Bedouin Wives on the Home Front: Living with Men Serving in the Israel Defense Forces


Intervies with 129 Bedouin women and their Israel Defense Force Veteran husbands examined the impact of Veterans' PTSD on wives' wellbeing. Wives of Veterans with PTSD reported more symptoms than wives whose husbands had other mental health disorders or did not have psychiatric problems.

**Key Findings:**
- Wives of Bedouin men with PTSD exhibited more elevated PTSD symptoms, depression symptoms, and somatic complaints than did wives whose husbands had other disorders and those without psychiatric diagnoses.
- Husbands with psychiatric diagnoses experienced higher levels of wife-reported aggression than those without diagnoses.
- Husbands’ aggression fully explained the relationship between husbands’ PTSD symptoms and wives’ emotional and somatic problems.
- Poor financial status was not related to wives’ distress.

**Implications for Programs:**
- Programs could develop workshops for wives whose husbands have PTSD which teaches skills in effectively supporting their loved one.
- Programs could include wives/partners in treatment of mental health issues, including PTSD.
- Programs could develop support groups for wives/partners of Service members living with PTSD and other mental health issues.

**Implications for Policies:**
- Policies could recommend offering a broad range of mental health treatments for Service members and their families who are managing psychiatric concerns.
- Policies could allocate funding for partnerships between mental health providers and family programs to jointly provide assistance to family members.
- Policies could recommend that a variety of family services are offered to families managing mental illness or PTSD (e.g., couples therapy, couples retreats).

**Avenues for Future Research:**
- Future research could explore the interrelationships between husband and wives’ mental health symptoms in other ethnic groups.
- Additional studies could follow couples over time to describe the fluctuations in symptoms as after military discharge.
- Future research could examine the impact of female Service members’ psychiatric concerns on their intimate partners/spouses.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.
For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu
Developed in collaboration with the Department of Defense’s Office of Family Policy, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture under The University of Minnesota Award No. 2013-48710-21515.
Methodology:
- Bedouin households with family members in the Israel Defense Forces were recruited door-to-door.
- 90 minute interviews were conducted separately for men and women in the participants’ homes.
- Women completed questions about their financial status, traumatic experiences, their husband’s physical aggression, PTSD, anxiety, and depression.
- Men completed measures of traumatic experiences, PTSD, anxiety, and depression.
- Analyses of variance, correlations, and hierarchical regressions examined relationships among the variables.

Participants:
- 129 Bedouin women and their husbands participated.
- Average wife age=31.3 years (SD=8.1 years).
- Average age of men=34.8 years (SD=7.8 years).
- Average Veterans’ education=11.2 years (SD=2.6 years).
- 74% of men reported service in combat units, 70% had been discharged, and 26% were currently unemployed.

Limitations:
- Results from this sample may not generalize beyond this group of couples.
- The design was cross-sectional and causal conclusions are inappropriate.
- It is unknown how having to have a husband’s permission to talk to his wife may have impacted these results, particularly in this cultural group.

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