

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans' Experiences Living With Their Parents After Separation From the Military

Worthen, M., Moos, R., & Ahern, J. (2012). Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' experiences living with their parents after separation from the military. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 34(3), 362-375. doi:10.1007/s10591-012-9196-4

SUMMARY: Interview data of Veterans living with their parents after separating from the military were utilized to explore their reintegration experiences. Several themes emerged, including parents serving as a source of instrumental and emotional social support, and a struggle for role definition and independence.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents were able to provide both instrumental (a home to live in) and emotional support to their Veteran children; while some Veterans reported more open and honest communication regarding deployment, other felt their parents could not relate to their experiences.
- Redefining family roles could create conflict, particularly if parents treated the Veteran like a child or conversely gave the Veteran too much responsibility while readjusting to civilian life.
- Parents were often the first to notice mental health and adjustment problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide further support for parents when welcoming home their adult children who have served in the military
- Educate parents regarding symptoms of mental health problems Service members may experience after returning home from deployment and resources to get help
- Utilize a family resilience model for programs that focus on families' strengths and resources

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Extend and support policies that include education for parents of Service members
- Encourage awareness campaigns among Service members' parents about post-deployment support
- Continue to provide support for programming for parents of Service members

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.



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METHODS

- The present study used a subset of interview data from a larger study investigating Iraq and Afghanistan war Veterans' reintegration experiences.
- Participants were recruited via email, flyers, and postings on social networking sites to complete semi-structured in-person or phone interviews between 2009-2011.
- Interviews focused on the Veterans' experiences after separation from the military within specific social domains, including family, friends, and work or school.

PARTICIPANTS

- The study was comprised of only Veterans who lived with their parents (n = 11), including Air Force (n = 2), Army (n = 3), Army Reserve (n = 1), Marine (n = 3), and Navy (n = 2) Veterans.
- The majority of participants were men (n = 9) who were 25 years old or younger (n = 8).
- At the time of the interview, time since separation from the military ranged from two months to five years.

LIMITATIONS

- Interviews were limited to Veterans perspective and did not include parents' or other family members' perspectives, which limits what can be understood from the results.
- Perspectives of 11 Veterans provides an understanding of their experiences, but is not indicative of all Veterans experiences living with their parents after they separated.
- With only two women in the study this is too few to make any claims about differences in experiences by gender.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include parents and other family members' perspectives
- Follow Veterans and their parents over a period of time in order to assess trajectories of support and conflict
- Investigate Veterans use of mental health resources and their effectiveness

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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