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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT, CONFLICT, AND STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS ON PTSD, DEPRESSION, AND ANXIETY SYMPTOM SEVERITY IN U.S. ARMY FEMALE VETERANS

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Introduction: There have been prevailing gender differences in negative mental health outcomes for female U.S. veterans returning from combat deployments. Research has validated the importance of post-deployment social support in mitigating the effects of these experiences on mental health; however, the influence of conflict within the social network has not been thoroughly explored.

Aims:

(1) Examine the relationships between social support, conflict, and stressful life events to PTSD, depression, and anxiety symptom severity in female veterans 6-12 months after deployment.

(2) Determine whether the absence of social support or the presence of social conflict is more influential in the severity of these symptoms.

Methods: Descriptive, correlational

Results: There were significant positive bivariate correlations ($p < .01$) between conflict and stressful life events and significant negative bivariate correlations

($p < .01$) between social support and each of the three outcome variables: PTSD, depression, and anxiety symptoms. Hierarchical linear regression showed that co-morbid depression, greater post-deployment stressful life events, and greater conflict within the social network best explained the presence of greater PTSD symptom severity. Stressful life events did not contribute to greater anxiety symptom severity; however, symptom severity was affected by the absence of social support. In contrast, greater depression symptom severity was best explained by the presence of co-morbid PTSD symptoms and the absence of social support.

Conclusions: Treatment programs for PTSD and anxiety in female veterans' post-deployment must assess and address sources of intrapersonal conflict within their social networks. Family therapy may be integral to treatment success.