

EFFECTS OF COMBAT DEPLOYMENT AND SOLDIER DISTRESS ON PARTNER WELL-BEING IN NATIONAL GUARD FAMILIES

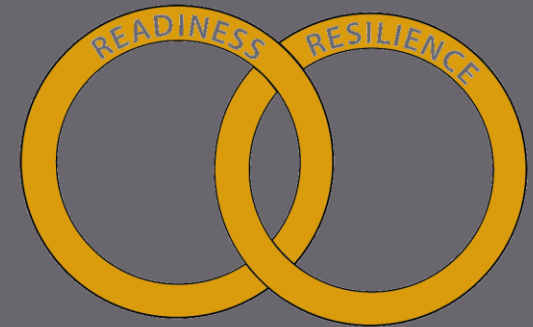
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Readiness and Resilience in
National Guard Soldiers
Project

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Overview

- I. The role of National Guard and Reserve components in OEF/OIF
- II. The challenges facing National Guard/Reserve families
- III. Findings from two studies on soldier and partner well-being before and after deployment
- IV. Implications and future directions

National Guard and Reserve Component Service-Members

- ▣ Unprecedented deployments – serving both in large numbers and repeated deployments
- ▣ Important differences from regular component service-members:
 - Demographics (older, married with children)
 - Civilian roles (leaving jobs and careers behind)
 - Training and deployment experiences
 - Re-deployment work challenges
 - Re-deployment social/unit support
 - Re-deployment access to health care
- ▣ Findings suggest NGR service members show greater increases in mental health distress over time than regular component service members (Milliken et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2010)

National Guard Families

- ▣ A key source of support when people confront extreme stressors
- ▣ May have different demographics, levels of support, expectations and readiness for deployment than regular component families
- ▣ Lapp and colleagues (2010) identified several key challenges:
 - Pre-deployment: being “on hold”
 - During deployment: worry, waiting, single parenting, “going it alone,” loneliness
 - Post-deployment: adjustment to changes in partners, soldiers, and families

What do we know about OEF/OIF families and service members?

- ▣ Like service members, military families can be remarkably resilient. However...

- ▣ Deployment has been linked to:
 - Increased mental health service utilization among partners (Mansfield et al., 2010)
 - Increased internalizing and externalizing disorders among children (Chartrand et al., 2008; Flake et al., 2009)
 - Increased reporting of child maltreatment (Gibbs et al., 2007)

- ▣ Soldier symptoms of PTSD are associated with:
 - Reduced relationship satisfaction as rated by both soldiers and partners (Allen et al., 2010; Nelson-Goff et al., 2007; Renshaw et al., 2008)
 - Poorer parenting practices as reported by soldiers (Gewirtz et al., 2010)

Limitations of our current knowledge

- ▣ Often based upon only one source (e.g., service member report)
- ▣ Often retrospective and cross-sectional in nature
 - Confuses directions of causality
 - Can't rule out pre-existing concerns or problems

The Readiness and Resilience in National Guard Soldiers (RINGS) Project

- ▣ Aims to identify protective and vulnerability factors for soldier and family mental health in National Guard troops following combat deployments.
- ▣ Works in close collaboration with Minnesota (and more recently Iowa) National Guards
- ▣ Focuses on longitudinal and multi-informant designs
- ▣ Two relevant RINGS studies discussed today:
 - ▣ Couples and PTSD Study
 - ▣ National Guard Veteran and Family Well-being Study (RINGS2 Pilot)

Couples and PTSD Study

▣ Aims:

- *Examine the effect of couple interactions and functioning on course of PTSD symptoms.*
- *Examine the effect of PTSD symptoms on couple functioning over time.*

▣ Method:

- Design: Two-wave, mixed method study of 49 OIF National Guard veterans and their spouses.
- Data collection:
 - ▣ Self report symptom (PCL) measures
 - ▣ Self report relationship measures (DAS)
 - ▣ Clinical interviews of soldiers (CAPS)
 - ▣ Videotaped observation of couple interactions (not discussed).

Couples and PTSD Study: Participants

- ▣ Soldiers
 - Mostly Caucasian (92%)
 - Working full time (80%) or part time (10%)
 - Mean age was 34.7
 - 7 of 49 soldiers (14%) were diagnosed with PTSD

- ▣ Partners
 - Mostly Caucasian (96%)
 - Working full (35%) or part-time (35%).
 - Mean age was 33.6.

- ▣ Relationship status:
 - Average length of marriage was 9 years.
 - 82% of couples were on their first marriage.

