

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Women and Men Who Have Served in Afghanistan/Iraq: Coming Home

Beder, J., Coe, R., & Sommer, D. (2011). Women and men who have served in Afghanistan/Iraq: Coming home. *Social Work in Health Care, 50*(7), 515-526. doi:10.1080/00981389.2011.554279

SUMMARY: Men and women who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan were surveyed to identify family, personal, and work reintegration difficulties that could be targeted for intervention. Results suggest that demographic and war-related experiences may be differentially associated with reintegration outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Younger participants, males, those in a committed relationship, those with children in the home, and those identifying as Asian American or Latino/Latina reported more positive reintegration experiences than their respective counterparts.
- Combat experience had mixed effects on reintegration, with negative effects observed for family reintegration.
- As the number of deployments or length of deployment increased, negative reintegration effects were more pronounced.
- Posttraumatic stress disorder was negatively associated with reintegration across domains.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer activities to military families with a Service member who recently deployed that facilitate positive family reintegration
- Provide targeted reintegration activities for older Service members, who report disproportionately more reintegration difficulties than younger Service members
- Disseminate information about programs and services that help military families during post-deployment reintegration

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs aimed at improving reintegration experiences of Service members and their families
- Recommend that Service members be assessed for reintegration difficulties shortly after returning from deployment
- Recommend training for service providers working with military families regarding the impact of deployment on personal and family functioning

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from local service-related organizations, and social work and behavioral health departments.
- Most participants completed an online survey, while others had in-person interviews.
- Participants completed a measure of post-deployment reintegration experiences and attitudes; they also responded to several open-ended questions.

PARTICIPANTS

- Eight hundred seventy-one individuals who had participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom participated.
- Eighty-seven percent male; most (92%) Active Army.
- Half were under the age of 25 years, one-third between 26 and 35 years, and the remainder were older than 35 years.
- The majority of participants were White (58%); 24% Black, 11% Latino/Latina, and 4% Asian-American.

LIMITATIONS

- Primarily male, Active Duty Soldiers in one state were included in the study, potentially limiting generalizability to other Service members.
- Social desirability may have affected responses, particularly for those who completed the survey in person rather than online.
- Method variance in terms of study administration (online vs in-person interview) may have affected outcomes.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Seek to further clarify the gender and age-related reintegration differences observed in the present study
- Evaluate the effectiveness of a specific intervention aimed at improving successful reintegration
- Replicate this study with military personnel from other installations and military branches

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