

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

The Role of Intimate Relationships, Appraisals of Military Service, and Gender on the Development of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms following Iraq Deployment

Skopp, N. A., Reger, M. A., Reger, G. M., Mishkind, M. C., Raskind, M., & Gahm, G. A. (2011). The role of intimate relationships, appraisals of military service, and gender on the development of posttraumatic stress symptoms following Iraq deployment. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 24*(3), 277-286. doi:10.1002/jts.20632

SUMMARY: Active Duty Army soldiers participated in pre- and post-deployment screenings. Those who screened negatively for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at pre-deployment were included in the present analyses designed to examine risk and protective factors for post-deployment combat-related PTSD symptoms. Positive appraisals of military service related negatively to a positive screen for PTSD at post-deployment. Being in an intimate relationships slightly increased the odds of screening positive for PTSD after deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Female Soldiers were nearly 2.5 times more vulnerable to post-deployment PTSD symptoms compared to male Soldiers.
- Positive appraisals of military service decreased the odds of a positive post-deployment PTSD screening.
- Being in an intimate relationship slightly increased the odds of a positive post-deployment PTSD screening.
- Female Soldiers who perceived greater impairments in intimate relationships were more likely to screen positive for PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop and distribute educational materials to address the unique concerns of female Soldiers living with PTSD
- Offer workshops to Service members and their families about the role of appraisals of military service and mental health functioning, emphasizing the positive elements of military service
- Continue to provide post-deployment reintegration workshops focused on helping Service members and their families successfully transition following deployment separation

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend continuation of pre- and post-deployment screenings for a wide range of functional domains
- Recommend continued research focused on mental health functioning and duty readiness of Service members
- Continue to support programs that promote resilience and family readiness

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METHODS

- Data from pre-deployment (45-120 days) and post-deployment (90-180 days) assessments between March 2006 and May 2008 from a large Army installation was used.
- Soldiers completed a set of health care screening measures and responded to questions about demographics, psychosocial history, deployment health, and mental health symptoms on a computer kiosk.
- Soldiers who screened negative for PTSD at the pre-deployment screening were included in the analyses.

PARTICIPANTS

- Two thousand eight hundred ninety-six Active Duty Soldiers participated (94% male).
- The majority of participants were White (68%) and had a mean age of 27.40 years (SD = 6.10 years); 67% married or partnered.
- Fifty-eight percent of participants were enlisted, with a mean deployment length of 12.70 (SD = 3.20) months.

LIMITATIONS

- All measures were self-reported which may introduce bias.
- Only one Army installation was measured; therefore, results may not generalize to the Army as a whole or to Reserve or Guard troops.
- The measure of relationship strength was one-dimensional and does not capture specific dimensions of relationship quality, which could influence the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the relationship between pre-deployment mental health screenings and duty restrictions during subsequent deployments
- Include non-self-report measures (e.g., clinical interviews) to determine mental health diagnoses
- Conduct a similar study with Service members from different branches of the military

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