

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Couple Treatment for Alcohol Use Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Pilot Results from U.S. Military Veterans and their Partners

Schumm, J. A., Monson, C. M., O'Farrell, T. J., Gustin, N. G., & Chard, K. M. (2015). Couple treatment for alcohol use disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder: Pilot results from U.S. military veterans and their partners. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 28*(3), 247-252. doi:10.1002/jts.22007

**SUMMARY:** Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and heavy alcohol use can be common among military Veterans. As a first partner-involved treatment, this pilot study assessed pre- and post-scores of Veterans and their partners on measures related to alcohol use, PTSD, depression, and relationship satisfaction. Findings revealed significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, depression, and amount of alcohol consumption each day.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Following participation in the couple's therapy treatment, eight Veterans reported significant reductions in PTSD symptoms.
- The percentage of days spent heavily drinking among Veterans was significantly reduced.
- Four Veterans and three partners reported a decrease in depression in post-assessment of the treatment.
- Relationship satisfaction of three Veterans and four partners was improved following couple's therapy.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate professionals who serve Service members and their families on recognizing the signs of PTSD and alcohol use disorders
- Develop workshops for Service members and their families on effective ways to reduce problematic alcohol use and PTSD, while also improving relationship satisfaction
- Offer support groups for family members of Service members with PTSD and other substance use disorders that promote healthy coping and family well-being

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage partnering with Veteran Affairs (VA) to help Service members and their families deal with PTSD and other substance use disorders
- Recommend that programs for Service members leaving the military provide information about VA benefits for Veterans
- Encourage awareness campaigns on and off installations regarding the importance of mental health and relationship 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

- Participants were recruited from the Cincinnati Veterans Affairs PTSD program and the alcohol use disorder treatment program.
- Couples completed pre-treatment and post-treatment assessments six to seven weeks following participation in the couples' treatment for alcohol use disorder and PTSD; a 15-session psychotherapy.
- Depression, PTSD symptoms and severity, substance use behaviors, and relationship satisfaction were assessed among the Veterans and their partners.
- Differences in changes from pre- to post-treatment were assessed for both Veterans and their partners.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Male Veterans (N = 13) and their female partners participated in this study; with an average of nine years cohabitating as a couple.
- Average age among Veterans and partners was 40 years (Veterans M = 42.22, SD = 16.14; partners M = 39.33, SD = 12.64).
- Racial composition of the sample included: seven White Veterans, six White partners, six Black Veterans, six Black partners, and one partner who was multiracial.

## LIMITATIONS

- Only 13 participants participated in this study, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to the general population of Veterans and their partners.
- The findings are limited to Veterans with primary alcohol use disorder and PTSD, thus the findings cannot be generalized to Veterans with other substance use disorders.
- The study only collected data at two time points and was a pilot study, which limits the ability to determine if the treatment was helpful to Veterans and the partners over a longer period of time.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Further this pilot study with a larger sample of Veterans and partners
- Utilize samples that include Veterans and their partners with various substance use disorders to determine how the treatment may be helpful to reducing use and symptoms from each disorder
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment at multiple time points and across time among Veterans and their partners

## 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>