

“Fi or Not To Fi”: Study of USMC Population Related to Social Intimacy and Trust¹

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Resumen: Esta investigación científica-psicológica analiza la relación entre la intimidad social y la confianza. El estudio compara los resultados entre tres grupos: militares con experiencia de combate (CD), militares sin experiencia de combate (NC) y civiles (CG). Los resultados indican una fuerte correlación entre intimidad social y confianza en ambos grupos de militares (con experiencia de combate $r=.960$ y sin experiencia de combate $r=.977$). En el grupo de civiles la correlación no es fuerte ($r=.367$).

Palabras Clave: PTSD, USMC, Militares, Confianza, MSIS, TS, Rempel & Holmes, Miller & Lefcourt, Psicología, Combate.

Abstract: This scientific-psychological study examines the relationship between social intimacy and trust skills. A Pearson Correlation was used to analyze the data for the three sample groups: CD (combat deployment group), NC (non-combat deployment group), and CG (civilian group). A strong relationship was found between social intimacy and trust for both military groups (CD $r=.960$, and NC $r=.977$) but it was not statistically significant for the civilian group (CG $r=.367$).

Keywords: PTSD, USMC, Military, Social Intimacy, Trust, MSIS, TS, Rempel & Holmes, Miller & Lefcourt, Psychology, Combat.

Fi or Not To Fi

“*Semper fi*” is the Latin translation for always faithful or the U.S. Marine Corps’ slogan. But, is it really? Are they always faithful? Faithfulness, trust, and social intimacy are considered to be elements of interpersonal relationships. Nowadays, many researchers are interested in studying the military population and their interpersonal relationships. But, are there any differences between them and the rest of the population? MacDonald, C., Chamberlain, K., and Long, N showed that PTSD is related to interpersonal relationships in their study “Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its effects in Vietnam veterans: The New Zealand experience.” The research studied how PTSD affects veterans’ interpersonal relationships and family functioning. A correlation was founded between high levels of PTSD in veterans and high levels of interpersonal problems, low levels of family functioning, and low levels of dynamic adjustment in veterans (MacDonald, C., Chamberlain, K., & Long, N., 1995). Studies of this type are important because the results can aim to a better understanding of PTSD and also to achieve better ways to treat veterans suffering from this syndrome. However one of the limitations of this study is the validity of the results relative to time. The research studied Vietnam War veterans, and it can be possible for the results to be different if it is compared with today’s veterans, after all life has changed tremendously in the past 50 years.

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² California State University, Fullerton. C. Belén Aldazabal Pronto empezará su programa de doctorado en psicología. Oriunda de Lima (Perú), sus primeros pinitos en investigación los ha hecho sobre estudios psicológicos centrados en las relaciones interpersonales, la educación, el bilingüismo y otros temas de tono marcadamente culturalista. También lleva a cabo investigación literaria con un enfoque analítico-psicológico y escribe cuentos y ensayos.

Another limitation of the study is that it can suffer from internal validity due to ambiguous temporal precedence. In other words, does PTSD increase interpersonal problems or is it the high levels of interpersonal problems that increase PTSD levels? And that is exactly what Carter and her colleagues (2011) studied in their research "Relationships between soldiers' PTSD symptoms and spousal communication during deployment." The social support for soldiers during deployment, specifically from spouses, and the relationship with PTSD symptoms was examined. The study suggested that higher levels of marital satisfaction and higher levels of communication during deployment would predict lower levels of PTSD symptoms (Carter, 2011). This study is very important for the military population, because the results can help decrease PTSD symptoms for future soldiers. The biggest limitation in this study is that the deployments were within a year from where the data was collected. This can influence data because in some cases PTSD symptoms can appear months or even years after the traumatic event.

There are many studies trying to show correlation between PTSD due to war experiences and interpersonal relationship problems, or vice-versa in some cases. However, there is little research done on non-PTSD members of the arm forces population and their interpersonal relationships. What if PTSD is not involved in relationship problems, but in reality is just the military life as a whole? This research will examine a sample of the three populations; combat deployment, non-combat deployment, and civilians.

