Depressive Symptoms and Mechanisms of Relational Turbulence as Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction Among Returning Service Members


This study uses the relational turbulence model to evaluate relational uncertainty and interference from partners as potential mechanisms linking depressive symptoms with relationship satisfaction. Cross-sectional, self-report data were collected from 220 Service members across all components and branches living in 27 states who had returned home from deployment within the past six months.

Key Findings:
- Service members experiencing depressive symptoms reported low relationship satisfaction and high relational uncertainty and interference from partners.
- Relational uncertainty and interference from partners mediated the negative association between Service members’ depressive symptoms and their relationship satisfaction.
- The longer Service members were home from deployment, the more negative were associations with relationship satisfaction. This link was found even after controlling for other, substantive variables from the study.

Implications for Programs:
- Programs designed to provide services during the different stages of deployment cycle could help Service members prepare for the stress of reentry (effects of which could be delayed); particular attention may be paid to specific relationship issues such as relational uncertainty and interference by partners.
- Clinicians working with Service members during the deployment cycle, especially those experiencing depressive symptoms, should be aware of, and focus on, helping the Service member and the relationship partner work through issues of relational uncertainty and create strategies to avoid disrupting daily routines that may negatively impact their relationship satisfaction.

Implications for Policies:
- Support may be sustained for programs that support Service members and their relational partners through the various stages of deployment.

Avenues for Future Research:
- The current findings could be extended by examining additional PTSD symptoms through the lens of the relationship turbulence model.
- Future research with information from both members of the dyad, as well as longitudinal data, would be important additions.
- Service members use different strategies when communicating with family members in an effort to avoid being distracted while in the warzone; future research should consider the efficacy of different coping strategies and how they impact the challenges of reintegration.
## Background Information

### Methodology:
- Online, cross-sectional, self-report data from U.S. Service members who had recently returned from deployment were used.
- Preliminary analyses involved individual differences and bivariate correlations; hierarchical regression models were used to test if depressive symptoms were negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, positively associated with relational uncertainty and interference from partners, and if relational uncertainty and interference from partners were negatively associated with relationship satisfaction; bootstrapping procedures were used to evaluate whether relational uncertainty and interference from partners mediated the negative association between depressive symptoms and relationship satisfaction.

### Participants:
- Participants were Service members \((N = 220); 84\%\) male; \(M\ age = 32.69\) years \((SD = 8.45;\ range = 18-57)\)
- Military Status = 58\% active duty, 38\% reserve, 2\% inactive ready reserve, 2\% discharged, 1\% retired, 1\% other; Service branch = 64\% National Guard, 28\% Army, 3\% Air force, 3\% Navy, and 2\% Marines
- 80\% Caucasian, 6\% African American, 5\% Hispanic, 3\% Asian, 3\% Native American, 3\% other

### Limitations:
- The participants were able to choose to participate. Selected participants may differ from non-participants in ways not measured, but affected the outcome variables. For example, those who chose to participate may be functioning better or worse than those who did not participate in the survey.
- Longitudinal data are needed to assess the direction of effects.
- Sample was primarily White males, decreasing generalizability.

## Assessing Research that Works

### Research Design and Sample

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### Research Methods

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### Limitations

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### Implications

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\[\square\] Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications

## Overall Quality Rating