The Home Front: Operational Stress Injuries and Veteran Perceptions of their Children’s Functioning


SUMMARY: Canadian military veterans (n=1,244) recruited from a Canadian Veterans Affairs hospital completed a mail survey regarding PTSD, depression, and concerns about children. Approximately one-third of participants with PTSD cited concerns about their children’s emotional well-being, and almost half were worried about their children’s behavior.

KEY FINDINGS
• Approximately 30% of Veterans with PTSD reported concerns about their children’s happiness.
• Almost half (47%) of participants with PTSD reported behavioral concerns about their children.
• Veterans with PTSD were significantly more likely to report concerns about their children’s behavioral and emotional well-being than Veterans without PTSD.
• Parental PTSD symptoms of emotional numbing and hyper-arousal (exaggerated startle, irritability) were related to both emotional and behavioral concerns about children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS
Programs could:
• Create classes for returning Service members regarding the potential influence of PTSD on children and offer tips on how to minimize any adverse impact
• Include information in parenting classes for military spouses about how to support their Service member with PTSD as a parent
• Offer peer support programs for youth whose parent has PTSD, allowing them opportunities to exchange social support with others with shared experiences

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES
Policies could:
• Recommend routine assessment of PTSD and other mental health concerns among Service members after deployment
• Encourage collaboration between installation family program staff and civilian school personnel in support of military children whose parents have PTSD
• Allocate funds to provide professional development training to community members who work with military youth to sensitize them to the unique experiences of these families

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METHODS

• Mail-out surveys were sent to military veterans in 1999 after they completed a health assessment at Veterans Affairs Canada.
• Response rates was 72%.
• Participants completed brief measures of PTSD and depression.
• Child functioning was assessed via two items, rating awareness of a child’s unhappiness and concerns about the child’s behavior.

PARTICIPANTS

• Canadian military veterans (n=1,244) with children participated.
• Sample was primarily male (94%), and most were married (89%).
• Almost half (42%) were over age 45, 26% were 45-54, and 23% were 35-44.
• The majority (76%) were noncommissioned officers and had been deployed one or two times.

LIMITATIONS

• Data are correlational, so no causal relationships can be determined.
• The primary parenting outcomes were assessed by two items that have not been validated.
• All measures were self-report which may introduce bias.
• A large portion of the participants were over age 45, and may have been reporting on relationships with older (or adult) offspring.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

• Qualitative research could more fully examine the relationships between parental PTSD and parenting challenges.
• Researchers could include other informants, including co-parents and children, to ascertain their perspectives on child functioning.
• Parents and children could be followed longitudinally to examine changes in family relationships over time.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-works

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