Family Problems among Recently Returned Military Veterans Referred for a Mental Health Evaluation.


In this cross-sectional study, the authors tested associations between mental health symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance/alcohol abuse) and reintegration problems (e.g., family readjustment, domestic abuse) among recently returned Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF-OEF) Veterans who were referred for a behavioral health evaluation by the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Key Findings:
- The following problems were reported by Veterans: 75% of the married/cohabitating Veterans reported family readjustment problems such as relational discord (58%), feeling like a guest in their household (41%), being unsure about their family role (37%), and reporting their children acting afraid or not acting warmly toward them (25%).
- Among Veterans with current partners or who had recently separated partners, 54% reported conflicts involving “shouting, pushing, or shoving,” and 28% reported that this partner was “afraid of them.”
- Depression and PTSD were associated with higher rates of family reintegration problems.
- Depression and generalized anxiety disorder were associated with higher rates of domestic abuse.

Implications for Programs:
- Family therapies may also be considered as part of treatment for Veterans who have identified behavioral health symptoms.
- Community-based programs that provide support to Veterans and their families should also integrate prevention activities like awareness or advocacy campaigns.
- Increased support to military Veterans and their families who are already seeking mental health treatment could be implemented through the form of systematic follow-up and outreach services.

Implications for Policies:
- Health service organizations should continue to provide regular behavioral health screenings in multiple settings (including primary care visits) and ensure referral and access to follow-up services.
- Increased communication (formal and informal) between organizations serving military families and children (schools, churches) may assist in providing additional support as needed.

Avenues for Future Research:
- The findings from the present study need to be replicated in community-based samples.
- Future research should incorporate longitudinal study designs that include measures of pre-deployment mental health symptoms, domestic abuse or marital problems, as well as post-deployment measures.
- Responses from this study were all self-reported by the military Veterans. Future studies should incorporate responses from service members and their romantic partners and/or children.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.
For additional information, please visit http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu
### Background Information

**Methodology:**
- Respondents to the cross-sectional survey were OIF-OEF Veterans referred by primary care clinicians at Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center to the Behavioral Health Laboratory (BHL), a psychiatric evaluation service that conducts structured telephone-based assessments for initial behavioral health triage and treatment planning.
- This study focused on Service members: 50% Army, 17% Marine Corps, 12% Navy, and 2% Air Force; 15% National Guard and 4% Army or Air Force Reserves. (In their results, the authors made no distinctions among those retiring from duty, and those accessing services while returning to National Guard duty or reserve units).
- Evaluations took place from April 2006 to August 2007 on military Veterans (all branches) of OIF or OEF since 2001.

**Participants:**
- Participation included 199 OIF/OEF Veterans, 90% were male and 10% were female; \( M = 32.7 \) years (\( SD = 9.1 \) years).
- Ethnic composition of the sample was 53% White, 32% African American, 13% Mixed/Other, 2.0% Asian.

**Limitations:**
- The study may not be generalizable as the sample was drawn from those who sought health care and were then referred for additional care.
- Without longitudinal studies, causality cannot be established between deployment, mental health issues, and reintegration difficulties.

### Assessing Research that Works

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**Overall Quality Rating**

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