

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Coping Behaviors Used by Army Wives During Deployment Separation and Their Perceived Effectiveness

Blank, C., Adams, L. A., Kittelson, B., Connors, R. A., & Padden, D. L. (2012). Coping behaviors used by Army wives during deployment separation and their perceived effectiveness. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 24(11), 660-668. doi:10.1111/j.1745-7599.2012.00766.x

**SUMMARY:** It is important for military spouses to use effective coping strategies during deployment to avoid mental and physical health problems. Wives of Active Duty Soldiers completed surveys regarding coping strategies used during deployment and the perceived efficacy of those strategies. Overall, the more effective a coping strategy was perceived to be, the more commonly wives used that strategy, with the most commonly used coping strategies being optimism (e.g., thinking positively and maintaining a positive attitude) and seeking support (e.g., family, friends, professionals, religion).

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall, the more effective wives perceived a coping strategy to be, the more commonly they used that strategy.
- The most common coping strategies used during Service members' deployments were optimism and seeking support from others; the most commonly used specific behaviors included trying to keep busy, thinking about the good things in life, and trying to think positively.
- Wives perceived thinking about the good things in life, praying or putting trust in God, talking with someone in a similar situation, and exercise or physical activity as the most effective coping strategies.
- The coping behaviors used least often were consuming alcohol or medications to feel better, talking to a professional about the problem, and doing something risky or impulsive, while wives perceived taking tensions out on someone else, worrying, or eating or smoking more than usual to be the least effective coping behaviors.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer programs that encourage military spouses to engage in regular physical exercise during deployment
- Provide support groups for military spouses to exchange social support during deployment
- Engage military spouses in classes that teach useful, effective, healthy coping skills during deployment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support programs that educate military families about the negative short- and long-term consequences of unhealthy coping behaviors (e.g., substance use, unhealthy eating, worrying, risky behaviors) and how to replace those with more positive coping behaviors
- Recommend education of professionals working with military families about how to teach and encourage effective coping strategies
- Promote programs with affordable, accessible childcare for military families to allow military spouses time to engage in healthy coping behaviors

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## METHODS

- Female spouses of deployed Active Duty Soldiers were recruited from Family Readiness Group meetings.
- Participants completed measures about use of coping strategies and perceived effectiveness of coping during their Service member's deployment.
- The associations between coping strategies and perceived coping effectiveness were examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 102 female spouses of male Active Duty Soldiers.
- On average, wives were 30.46 years of age (SD = 6.36), had 1.5 children, had been married 7.1 years, and had experienced 1.5 previous deployment separations.
- Service members' ranks included junior enlisted (20%), noncommissioned officer (33%), chief warrant officer (16%), company grade officer (20%), and field grade officer (12%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample was limited to female wives of Active Duty Soldiers only, and results may not generalize to male spouses, spouses of National Guard or Reserve Service members, or other military branches.
- Without a pre-test or comparison to a group of Army wives not experiencing deployment, it is unclear whether the coping strategies used were related to coping with deployment.
- The statistical reliabilities of several of the subscales were low which may have compromised accurate assessment of the constructs.
- Results were based on perceived effectiveness of coping strategies and behaviors, but it is unclear whether perceived effectiveness is related to effectiveness based on actual outcome measures.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study with a more representative sample (e.g., spoused of National Guard or Reserve Service members, male spouses, other military branches)
- Use non-self-report measures of coping strategies such as other informant reports
- Examine military spouses' coping strategies longitudinally to understand how coping changes across the phases of deployment and between times when Service members are and are not deployed

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>