

PTSD partners feel invisible, study finds

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Recognition of the needs of wives and intimate partners in supporting the recovery of veterans and front-line emergency workers affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been highlighted in a new study led by Flinders University.

Their contribution to [trauma recovery](#), and their own need for support, are not well understood by military and emergency service organisations, [healthcare providers](#) and government, the researchers found when they interviewed 22 partners of Australian veterans, paramedics, fire and police officers.

"We looked at partners in these groups because of the [occupational exposure](#) to trauma they experience," says Flinders Behavioural Health researcher Professor Sharon Lawn, project lead and author of a new article published in *Health and Social Care in the Community*.

"The key finding was that partners feel invisible in recovery. They live with the trauma that their partners experience but are still not acknowledged by [health services](#) or professional organisations (such as Department of Veterans' Affairs, Police, etc) as a vital part of the person's support system."

Feeling invisible was the barrier respondents felt to receiving the support they crave, says co-investigator Paula Redpath, a consultant psychotherapist and discipline lead—Flinders Behavioural Health.

"The participants' key concerns were to protect their family unit and relationship with their partner, showing many ways in which they managed, coped and adapted to myriad changes brought by the PTSD," she says.

However, many perceive that the strength of their commitment to their relationship, their contribution to the recovery of the veteran, and to what they do every day for the family, is largely invisible to the organisations and healthcare providers available to these occupations, the researchers conclude.

The article, "' Why do you stay?': The lived-experience of partners of

Australian veterans and first responders with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder' has been published in *Health & Social Care in the Community*.

The research, funded by veteran support network The Road Home, used a qualitative phenomenological approach, and inductive thematic analysis was undertaken on data collected in 2017-2018 through individual interviews with a purposive sample of 22 partners of veterans, paramedics, fire and police officers living in Australia.

Behavioural Health, based at Flinders University, has developed a wide range of tools and outreach services to facilitate support for self-management, so that health professionals can become truly collaborative with people with chronic conditions.

More information: Elaine Waddell et al, "Why do you stay?": The lived-experience of partners of Australian veterans and first responders with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, *Health & Social Care in the Community* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/hsc.12998](https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12998)

Provided by Flinders University

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