In this study predictability refers to "our ability to foretell our partner's specific behavior, including things we like and dislike" (J.K. Rempel, & J.G. Holmes, 1986) For the author, a predictable person is someone whose behavior is consistent, perhaps even consistently bad. Volatile, unpredictable people, however, do not inspire confidence. However, dependability, the second aspect, is ultimately more central to trust; the author associates it with an emerging sense that the partner can be relied upon when it matters. The third and final element, faith, "enables people to go beyond the available evidence and feel secure that a partner will continue to be responsive and caring" (J.K. Rempel, J.G. Holmes, 1986). The current study examined the extent to which trust and social intimacy is associated with interpersonal relationship among the three groups. If a significant difference is not found between the three groups then the researches mentioned before are correct and PTSD is the baseline for interpersonal relationship problems among military members. However, if there is a difference between the military groups, and the civilian group, then PTSD is not necessary the baseline for their interpersonal relationship problems and further investigation will be necessary to assess the subject. The research hypothesized that the civilians will have a strong correlation between social intimacy and trust and that the military groups will not. In other words the civilians have more trust and social intimacy than those in the military.

Method

Participants

Twenty-one military and non-military persons participated in the study. They were separated into three groups: militaries with combat deployment group (7 participants), militaries with non-combat deployment group (7 participants), and a civilians group (6 participants). Both, combat and non-combat, belong to the U.S. Marines Corps. The participants from the civilian group were undergraduate students at California State University, Fullerton. Seventy-five percent were male and 25% were female. The ethnicity frequency was as follow: 5.3 % African American, 31.6 % European American, 47.4 % Hispanic American, 5.3% Native of American, 10.5%

Other. The mean age was 23.80 years. Participants completed a survey and no informed consent was provided.

Material

The participants filled out a self-reported survey where basic demographics (age, gender, and ethnicity) were asked. The survey also had questions regarding their GPA, the number of relationships and the duration of current or latest relationship. The questionnaire also included the Trust Scale (TS) scale with 18 seven-point Likert-type items (1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree). In the TS three aspects of trust were covered: predictability, dependability, and faith. Higher scores mean more predictable, more dependability, and higher faith subscales (Rempel & Holmes, 1986). The Trust Scale had good inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .86$). The Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS) was also used in the survey with 20 Likert-type items [(questions 4-9, “1” Very Rarely to “5” almost always) & (questions 10- 20 “1” not much to “5” a great deal)]. The MSIS measured closeness with others in the context of friendship or romantic relationships. Higher scores mean greater amounts of social intimacy (Miller & Lefcourt 1982). The Miller Social Intimacy Scale had good inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .85$).

Procedure

The survey was administered in two different days. A sample of college students completed the surveys during a club board meeting at California State University, Fullerton in the morning. The military sample completed the surveys in a normal workday at their office in the Marine Corps base in Camp Pendleton. The majority of participants provided complete data.

Results

Table 1 shows the relationship between social intimacy ($M = 65\%$, $SD = 13\%$) and trust ($M = 95\%$, $SD = 18\%$) among the combat deployment group. Table 2 shows the relationship between social intimacy ($M = 60\%$, $SD = 15\%$) and trust ($M=77\%$, $SD= 15\%$) among the non-combat deployment group. Table 3 shows the relationship between social intimacy ($M = 67\%$, $SD = 9\%$) and trust ($M = 87\%$, $SD = 20\%$) among the civilians group.

The hypothesis stated that the civilian group would have higher rates of trust and social intimacy than military. Contrary to the hypothesis, the results were statistically significant for both military groups, the combat deployment ($r = .96$, $p < .01$) and non-combat deployment ($r = .98$, $p < .01$). However, for the civilian group, the result was not statistically significant ($r = .367$, $p < .01$).

