



Military REACH's review of
PILOT DATA ON THE NATURE OF TRAUMA EXPOSURE IN MILITARY COUPLES

Beck, A., Ruhlmann, L. M., & Goff, B. S. N. (2018). Pilot data on the nature of trauma exposure in military couples. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 3(1), 67-84.

BRIEF SUMMARY: This study uses the Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress (CATS) Model to investigate couple relationship quality based on severity of PTSD symptoms, type of trauma, and perpetrator type. CATS suggests that trauma experienced by a partner in a couple has a reciprocal impact on both partners' symptoms and functioning. Type of trauma indicates if the trauma was interpersonal (committed by another person), non-interpersonal (illness, car accident, etc.), or military trauma. Perpetrator type indicates the individual's relationship to the perpetrator: family member, non-family member, or military related. In general, both service members' ($n = 50$) and spouses' ($n = 50$) experiences of trauma were associated with both partners' reduced relationship quality.

KEY FINDINGS

- Among husbands with interpersonal trauma, their PTSD symptoms were related to lower self-reported relationship quality (a within individual effect) and lower relationship quality reported by their wives (a partner effect indicating a spillover from the husband to the wife).
- Among husbands with military-related trauma, their PTSD symptoms were related to lower self-reported relationship quality; it did not influence the relationship quality of their wives.
 - Within these couples where husbands reported military-related trauma, it was also found that PTSD symptomology among the wives was related to lower relationship quality reported by the wives and their husbands.
- Among wives with interpersonal trauma, their PTSD symptoms were related to lower self-reported relationship quality; it did not influence the relationship quality of their husbands.
- Among wives whose perpetrator was a family member, their PTSD symptoms were related to lower self-reported relationship quality; it did not influence the relationship quality of their husbands.
- Among wives whose perpetrator was a non-family member, their PTSD symptoms were related to lower self-reported relationship quality and lower relationship quality reported by husbands.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES

- Traumatic events experienced both in and outside of military service and the post-traumatic stress that accompanies those events have the potential to spill over to influence personal relationships.
- Spousal trauma experiences and PTSD symptoms can affect both partners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- Including spouses in treatment, both for marital counseling and therapy for trauma, may be more effective considering the bidirectional effects one spouse's experiences can have on the other.
- Considering other sources of trauma (i.e., past experiences that occurred outside the military experience) when working with service members provides a broader lens of contextual stress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY ADVOCATES AND POLICY MAKERS

- Providing therapeutic services for spouses may benefit service members, considering the finding that spousal PTSD symptomology influenced the relationship quality of service members.
- Recognizing and providing services for non-military related trauma may benefit service members.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ 50 Army couples in which the husband was the service member
- ✓ All soldiers reported at least one post 9/11 deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan
- ✓ Cross-sectional data, collected through interviews and self-report surveys

METHODOLOGY

- 50 Army couples; the husband was/is a soldier and the wife was not at the time of data collection.
- Recruitment occurred through advertising in Midwest cities neighboring an Army installation.
- Both partners were asked questions about traumatic events during interviews. All participants completed self-report surveys, which included the Purdue Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Scale - Revised to assess PTSD symptoms, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale to assess relationship quality, and the Traumatic Events Questionnaire to assess details of trauma and perpetrator type.
- Multiple Actor-partner Interdependence Models (APIM) were fit to examine various couple configurations based first on who experienced the trauma (the husband or the wife), and then based on features of the trauma: type (military or interpersonal) and perpetrator (family member or non-family member).

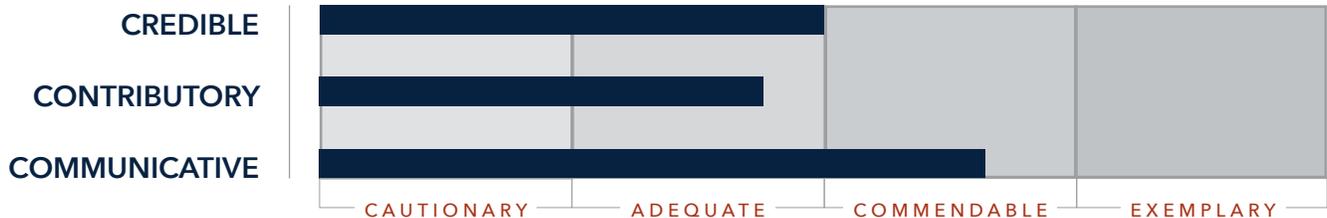
ARTICLE STRENGTHS

- The study is theoretically rooted in the Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress Model.
- Some novel contributions were made to the extant, such that this was the first study to examine the relationship between trauma-type and perpetrator-type as variables associated with relationship quality and PTSD symptoms in military couples using APIM.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- The small sample size overall and within each couple configuration limits generalizability.
- The cross-sectional nature of the study prevents causal inferences.
- This study used DSM-IV criteria to assess for PTSD instead of DSM-V criteria.
- The study fails to account for pro-active ways couples approach everyday life; that is, it focuses on deficits to the exclusion of assets in the couple relationship.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY



DIMENSIONS OF ASSESSMENT

- CREDIBLE: Research that is rigorous, transparent, consistent, and generalizable. This dimension reflects an evaluation of the study's scientific methodology.
- CONTRIBUTORY: Research that is original, applicable, and has the potential to enhance the well-being of military families. This dimension examines the impact of the study.
- COMMUNICATIVE: Research that is coherent, understandable, and readable. This dimension assesses how effectively the authors convey the content of the study.

* These dimensions are adapted from the work of Mårtensson et al. (2016). For more information on the REACH evaluation framework and rubric visit: militaryREACH.org

PARTNERSHIP

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