

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Military Deployment and the Spouse Left Behind

Asbury, E. T., & Martin, D. (2012). Military deployment and the spouse left behind. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 20(1), 45-50. doi:10.1177/1066480711429433

SUMMARY: The relationship with a spouse is an important part of Service members' operation readiness and influences recovery from injuries or post-traumatic stress symptoms upon return from deployment. This study examined mental health, relationship satisfaction, and social support reported by military spouses compared with civilian spouses. Results indicate military involvement can have an impact on relationship satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Military spouses reported higher levels of marital discord than civilian spouses (6.44 and 4.76 respectively, range 4-16), and 80% of military spouses had frequently considered divorce, compared to 17% of civilian spouses.
- Military spouses reported higher levels of social support than civilian spouses (13.88 and 11.68 respectively, range 6-20).
- Military spouses and civilian spouses did not differ on measures of depression or anxiety.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military couples regarding the impact social support has on mental health
- Offer workshops for military couples prior to deployment on how to maintain a strong relationship during the deployment cycle
- Offer relationship-oriented support groups for spouses of deployed Service members

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend the development and continuation of relationship improvement programs for military couples to improve military readiness
- Encourage development of programs that can strengthen marriages in military couples to reduce divorce contemplation
- Recommend education for professionals working with military couples on military factors that can impact marital satisfaction

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METHODS

- Data were gathered through a voluntary online survey sent via email to participants in a distance education program. Response rate was not provided.
- The authors created a new measure, the Military Deployment Survey, to obtain data on participants' levels of depression, anxiety, marital discord, and social support.
- The data were analyzed by comparing the means for each subject of interest (e.g., depression, social support), for the civilian spouses and military spouses.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included married U.S. college students (N = 121) enrolled in a distance education program at the military bases Camp Lejeune and Fort Bragg.
- The sample (mean age = 28 years old) included 59 military spouses (mean age = 31 years old) and 62 civilian spouses (mean age = 26 years old). Age was the only significant demographic difference reported between groups.
- On average, participants reported between 1-2 children and 6-7 years of marriage.
- Participants with a spouse in the military reported their branches as 11% Air Force, 47% Army, 33% Marines, and 8% Navy, with an average of two deployments averaging 20 months per deployment. No data were provided on military rank or Active Duty vs. Reserve status.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was a convenience sample, self-selected, and not representative of the overall military population in terms of branch of service served by spouses, therefore generalizability to all military is limited.
- There was no indication that the measure used to obtain data had been validated.
- Data were gathered via online self-report, therefore the validity of the data is not corroborated by outside sources.
- The topics measured in this study are sensitive and therefore may be susceptible to social desirability, but no steps were taken to reduce the likelihood of this occurring.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the variables in the present study utilizing validated measures and controlling for confounding variables
- Explore contributing factors to military spouses' thoughts of divorce
- Investigate military spouses' experiences of marital discord and social support over time, particularly over the course of the deployment cycle

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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