Figure 1 is a scatterplot that depicts the relationship between social intimacy (MSISTOT) and trust (TSTOT) among the combat deployment group. The graph suggests that higher levels of social intimacy (MSISTOT) are associated with higher levels of trust (TSTOT). Figure 2 is a scatterplot that depicts the relationship between social intimacy (MSISTOT) and trust (TSTOT) among the non-combat deployment group. The graphic suggests that higher levels of social intimacy (MSISTOT) are associated with higher levels of trust (TSTOT). Figure 3 is a scatterplot that depicts the relationship between social intimacy (MSISTOT) and trust (TSTOT) among the civilian deployment group. The graphic shows no relationship between levels of social intimacy (MSISTOT) and levels of trust (TSTOT). Therefore, the results from this particular study suggest that social intimacy and trust are correlated among the military groups. On other words, the higher rates of social intimacy, the higher rates of trust. However, among the civilians group there is not a correlation between trust and social intimacy.

Discussion

Social intimacy and trust skills were examined in this research, among a sample of United States Marines Corps compared to a sample of same-age college students at California State University, Fullerton. Findings reveal a strong relationship between social intimacy and trust for both military groups (CD and NC). In other words, high rates of closeness with people are related to more trust with others. However, it was not statistically significant or there was not a relationship founded between social intimacy and trust for the civilian group (CG).

Previous researches, including the two mentioned before, only studied samples of military with PTSD and their interpersonal relationships. However, these researches have not addressed the military population without PTSD. In order to have a better understanding of PTSD, it is important to study the population of militaries without this disorder. By comparing both populations, can not only have a better understanding of the disorder, but also search for better ways to prevent it instead of only treating it.

There are several limitations for this study. First, findings cannot be generalized to other population due to the small sample size used. Second, the militaries in the study belong only to the United States Marines Corps branch and they were only males reducing the validity of the study. Third, the sample were not randomly selected, which influence the generalization of the study and can include researchers bias in selection of participants. And finally, the data was collected from self-reported questionnaire, which may have influenced subjects' responses.

In order to improve future researches based on these topics a larger sample size should be consider. The sample should also include other branches in the military and both genders. The subjects should be randomly selected. It is also recommended, if it is possible, to obtain medical and psychological records of the subjects in studied along with the self-reported questionnaire.

In conclusion, even with its limitation, the current study provides valuable empirical information for the military about social intimacy and trust. It is important to study the population of military without PTSD, to use it as a baseline to help to prevent the disorder. However more research is needed to further understand the connection of interpersonal relationships, trust, and PTSD.

References

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Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of combat deployment group & social intimacy and trust

Combat Deployment Group

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min to Max	<i>r</i>
Social Intimacy (CD)	65%	13%	50-83	.960
Trust (CD)	95%	18%	64-109	
Social Intimacy (NC)	60%	15%	32-79	.977
Trust (NC)	77%	15%	60-98	
Social Intimacy (CG)	67%	9%	55-77	.367
Trust (CG)	87%	20%	67-111	

Note. CD = combat deployment group (n = 7), NC = non-combat deployment group (n = 7), CG= civilian group (n = 6), *M* = Mean, *SD* = standard deviation, Min to Max = the lowest and highest score in the distribution for each particular variable, *r* = correlation.

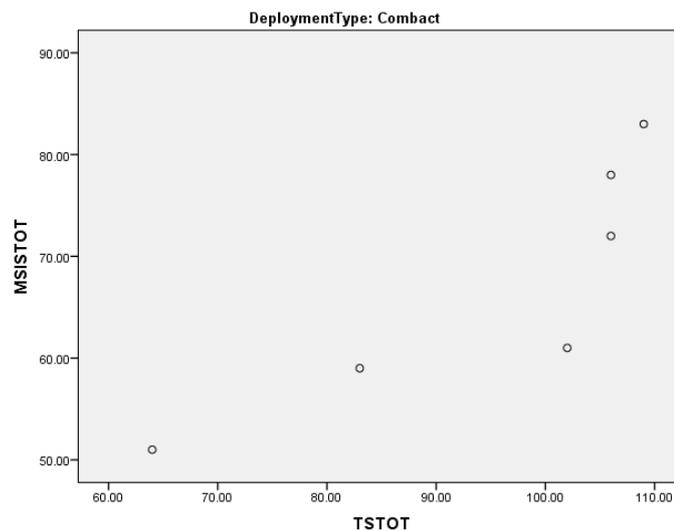


Figure 1. Scatterplot showing the correlation between social intimacy (MSISTOT) and trust (TSTOT) among the combat deployment group. This graphic suggests that higher levels of social intimacy (MSISTOT) are associated with higher levels of trust (TSTOT)

