



Military REACH's review of
**THE ASSOCIATION OF EXPOSURE TO MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA AND
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG PARTNERED MEN SERVICE
MEMBERS/VETERANS: THE INFLUENCE OF COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR**

Blais, R. K. (2021). The association of exposure to military sexual trauma and romantic relationship satisfaction among partnered men Service members/Veterans: The influence of compulsive sexual behavior. *Family Process*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12623>

BRIEF SUMMARY: The current study examined how experiencing a military sexual trauma (i.e., unwanted/uninvited sexual attention or assault during military service) may be related to poorer romantic relationship satisfaction *through* sexual dysfunctions, including erectile dysfunction and **compulsive sexual behavior** (i.e., the inability to control frequent sexual urges and activities). Data from 499 men Service members and Veterans were utilized for this study, 64 of whom reported experiencing a military sexual trauma. Compulsive sexual behavior, but not erectile dysfunction, appears to be a mechanism through which experiencing a military sexual trauma is associated with poorer relationship satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS

- Men Service members and Veterans who had experienced a past military sexual trauma generally reported similar levels of current relationship satisfaction compared to those who had not experienced a military sexual trauma.
- Experiencing a military sexual trauma was not directly associated with poorer relationship satisfaction.
 - However, experiencing a military sexual trauma was indirectly related to poorer relationship satisfaction *through* greater compulsive sexual behaviors. In other words, those who had experienced a military sexual trauma were more likely to exhibit compulsive sexual behaviors and, in turn, experience poorer relationship satisfaction.
- Erectile dysfunction was associated with poorer relationship satisfaction. However, military sexual trauma was *not* linked to erectile dysfunction; thus, there was no indirect link between sexual trauma to relationship satisfaction *through* erectile dysfunction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES

- Recognize that men can also be victims of unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment/violence.
- **Discuss** expectations regarding the frequency and type of sexual intimacy desired within the couple relationship; seek help (e.g., couples counseling or therapy) if misaligned expectations between partners are causing relational problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- Screen for a history of sexual trauma when working with couples experiencing sexual dysfunctions and relationship issues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP

- Continue efforts to promote a safe environment and **prevent sexual harassment** and violence.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ 499 Service members and Veterans, all of whom were men in romantic relationships
- ✓ Service members and Veterans were 39.05 years old, on average.
- ✓ Most were married (76.95%) and had been with their partner for 9.90 years, on average.
- ✓ Participants were predominantly White (83.17%), heterosexual (93.99%), served in the Army (54.91%), and Veterans (no longer serving in the military; 66.5%).

METHODOLOGY

- Participants were recruited through Facebook, and had to confirm male sex, history of military service (either currently or in the past), and being old enough to consent.
- Participants responded to demographic questions (e.g., age, sexual orientation) as well as measures on relationship satisfaction, exposure to military sexual trauma, compulsive sexual behaviors, erectile dysfunction, and posttraumatic stress disorder symptom severity.
- The military sexual trauma indicators were two dichotomous measures. The first item assessed whether the Service member or Veteran had ever experienced unwanted or uninvited sexual attention during their military service. The second item assessed whether they had ever experienced sexual violence during their military service. Answering “yes” to either item was an indication of a history of military sexual trauma.
- Path analysis with **bootstrapping** was used to examine the links between experiencing a military sexual trauma and romantic relationship satisfaction, with erectile dysfunction and compulsive sexual behaviors included as potential **mediators**.

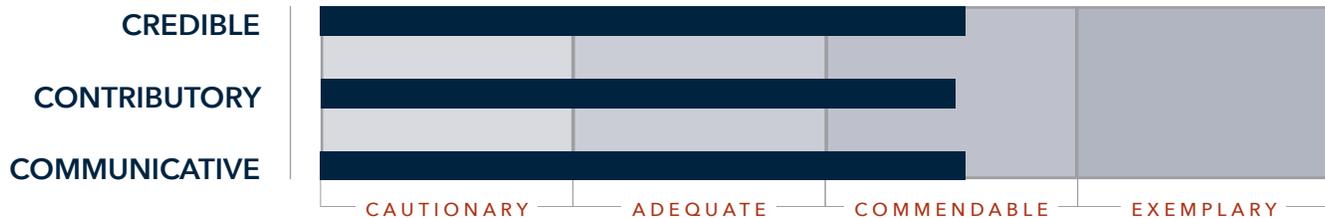
STRENGTHS

- This study used reliable measures to examine novel associations among sexual trauma, sexual dysfunctions, and relational satisfaction in Service members and Veterans.
- The sample focus on men Service members and Veterans is a strength because men are often understudied regarding sexual trauma.

LIMITATIONS

- The measure for military sexual trauma raises some validity concerns; it is relatively subjective and could include experiences that do not reflect traumatic experiences.

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Underlined terms in **red font** are linked to the definition in the Military REACH Dictionary. To explore more terms visit: <https://militaryreach.auburn.edu//DictionaryResult>. Terms in blue font are linked to additional resources.

PARTNERSHIP

This work is result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense (DoD) between the DoD's Office of Military Family Readiness Policy and the U.S. Department of Agriculture/National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA/NIFA) through a grant/cooperative agreement with Auburn University. USDA/NIFA Award No. 2017-48710-27339, PI, Mallory Lucier-Greer.

