

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Marines

## “We Walk On Eggshells”: A Phenomenological Inquiry of Wives' Experiences of Living With Active-Duty Marine Husbands With PTSD

Temple, J., McInnes Miller, M., Banford Witting, A., & Kim, A. B. (2017). “We walk on eggshells”: A phenomenological inquiry of wives' experiences of living with active-duty Marine husbands with PTSD. *Journal of Family Social Work, 20*(2), 162-181 . doi:10.1080/10522158.2017.1279579

**SUMMARY:** Interview data from wives of Active-Duty Marines were utilized to explore wives' experiences of living with a husband with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following deployment. Wives reported changes in roles and family functioning and discussed their lack of education and training regarding how PTSD could impact family functioning.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Wives experienced confusion, pain, and fear of their husbands due to the unpredictability of PTSD.
- Wives felt unprepared to handle the symptoms related to PTSD and had to take on different roles to care for their Service member spouse.
- Wives were confused regarding the conflicting messages they received about where to get help and the repercussions of seeking help for Service members.
- Wives expressed interest in connecting with other spouses and emphasized the importance of understanding the symptoms associated with PTSD.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education for spouses of Service members regarding the potential effects of deployment on the Service members mental and physical health
- Provide support services to spouses related to how symptoms of PTSD manifest and influence family functioning
- Provide education and support services to children and adolescents during the reintegration process to foster healthy coping and transition once a deployed parent returns home

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs and services that work with military families throughout the deployment cycle
- Continue to support awareness campaigns that focus on reducing the stigma associated with mental health care utilization for military Service members and their families following deployment
- Recommend education for service providers working with military families regarding the possible effects of deployment on Service members and their families

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 through social media, flyers, and snowball sampling.
- Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.
- Participants had to be at least 18 years of age, married to an Active Duty male Marine with a PTSD diagnosis, and have access to military benefits.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of eight wives of male Active-Duty Marine Corps members.
- The majority of participants were White (75%), were between the ages of 25-35 years, and had been married for at least three years.
- The majority of wives experienced between one to five deployments; two wives experienced six or more deployments.

## LIMITATIONS

- Only wives of Marines were included in this study, therefore results may not reflect the experiences of wives with Service members in other branches of the military.
- Due to the small sample size (n = 8), results may not accurately represent all Marine Wives' experiences regarding living with a Marine spouse with PTSD.
- The use of a snowball sampling method may have biased the results because participants were not randomly selected.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how stigma related to mental health issues in the military hinder mental health care utilization for military families
- Explore the impact of mental health help-seeking on career advancement for Service members
- Continue to explore the effects PTSD has on family functioning, particularly for youth within military families

## 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>