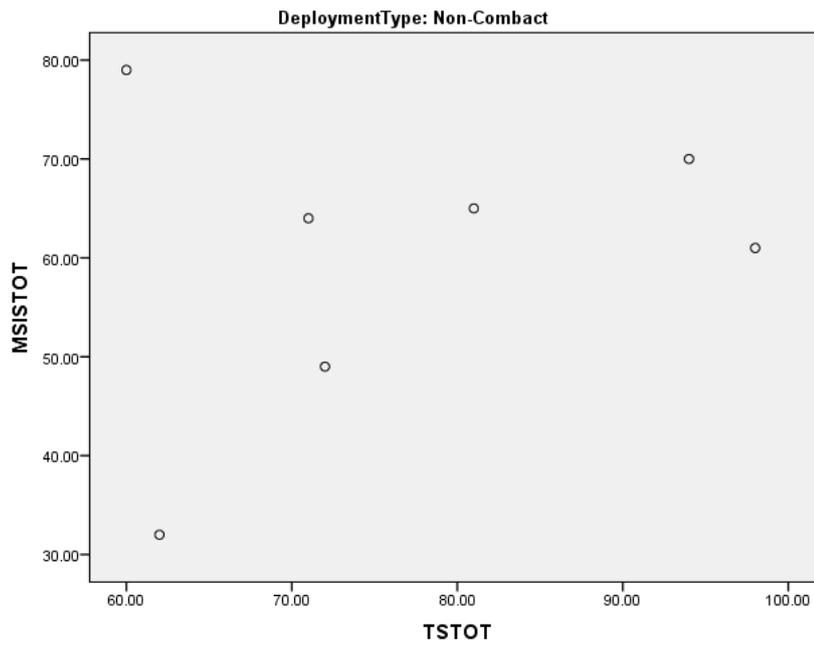


Figure 2. Scatterplot showing the correlation between social intimacy (MSISTOT) and trust (TSTOT) among the non-combat deployment group. This graphic suggests that higher levels of social intimacy (MSISTOT) are associated with higher levels of trust (TSTOT).

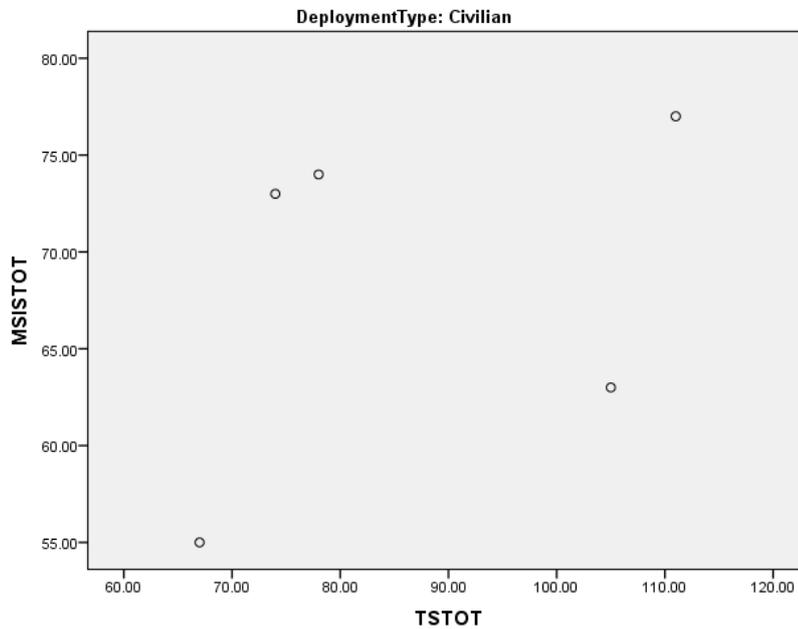


Figure 3. Scatterplot showing the correlation between social intimacy (MSISTOT) and trust (TSTOT) among the civilians group. This graphic shows no relationship between levels of social intimacy (MSISTOT) and levels of trust (TSTOT).

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