

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Deployment Stressors, Gender, and Mental Health Outcomes Among Gulf War I Veterans

Vogt, D. S., Pless, A. P., King, L. A., & King, D. W. (2005). Deployment stressors, gender, and mental health outcomes among Gulf War I Veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 18*(2), 115-127. doi:10.1002/jts.20018

SUMMARY: The gender differences in associations between deployment stressors and mental health outcomes were explored among Gulf War I Veterans. Compared to men, women reported significantly more anxiety and interpersonal stressors.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall, mission-related stressors (combat experiences, aftermath of battle, perceived threat, difficult living, and working environment) had a similar impact on the mental health of men and women. Men reported significantly more combat experiences than women.
- Compared to men, women reported significantly more interpersonal stressors during deployment, especially frequent incidents of sexual harassment and less social support from supervisors and peers.
- Although men and women reported similar levels of PTSD and depression, women reported significantly higher levels of anxiety.
- Lower levels of social support during deployment represented a stronger risk factor for depression and anxiety among women compared to men.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate Service members about the importance of social support from peers during deployment and encourage them to dedicate time and energy to these relationships, recognizing that such peer support can give strength during difficult times
- Provide classes about the deleterious effects of sexual harassment, encouraging affected personnel to seek support if indicated
- Offer support groups to the families of female Service members during deployment that address the unique issues faced by female Service members (e.g., anxiety, interpersonal stressors) and their families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support sexual harassment prevention activities as well for as a range of supports for people who have experienced such harassment
- Recommend systematic literature reviews, identifying protective and risk factors associated with Service members affected by sexual harassment
- Recommend professional education including information on military culture for professionals who work with Service members and their families

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METHODS

- Gulf War I Veterans from across the U. S. were identified through the Defense Manpower Data Center and the VA Gulf War Health Registry (response rate: 66%).
- Participants completed self-report questionnaires containing measures of mission stressors (combat experiences, aftermath of battle, perceived threat, difficult living and working environment), interpersonal stressors (concerns about family/relationship disruptions, lack of deployment social support, sexual harassment), and mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, PTSD).
- Researchers used statistical analyses to examine study outcomes.

PARTICIPANTS

- Three hundred seventeen Gulf War I Veterans participated in the study.
- In this sample, most participants were male (74%) and age and race/ethnicity were not specified.
- Participants represented each service branch as well as Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve (percentages not specified). However, no data on ranks were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Results are based on retrospective accounts collected approximately 10 years after deployment to the 1990–1991 Gulf War. Hence, the findings may be biased given issues related to memory.
- Data were based on self-reports, which are subject to bias.
- Several key demographic variables were missing (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, military branch) which limits the ability to understand the sample.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with OIF/OEF Veterans
- Explore how family and relationship disruptions translate into challenges in post deployment mental health for women
- Examine how men's experiences of sexual harassment are qualitatively different than those of women

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