Treating Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Couples

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Overview

• Demographics
• Relevant Research
• Clinical issues for Couples
• Treatment interventions with Couples
How many Troops have served in OEF/OIF?
• 1,599,432 troops have served in OEF and OIF
• More than 540,306 have served more than 1 tour

August, 2007 DOD
Ever Deployed to OEF or OIF

• Active duty
  Male- 88.8%
  Female-11.2%

• Reserves
  Male- 89.2%
  Female- 10.8%

August, 2007 DOD
Ever Deployed to OEF or OIF

- Active Duty
  - Age 17-24: 47.3%
  - Age 25-29: 21.5%
  - Age 30-39: 23.7%
  - Age 40+: 07.6%

August, 2007 DOD
Ever Deployed to OEF or OIF

- Reserves
  - Age 17-24: 27.0%
  - Age 25-29: 16.3%
  - Age 30-39: 30.1%
  - Age 40+: 26.6%

August, 2007 DOD
Marital Status of Ever Deployed Troops

• Active duty
  Single  48.8%
  Married  51.1%

• Reserves
  Single  46.7%
  Married  53.2%

August, 2007 DOD
Seal et al, 2007

• Most common mental health diagnoses:
  – PTSD
  – Anxiety
  – Adjustment
  – Depression
  – Substance abuse
Child maltreatment during combat deployment

- Higher rates of child maltreatment when soldier-parent deployed vs. when not deployed

Impact on soldier-parent while deployed?
Afterwards?

Gibbs et al, JAMA, 2007
• No published treatment research on OEF/OIF couples/families
Validated couples therapy treatments

- Insight oriented therapy (Snyder and Wills, 1989)
- Emotion focused therapy (Johnson, 2002)
PTSD Couples Treatment research with Vietnam Vets

- Sweany 1988 (N=14 couples)
- Glynn et al, 1999 (N=42 couples)
- Monson, 2004 (N=7 couples)
• Careful to equate research from Vietnam veterans to this population

• Many studies are on 2nd and third relationships and conducted 13 or more years post conflict

• Environment for seeking help much worse after Vietnam
Current Couples Trauma research
CBCT Monson
EFT Weisman

Treating the relationship?
Treating PTSD?
Treating both?
Clinical Presentation of Veteran

- View of life has changed
- Less connected with peer groups, alienation
- Family and work adjustment issues
- Acute distress, heightened anger, hypervigilance
- Feel that nothing matters any more; life is meaningless
- Self-destructive and reckless behavior
Clinical Presentation of Veteran

- Feel disillusioned and betrayed
- For some, fear redeployment; for others, seek redeployment
- Wish that memories and reminders of war would fade
- Reluctant to seek help; don’t believe they are that troubled
- Encouraged to come for help by family members or other veterans
- IMPACT ON PARTNER?
Sense of Humor
Partners

• Detailed assessment with partner
• Care taking issues
• Discussion of Vet’s experience- what do they know?
• What about me? Jealousy and being married to the war “hero”
Clinical presentation of OEF/OIF couples

- Variety of presentations
  Determined by:
  - Developmental stage of couple
  - Developmental stage of individuals within the relationship
  - Relationship dissatisfaction
  - Severity of PTSD or other war-related symptoms
  - Pre-war relationship vs. post war relationship?
  - Numbing vs. Arousal
Clinical presentation of OEF/OIF couples

- First stop into treatment
- Last stop before ending the relationship
- Interested in improving communication or other specific couples related issue
- Money, jealousy, sex, in-laws, household chores etc.
- Going out
- Having additional relationships
- Partner interested in “helping the veteran”
Interventions with OEF/OIF Couples

- Obtain an agreed upon problem focus
- Clarify couple’s goals
- Detailed assessment including:
  - Individual sessions
  - Satisfaction with relationship
  - Violence within the relationship
  - Substance abuse
Interventions with OEF/OIF Couples

- Educate family about PTSD and help couple negotiate how they will cope with sx's
- Teaching communication and problem solving skills?
- War stress fractures attachment within and between
- Repair and strengthen attachment
- Pay attention to process not content
- Vet needs to lean on partner; Partner needs to lean on vet
Interventions with Couples

- Self soothing vs. other soothing
- Can’t we all just get along?
Discussion of Traumatic Event

- How is discussion related to presenting problem or goal of therapy?
- Is environment safe for discussion of trauma?
- In what detail should events be discussed?
- Couples/family therapy does not have to involve direct discussion of trauma
- Discussion of effects of trauma may be as useful as the discussion of the trauma
## Secure Attachment as an Antidote to Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SECURE ATTACHMENT</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Floods us with physical fear/helplessness</td>
<td>- Soothes and comforts</td>
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<td>- Colors the world as dangerous/unpredictable</td>
<td>- Offers a safe haven</td>
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<td>- Creates overwhelming chaos</td>
<td>- Promotes affect regulation/integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Threatens a cohesive sense of self</td>
<td>- Promotes personality integration</td>
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<td>- Assaults self-efficacy and a sense of control</td>
<td>- Promotes confidence/trust in self and others</td>
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<td>- Scrambles ability to engage fully in the present and adapt to new situations</td>
<td>- Promotes openness to experience, risk taking, and new learning</td>
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(Johnson, 2002)
Confidential Material

- Engaged couple in their twenties
- Served with Marines in Iraq
- Recent trigger from watching “Alive Day”
- 3rd session
"Would you care to put your filthy paws on me?"
Additional Interventions

- Provide individual, group, and medication therapy as needed for both members of the couple
- Utilization of services outside the VA for the partner
- Spouses support group
Community Interventions

• It doesn’t end with the DOD or the VA

• Build community resources to help decrease isolation of couple/family
No research on veteran couples when veteran is female

- 10% of veterans in the war-zone are female
No research on parents of OEF/OIF Troops

- 50% of vets returning are single
- 47% of active duty vets are 17-24

“When my baby comes home and is disfigured, do you think she is going to stick by him?”

Quote from a blue star mother regarding the wife of a young vet
Thank you