

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Sexual Functioning in Military Personnel: Preliminary Estimates and Predictors

Wilcox, S. L., Redmond, S., & Hassan, A. M. (2014). Sexual functioning in military personnel: Preliminary estimates and predictors. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 11(10), 2537-2545. doi:10.1111/jsm.12643

SUMMARY: Male Service members provided self-report data about their happiness, quality of life, mental and physical health, life and military experiences, and sexual functioning problems. Findings indicate that presence of mental health problems (posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD], depression, anxiety) is associated with significantly higher odds of sexual functioning problems, and that sexual functioning problems are associated with lower odds of happiness and quality of life.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Absence of sexual functioning problems was associated with significantly higher scores for general happiness and quality of life across all four measures (physical, psychological, social, and environmental).
- PTSD was associated with a 30 times higher likelihood of having erectile dysfunction and 6 times higher likelihood of having a sexual dysfunction overall.
- Depression, anxiety, and military sexual trauma each significantly predicted greater odds of both sexual dysfunction and erectile dysfunction.
- Most males with erectile dysfunction or sexual dysfunction do not seek treatment, largely due to concern about potential treatment effects and social stigma.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to Service members regarding ways to improve quality of life and overall happiness, as well as how these factors impact sexual functioning
- Educate Service members about services and programs aimed at enhancing quality of life for military members
- Publicize information regarding the inter-relationships among mental and physical functioning

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support programs that educate Service members about sexual functioning problems
- Recommend awareness campaigns that reduce stigma associated with sexual functioning problems and mental health issues
- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community-based services that work with Service members coping with sexual functioning issues to provide streamlined care

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METHODS

- Participants were part of a larger nation-wide study (The Sexual Functioning Survey) conducted in late 2013 and were recruited through online e-mail solicitations.
- Participants completed self-report surveys about their sexual functioning and general happiness.
- To be eligible, Service members had to be 40 years old or younger with a partner who was 45 years old or younger.

PARTICIPANTS

- Three hundred sixty-seven male Service members from across the U.S. completed questionnaires.
- Service members' ages ranged from 18-40 (mean age = 31.43, SD = 3.91).
- The majority were White (66%), followed by Black (15%), Latino/Latina (12%), and Other (7%).
- Service branch data were not provided.

LIMITATIONS

- The cross-sectional research design does not allow for causal inferences to be made.
- Self-reports of sexual functioning problems are subject to under reporting due to embarrassment and perceived stigmatization.
- Service branch data were not provided but were said to be representative of Active Duty members; however, without this information it is hard to determine generalizability of the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include a longitudinal design to determine direction and causality of associations
- Incorporate the perspectives of Service members' wives or partners to broaden the understanding of sexual functioning in these relationships
- Explore whether similar results are found among Female Service members

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