

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Associations Between Perceived Social Reactions to Trauma-Related Experiences With PTSD and Depression Among Veterans Seeking PTSD Treatment

Schumm, J. A., Koucky, E. M., & Bartel, A. (2014). Associations between perceived social reactions to trauma-related experiences with PTSD and depression among veterans seeking PTSD treatment. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 27*(1), 50-57. doi:10.1002/jts.21879

SUMMARY: An investigation of treatment-seeking Veterans' and the associations between perceived social reactions to their trauma-related experiences and their mental health diagnosis was conducted. The differences found between the influences of three aspects of social acknowledgment: Recognition, General Disapproval (e.g. perceiving that the general society does not understand the survivor's responses), and Family Disapproval (e.g. perceiving that the family underestimates the survivor's traumas or believes that the survivor's reactions are exaggerated), on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depressive symptoms indicate the multifaceted, complex role of social processes following trauma.

KEY FINDINGS:

- General and Family Disapproval were positively related to Veterans' depression and Recognition was negatively related to Veterans' depression.
- General Disapproval was positively and significantly related to PTSD, whereas neither Recognition nor Family Disapproval was significantly related to PTSD.
- General and Family Disapproval did not have a significantly strong association with PTSD and depression versus Recognition.

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 Service members mental well-being
- Engage Service members' families and friends in workshops on how to provide supportive acknowledgment of trauma experiences
- Disseminate information to destigmatize depression and PTSD to Service members' friends, family members, and communities

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of structured workshops for Service members to provide support as they work through their trauma experiences
- 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 Department of Defense programs and local community organizations to support programs for Service members and their families that address their mental well-being

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METHODS

- Participants included 198 Veterans. They had completed an initial PTSD diagnostic assessment for an outpatient Veterans Affairs PTSD treatment program.
- A Social Acknowledgement survey with three subscales: Recognition, General Disapproval, and Family Disapproval was given to all participants.
- Analysis identified associations between the three survey scales and PTSD and depression.

PARTICIPANTS

- Most participants identified as White (80.8%), Black (17.2%), or Other (2.0%).
- Based upon the diagnostic assessment, three fourths of the sample met criteria for PTSD and over half met criteria for major depressive disorder.
- Over three fourths of the participants served in combat, were predominantly male (86.4%), and most served during either Vietnam or Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was composed only of treatment-seeking Veterans; therefore, results may not generalize to Veterans who were not actively seeking services for PTSD.
- Data did not include measures of Veterans' level of trauma or general social support, which are shown to be important in predicting PTSD.
- Participants came from one treatment program, potentially biasing the outcomes.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate how mental health disclosure, social reactions to traumatic experiences, and general social support are related and influence Service members' psychological reactions to trauma
- Explore Service members' families and friends understanding of how traumatic experiences can affect their loved ones' mental well-being
- Examine a broader Service member population who have experienced traumatic experiences to see if similar results are found

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