Couples and PTSD Study: Results

- ▣ Multi-level Modeling (MLM) found that soldier Time 1 PTSD (PCL) predicted decreased relationship adjustment (DAS) at Time 2 ($r = -.30$) for both soldiers and partners.
- ▣ Regression analysis found that Time 2 PTSD for soldiers was not predicted by Time 1 relationship adjustment as reported by soldiers ($f^2 = .04$) or partners ($f^2 = .08$; $R^2 = .11$, ns)

Couples and PTSD Study: Summary

- ▣ PTSD is associated with deteriorations in soldier and partner ratings of relationship adjustment over time
- ▣ Relationship adjustment was not predictive of changes in PTSD over time
- ▣ Services and support for family members of soldiers with PTSD symptoms can be important

National Guard Veteran and Family Well-being Study (RINGS2 Pilot)

- ▣ Aims:
 - *Identify soldier and family predictors of pre-deployment family well-being*
 - *Determine the impact of family well-being on NG veteran's post-deployment mental health*

- ▣ Mail survey methodology:
 - Surveyed soldiers and partners 1 month prior to a combat deployment to Afghanistan (July, 2010)
 - Soldiers and partners will complete additional surveys during (partners) and after (soldiers and partners) the deployment
 - Measures: Soldier and partner distress (PTSD, depression, ETOH), stressors, prior deployment experience, communication, and relationship adjustment

- ▣ Time 1 (Pre-deployment) data collection complete

RINGS2 Pilot Participants

623 soldiers participated, 288 nominated spouses to take part, 223 spouses did take part (response rate = 77%)

| | Soldier | Partner |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Gender | 95% male | 95% female |
| Race | 96% Caucasian | 93% Caucasian |
| Age | 34.20 (SD = 8.63) | 33.50 (SD = 9.45) |
| Education | 46% AA or higher | 49% AA or higher |
| Rank | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 17% Officers• 1 % Warrant Officers• 82% Enlisted | |
| Role in Upcoming Deployment | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 45% Combat Arms• 31% Combat Support• 24 % Service Support | |
| Prior Deployments | 51% prior OEF/OIF deployment | |

RINGS2 Pilot Results: Soldier and Partner Distress

| Measure | Soldier (Mean, SD, % Screening Positive) | Partner (Mean, SD, % Screening Positive) |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| PTSD (PCL) | 24.31 (SD = 9.62, 3%) | 26.56 (SD = 9.23, 2%) |
| Depression (PHQ-8) | 2.60 (SD = 4.00, 5%) | 4.61 (SD = 4.38, 15%) |
| Alcohol Problems (AUDIT) | 4.88 (SD = 4.23, 15%) | 2.58 (SD = 2.36, 4%) |
| Social Functioning (SFQ) | 4.60(SD = 3.39, 9%) | 5.97 (SD = 3.40, 17%) |
| Relationship Adjustment (DAS-7) | 18.01 (SD = 2.79) | 17.25 (SD = 2.89) |

RINGS 2 Pilot Results: Common Concerns

DURING MY SPOUSE/PARTNER'S DEPLOYMENT, I AM CONCERNED ABOUT...

- My spouse/partner's and/or children's safety and well-being (51%)
- My spouse/partner missing out on our children's growth and development (49%)
- My spouse/partner missing important events at home such as birthdays, etc. (43%)
- My spouse/partner's and/or children's mental health (41%)
- The effect of the deployment on my relationship with my spouse/partner (41%)
- The effect of the deployment on my spouse/partners' relationship with his/her children (36%)
- My spouse/partner's inability to help at home if there was some type of problem (32%)

RINGS 2 Pilot Results: Correlates of Partner Depression and Concerns

| | Partner Depression | Partner Concerns for Family Wellbeing |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Partner : | | |
| •Depression | --- | .41 *** |
| •Concerns for Family Wellbeing | .41 *** | --- |
| •Social Functioning | .57 *** | .38 *** |
| •Relationship Adjustment | -.06 | .01 |
| •Children (yes/no) | .03 | .20 ** |
| | | |
| Soldier: | | |
| •Prior OEF/OIF deployment | -.04 | -.00 |
| •Symptoms of PTSD | .18 ** | .16 * |
| •Symptoms of Depression | .15 * | .28 *** |

RINGS2 Pilot Summary

- ▣ Partners, like soldiers themselves, are for the most part resilient to the stressors of deployment
- ▣ A substantial number report heightened levels of depression and impaired social functioning
- ▣ Partner concerns for family well-being are related to partner distress and social functioning as well as soldier distress
- ▣ Pre-deployment soldier distress is also related to partner distress

Conclusions

- ▣ National Guard spouses/partners may be affected by the stresses of deployment and their soldier's mental health
- ▣ Symptoms of PTSD are associated with deterioration in marital relationships over time
- ▣ NG families may benefit from support and services before, during, and after combat deployments
- ▣ Support for NG families may be an important means of supporting their soldiers

Future Directions

- ▣ Couples and PTSD Study:
 - Planned analyses of observed communication patterns as they relate to PTSD, couple functioning, and partner well-being over time.

- ▣ RINGS-2:
 - For the Pilot, we will continue to follow-up with soldiers and partners over the course of the deployment
 - The larger RINGS-2 study has been funded by VA HSR&D and will start data collection in January, 2011
 - Both will allow investigation of how soldiers and partner distress and risk factors relate over time.

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Thank you for your attention!

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