



Medical Humanities Fair

# Contextualizing Fatherhood Practices via Military Service and PTSD Symptoms

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## Critical Background

### Context

Trauma-informed care is a framework that works to address the challenges of parenting while also suffering from trauma. Veterans, who experience PTSD at higher rates than the general population, are one group of people who are highly affected by issues in fathering due to their own symptoms and struggles with PTSD. Historically, veterans have shown symptoms ranging from aggression and violence to complete withdrawal towards their children (Creech & Misca, 2017).

**Insight from Fieldwork:** Veteran fathers struggle with defining what hurting and pain means to them.

### Facts

1. Veterans from Afghanistan and Iran experience PTSD at a prevalence of approximately 23% (Fulton et al., 2015).
2. Of those who are currently serving, 43% parent at least one child (Department of Defense, 2014).

### A Humanities Approach

A humanities approach is critical in exploring this issue because it allows one to fully acknowledge the role of social influence and family support in shaping mental illness (PTSD) and how illness can, too, shape other aspects of an individual's life (fatherhood).

## Research Questions

1. How does the illness define the father's perception of himself?
2. How do the symptoms of PTSD affect how veterans fathers approach their own relationship with their children?
3. How are children of veteran fathers affected by their fathers' illnesses?

## Field Site: UIH Family Partners

### Background

UIH Family Partners aims to address the lack of institutional support for fatherhood practices via programs such as work readiness, HSE preparation, anger, stress and time management, and job search assistance. The organizations counters many institutional models of parenting interventions in which the mother is the primary focus of the care model. As such, UIH fills gaps in the parenting assistance realm by providing a space for fathers specifically to explore their role in their child's life.

