



Summaries of Recommended Readings for:

2009 TSD Conference

Family Functioning Predicts Outcomes for Veterans in Treatment for Chronic Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Lynette Evans, Sean Cowlshaw, and Malcolm Hopwood

Family functioning affects outcomes of PTSD in soldiers but a PTSD diagnosis does not affect family functioning, according to this 2009 study. Positive family functioning was found to play a significant role in recovering from PTSD. Higher levels of family dysfunction were associated with increased levels of PTSD. Family functioning was found to affect veteran's symptoms and their ability to benefit from treatment.

This study is important because it identifies the need to incorporate families into the treatment plans of veterans who suffer from PTSD

Families Under Stress: An Assessment of Data, Theory, and Research on Marriage and Divorce in the Military

Benjamin R. Karney and John S. Crown

A 2007 RAND study examined marriage in the military and how it is impacted by the recent high deployment tempo. The study found that overall divorce rates across the armed forces have not increased appreciably in the past few years and are roughly the same as in 1996, when many less demands were placed on the military. However, female married service members were much more likely to get a divorce and enlisted personnel were also at an increased risk, although at a far less risk than females. This study also found that only the Air Force showed a positive correlation between time spent deployed and divorce. Interestingly, enlisted soldiers, sailors, and marines and navy and marine officers showed a slight negative correlation between length of deployment and risk of divorce.

While not addressing traumatic spectrum disorders, this study gives good background information on military marriages and also proposes a model that explains why military marriages succeed or fail.



Families of Patients with Polytrauma: Understanding the Evidence and Charting a New Research Agenda

Joan M. Griffin, Greta Friedemann-Sánchez, Carmen Hall, Sean Phelan, Michelle van Ryn

This 2009 article examined the role that polytrauma (multiple injuries that often include TBI and PTSD) plays in family functioning. It also explored how the stress of caring for a family member with polytrauma affects family functioning. The study also looks at family outcome in cases where long-term care (up to 3 years) is needed. It reiterates the importance of family functioning in positive treatment outcomes and talks about what the family of a wounded warrior needs during this period (information from treating doctors, ability to manage their expectations about the family member's recovery, etc). This information fits in nicely with the conference's theme of focusing on the families of wounded warriors and examining what they need in order to function better. And again, family functioning is important to treatment success.

Military Deployment: The Impact on Children and Family Adjustment and the Need for Care

Alexander C. McFarlane

Deployment's effects on children are summarized in this 2009 literature review. Among the information provided:

- Media coverage of war is especially troubling for adolescents
- Mothers' anxiety has the greatest impact on the children of deployed fathers
- Soldiers with PTSD are at risk for committing domestic violence
- Children are at an increased risk of maltreatment while one parent is deployed. However, this increased rate is still less than that of the general population
- Deployment can have negative effects even on unborn children, because of the effects deployment has on the mother

While this is an Australian study, it examines several studies of American soldiers and family members.



Understanding the Impact of Deployment on Children and Families: Findings from a Pilot Study of Operation Purple Camp Participants

Anita Chandra, Rachel M. Burns, Terri Tanielian, Lisa H. Jaycox, Molly M. Scott

The RAND authors of this working paper interviewed spouses and children of deployed service members while the family members were at a summer camp that was free to children of a deployed parent. The results of the study showed that the nondeployed parent often reported increased levels of children's behavioral and emotional trouble. Children also reported that their parent or caregiver was also affected by the deployment of their spouse. The article found that children and parents who went to the free summer camp (Operation Purple Camp) enjoyed themselves and found the experience helpful in dealing with the stressors of a deployed spouse.

This study is unique because it examines both parents' and children's perspectives on the stresses of family life when a spouse is deployed.

How Effective Are Interventions With Caregivers? An Updated Meta-Analysis

Silvia Sörensen, Martin Pinqart, Dr habil, and Paul Duberstein

This meta-analysis reviewed 78 articles that study the effectiveness of various interventions for treating family caregivers of older adults. The analysis showed that educating family members about the disease/disorder that their loved ones suffer from as well as psychotherapy were the most effective interventions for caregivers. The study found that the type of intervention (respite from care giving, psychotherapy, skill training to improve caregiver skills, etc) and the care giving situation (care giving for a severely impaired family member, caring for a spouse vs. caring for a parent, etc) play a role in outcome measures.

Taken as a whole, all interventions had a good effect on all outcome measures, but psycho-education was overall one of the most effective ways to help caregivers. This study does a good job of telling what specific intervention works on particular symptom categories.



Bringing the War Back Home: Mental Health Disorders Among 103788 US Veterans Returning From Iraq and Afghanistan Seen at Department of Veterans Affairs Facilities

Karen H. Seal, Daniel Bertenthal, Christian R. Miner, Saunak Sen, Charles Marmar

A large group of military veterans who sought VA healthcare post 9/11 were examined in this recent study. Twenty five percent of them received a psychiatric diagnosis and over half of that group had 2 or more discrete diagnoses. The majority of these diagnoses were made outside of a mental health setting, usually in a primary care setting. Most patients were White males. PTSD was the most common diagnosis (13%). The 18-24 age group appears most at-risk for receiving a PTSD diagnosis. Race did not seem to play a factor in mental health diagnosis.

The main limitation of this study was that it only looked at veterans who actively sought out VA healthcare and does not account for veterans who sought healthcare privately or did not seek services at all.

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

Steven L. Sayers, Victoria A. Farrow, Jennifer Ross, and David Oslin

Three fourths of veterans with a mental health diagnosis seen at a Philadelphia VA hospital reported significant family troubles, according to these authors. These problems included not feeling like part of the family or perceptions that other family members are acting differently towards them. Fifty three percent of this population who recently separated from their spouses reported shouting or physical altercations. Depression and PTSD were the diagnoses most associated with these negative outcomes. All told, returning military veterans with Depression or PTSD are about 5 times more likely to have family problems than other veterans.

This is a well-done study published in a respected journal that gives scientific evidence supporting the importance of treating the family of veterans returning home with PTSD.