

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Multifamily Group Treatment for Veterans With Mood Disorders: A Pilot Study

Sherman, M. D., Fischer, E. P., Owen, R. R., Lu, L., & Han, X. (2015). Multifamily group treatment for veterans with mood disorders: A pilot study. *Couple and Family Psychology, 4*(3), 136-149. doi:10.1037/cfp0000040

**SUMMARY:** The presence of a mood disorder can negatively impact family relationships. This study investigated a psychoeducational intervention for Veterans diagnosed with a mood disorder and their families. Results indicated that Veterans and family members who participated in the intervention had more knowledge and a better understanding of mood disorders as well as increased coping skills by the end of the study.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Symptoms of Veterans' mood disorders decreased over the course of the intervention.
- Veterans and their families experienced increases in family coping strategies, communication, and effective problem-solving during the course of the study.
- Family members reported more knowledge and better understanding of Veterans' mood disorders at the end of the intervention.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to enhance positive family communication strategies, particularly for families in which an individual has been diagnosed with a mood disorder
- Develop classes to disseminate information regarding mood disorders and how they may influence relationships
- Create support groups for Service members with mood disorders and their families to increase social support

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage professionals to include families in services for Service members with mood disorders
- Continue to promote the development of programs that provide support and education for families of Service members with mood disorders
- Recommend collaboration among professionals who work with military family members and those who work with Service members to enable coordinated support for the family as a whole

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from the Oklahoma City Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center to participate in a nine-month, three-phase multi-family group intervention.
- Surveys with questions about coping behaviors, life satisfaction, communication, relationship satisfaction, and mental health symptoms were completed by Veterans and family members at four points during the program: before starting the program and after each phase of the intervention.
- Data were analyzed by comparing responses over time to determine whether the intervention was effective.

## PARTICIPANTS

- There were 101 Veteran participants who had a primary diagnosis of major depression (73%) or bipolar disorder (27%).
- Most Veterans were men (82%) and White (89%) with an average age of 51 years old (SD = 1.21years).
- Most of the 93 Veterans' family members who participated were women (83%) and White (82%) with an average age of 49 years old (SD = 1.45 years).

## LIMITATIONS

- There was no control group receiving treatment as usual, so it is unclear if the results are due to receiving treatment generally or if they are specific to including Veterans' families in treatment.
- All participants were recruited from one VA center, so results may not be generalizable to other geographic locations or to individuals receiving treatment outside of the VA.
- Participants were primarily middle-aged; results may not extend to younger populations.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine whether the gains from such an intervention are maintained after the intervention ends
- Include a control group of individuals receiving treatment as usual to determine whether outcomes are specific to this type of intervention
- Investigate the efficacy of non-clinical education (e.g., classroom education) for family members of Service members with mood disorders

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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