

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Marital Satisfaction, Family Support, and Pre-Deployment Resiliency Factors Related to Mental Health Outcomes for Reserve and National Guard Soldiers

Vest, B. M., Cercone Heavey, S., Homish, D. L., & Homish, G. G. (2017). Marital satisfaction, family support, and pre-deployment resiliency factors related to mental health outcomes for Reserve and National Guard soldiers. *Military Behavioral Health, 1-11*. doi:10.1080/21635781.2017.1343694

**SUMMARY:** Soldiers are at higher risk of mental health issues than civilians, including anger management, depression, anxiety, and PTSD. This study assessed the relationship between family and unit-related resilience factors and Soldiers' mental health. Results indicate marital satisfaction was significantly related to lower levels of mental health symptoms in Soldiers.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Higher marital satisfaction was significantly associated with Soldiers reporting lower levels of symptoms of anger, depression, anxiety, and PTSD.
- Soldiers' deployment preparation was associated with lower PTSD symptoms.
- Perceptions of increased social support from unit leaders and unit members was associated with lower levels of anger in Soldiers.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops focusing on strengthening intimate relationships during the deployment cycle to help increase positive mental health outcomes among Service members
- Provide information to Service members' intimate partners about the importance of focusing on the quality of their intimate relationships
- Educate unit leaders on how to facilitate unit support among members and leaders as a potential protective factor against later anger issues

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of couple-based programs that focus on strengthening intimate relationships during the deployment cycle
- Recommend professional development courses for community providers to educate them about the unique factors that affect intimate relationships and marital satisfaction in military couples
- Promote reintegration programs that include attention to the current quality of Service members' marital relationships and how to bolster these relationships post-deployment

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## METHODS

- Research staff ran 47 recruitment events at unit drill weekends across the state of New York.
- In order to qualify for the study, couples had to be married or co-habiting, with one partner currently serving in the Army Reserve or National Guard. The Soldier had to be between 19 and 45 years of age, and both partners had to have consumed at least one alcoholic drink in the past year.
- Participants completed an online survey which measured anger and hostility, depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, PTSD symptoms, deployment preparation, unit social support, marital satisfaction, family support, combat exposure, and other military factors.
- Researchers analyzed the relationship between the four resiliency factors (deployment preparation, unit social support, marital satisfaction, and family support) and four mental health dependent variables (anger/hostility, depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms and PTSD).

## PARTICIPANTS

- Four hundred and eighteen couples participated in the study, with an average age of 33.4 years (SD=6.2).
- The majority of participants were White (81.1%), while 4.4% were Black, 9.7% were Latino, and 3.2% were "other".
- Soldiers had an average of 11.9 years of military service (SD=6) and 85% were of an enlisted rank.

## LIMITATIONS

- Mental health symptoms were self-reported, not clinician-verified, which could effect the accuracy of the results.
- The study was cross-sectional, so causation cannot be inferred.
- Mental health during the pre-deployment phase and prior to enlisting in the military was not considered in the study, causing results to be potentially influenced by experiences other than the Soldiers' deployment.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include clinician-verified mental health diagnoses in order to increase accuracy of categorizing Soldiers as experiencing mental health issues
- Collect longitudinal data in order to determine if these resilience factors have causal relationships with Soldiers' mental health symptoms
- Include retrospective reports of Soldiers' mental health symptoms prior to joining the military and prior to deployment in order to determine if these factors play a role in the relationship between the resilience factors and post-deployment mental health symptoms

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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