## Field Site: UIH Family Partners (Cont.)

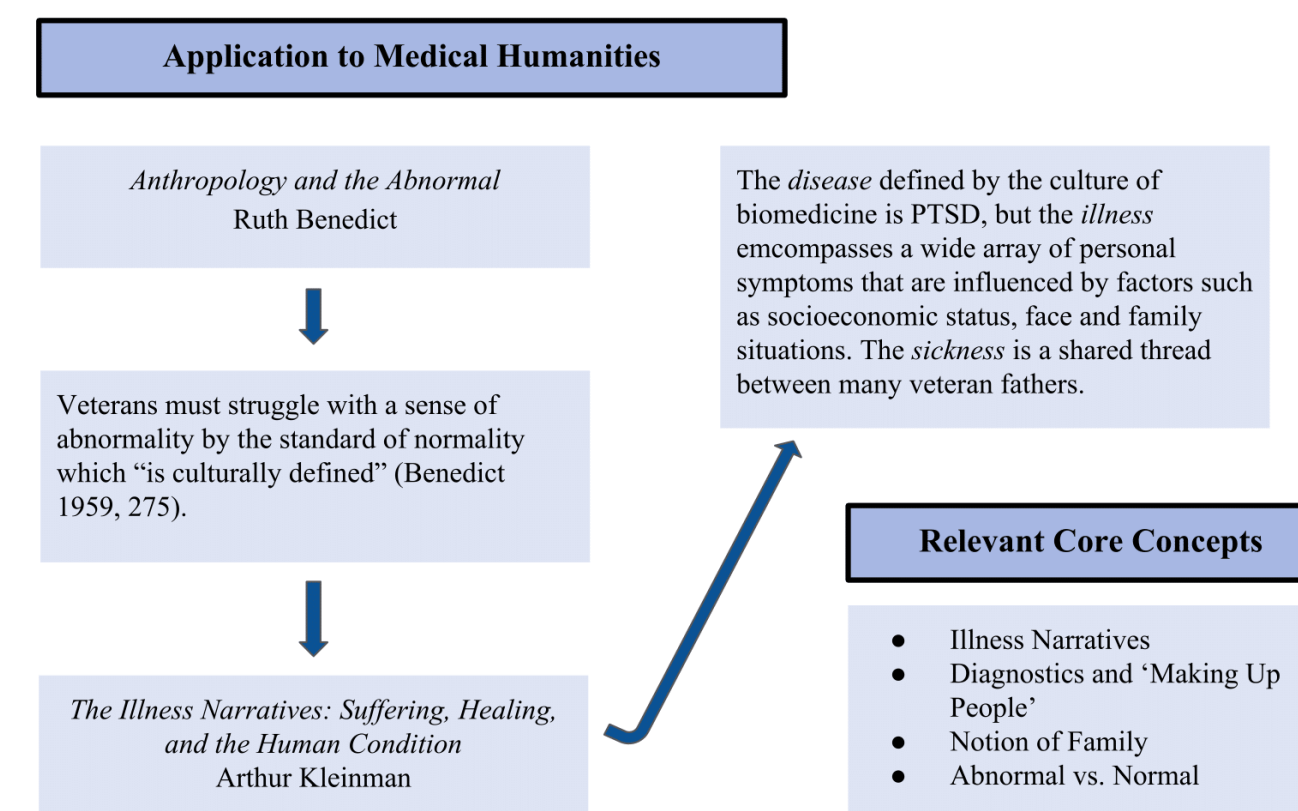
### Core Values

- ✓ Empowerment
- ✓ Self-Sufficiency

## Insights and Discussions

### Research Results

- ✓ Stronger symptoms of PTSD in veteran fathers are associated with inconsistent behaviors in terms of discipline and supervision (Creech & Misca, 2017).
- ✓ Veteran fathers are less likely to notice and subsequently report signs of "negative child functioning" than their counterpart veteran mothers (Creech & Misca, 2017).
- ✓ Adolescent children tend to be more apprehensive, tense and anxious (Dansby & Marinelli, 1999). Children of veteran fathers who suffer from PTSD generally have a problematic view of their own father.



### Implications

- ✓ Knowledge about the fathering challenges that veterans may face from a medical-social perspective can help institutions and non-profits implement a better support system specifically for fathers who have recently returned from combat to ensure that their trauma does not affect their relationship with or perception of their children.

## Insights and Discussions (Cont.)

- ✓ In the long term, this research can be utilized to analyze the veteran support system at large and use the intersection between medicine and social support to aid in areas such as fatherhood and reintegration into society.

### Unanswered Questions

Unanswered questions include whether veteran fathers express different levels of trauma in their care based on the age of their child when they departed for combat.

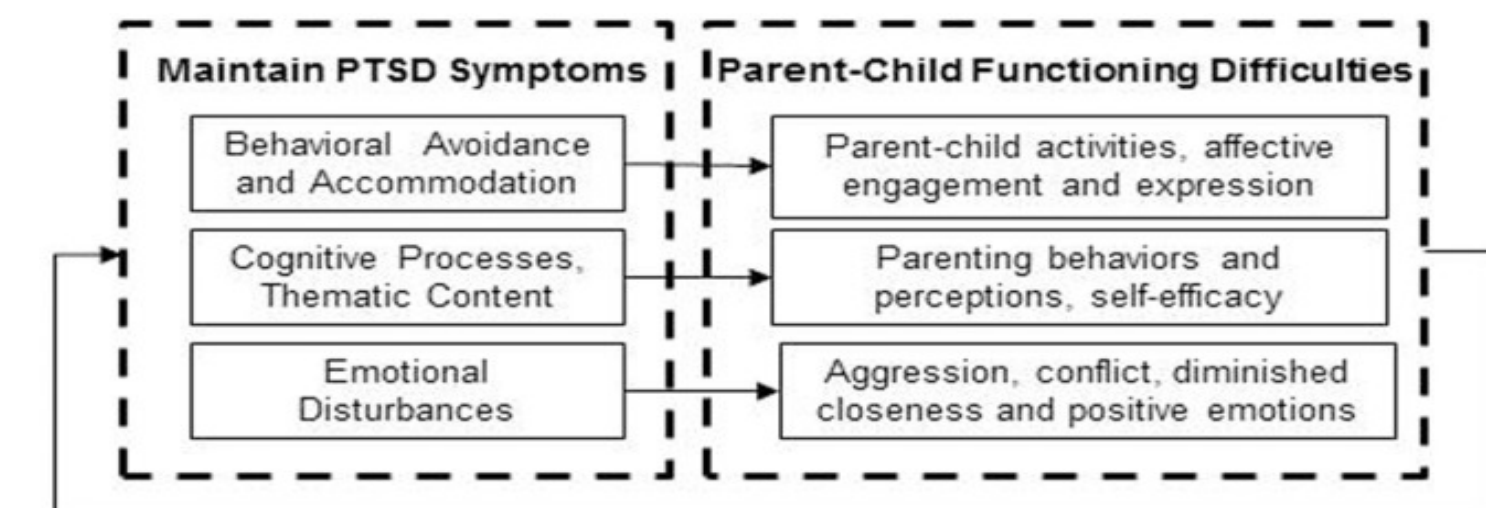


Figure 1. The above table outlines the correlation between PTSD symptoms and interpersonal relationships between fathers and children (Creech & Misca, 2017).

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