

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Military Marriages: The Aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Deployments

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SUMMARY: Researchers examined how military couples were affected by and adapted to deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. Based on information from interviews, three themes emerged: communicating to stay connected, emotional and marital intimacy, and managing changes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members and spouses discussed the importance of staying connected during deployment; however, Service members were selective in what they shared with their partners in order to maintain confidentiality of high security information, and/or prevent their wives from worrying.
- Although emotional deployment experiences may lead to increased emotional intimacy, they could also create trust issues, reduce sexual desire, and increase risk for symptoms of posttraumatic stress or other mental health symptoms.
- Deployment resulted in changes in roles and responsibilities for both partners and changes often continued after the Service members returned home, resulting in some tension in relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Incorporate curriculum designed to address communication, relationship roles, intimacy, cohesion, conflict, and emotional reactions such as anger and fear in marriages
- Offer support groups to military spouses to help them cope with the increased responsibilities, particularly parenting, during a Service member's deployment
- Provide professional development and continuing education for service providers regarding how to best support military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that work with military families throughout the deployment cycle
- Promote the dissemination of information regarding existing programs and resources available to support military families during deployment
- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community-based organizations to provide support for military families during deployment

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METHODS

- This qualitative study used cross-sectional data collected in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (specific questions with optional follow-up questions) with military couples living in the Midwest.
- This study focused on Army Service members and spouses.
- Participants were recruited via flyers and newspaper announcements or referrals from Army Family Readiness Groups, chaplains, local military sources, and other participants.

PARTICIPANTS

- Although 50 couples were interviewed, only transcripts from 12 Service members and 18 spouses were used (saturation had been reached).
- The sample was primarily White (n = 25), female (n = 18), and between the ages of 22-35 years (M = 29.33).
- Average length of marriage was 5.29 years.

LIMITATIONS

- Those who participated may differ from non-participants in a way that is not measured, but affected the outcome variables. For instance, those who participated may be functioning better than those who did not participate.
- Given the small sample size, these results may not generalize to other branches or components of the military.
- Interviewers may have asked leading questions, and researchers analyzing transcripts may have overlooked themes that did not fit with their theoretical framework.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore factors that influence couples functioning during deployment
- Examine spouses adaptation specifically during reintegration and reunion
- Replicate the current study with a more diverse sample using quantitative methods

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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