to Work
for Military Families

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Focus:
Multiple Branches

Web-based Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Education for Military Family Members

SUMMARY: An educational website about posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was created for military family members in order to increase PTSD-related knowledge and promote actions to help Service members with their symptoms. The findings indicate that use of the website improved military family members' PTSD-related knowledge, and for some participants, stimulated discussion with the Service member about their symptoms or about seeking mental health care.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Military family members' PTSD-related knowledge increased after accessing this educational website.
- More than half of participants who visited the website a second time reported discussing symptoms with and/or persuading the Service member to seek medical or mental health services for their symptoms.
- The majority of participants believed that their actions regarding encouraging Service members to seek medical attention was beneficial.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military family members about PTSD and related symptoms
- Offer web-based resources to enhance education regarding PTSD for military Service members and their families
- Inform Service member and their families about resources available for those struggling with mental health issues

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support post-deployment reintegration programs for Service members and their families
- Support web-based education for family members in order to maximize treatment-seeking among military Service members experiencing symptoms of PTSD and related disorders
- Support research efforts examining the effectiveness of web-based educational programs

REACH

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METHODS

- This was a three-phase study which included: 1) focus groups; 2) a pilot study and a 25-item PTSD Knowledge Questionnaire; and 3) the primary study.
- Participants were recruited through Family Readiness Groups and Family Advocacy Programs.
- Primary analyses focused on comparison of PTSD Knowledge Questionnaire scores before and after accessing the website.

PARTICIPANTS

- Focus groups were conducted with military family members (primarily spouses; two teenage children) from three sites across the country. No additional focus group demographics were provided.
- The pilot study included 101 website users.
- The primary study included 497 website users were included in analyses; 217 of the original 497 completed a return visit to the website.
- Over three-quarters of the website users were females who identified themselves as a Service member's spouse, the average age of participants was 30 years and approximately three-quarters of participants identified themselves as White.

LIMITATIONS

- Results cannot be generalized to general military or Veteran populations because most respondents reported on males who were Active Duty in the Army.
- Although a substantial number of fraudulent website users attempting to obtain compensation were detected and excluded, concerns about the validity of the included participants remain.
- Focus group participants expressed concerns about confidentiality and adverse effects of accessing the website on the career of the Service members which may influence results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct additional studies with different military branches to increase generalizability to other Service members
- Compare the benefit of accessing this website relative to other pre-existing PTSD-related websites (e.g., the National Center for PTSD website) may be useful in determining the utility of the website
- Explore ways to address confidentiality issues

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design
★☆☆
Limited
Research Plan
and Sample

Methods
★★☆
Appropriate
Measurement
and Analysis

Limitations
★★☆
Few

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