

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Air Force

Linguistic Indicators of Wives' Attachment Security and Communal Orientation During Military Deployment

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SUMMARY: Changes in military female spouses' relationship satisfaction were assessed over the course of a deployment cycle (pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment) via a combination of self-report questionnaires and interviews. Findings suggest that relationship satisfaction decreases throughout the deployment cycle. In addition, we-talk (a measure of marital cohesion) may buffer against deployment-related marital distress.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Spouses' pre-deployment relationship satisfaction decreased significantly during deployment and post-deployment.
- Greater we-talk (a measure of marital cohesion indicated by using words that relate to the couple such as "we, us, or our" rather than "I, me, mine" predicted relationship satisfaction during deployment (but not afterward).
- In the interview data, greater judge-rated narrative of coherence (a measure of attachment) predicted higher relationship satisfaction post-deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information regarding how deployment can affect military couple's relationship satisfaction and cohesion and ways to maintain couple functioning throughout the deployment cycle
- Offer classes that educate military couples about the importance of we-talk and coach them on how to use such language
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs that work with and support military families throughout the deployment cycle

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide support family readiness programs, particularly those focused on maintaining couple's relationships throughout the deployment cycle
- Encourage the training of professional development courses for community providers to educate them regarding the unique factors that can influence couple satisfaction throughout the deployment cycle
- Support programs that help Service members and their families stay connected during deployment

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METHODS

- Self-report questionnaires and in-person interviews were administered to participants two weeks pre-deployment (n = 41), two weeks into deployment (n = 37), and two weeks post-deployment (n = 20).
- Spouses completed pre- and post-deployment online assessments regarding relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment style, and psychological adjustment; an in-person stream-of-conscious narrative was completed during deployment to assess marital cohesion (we-talk).
- This study did not include details regarding participant recruitment.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 41 female spouses of deployed Service members (83% Air Force) who were living in the Southwestern United States completed interviews and questionnaires.
- The majority of spouses were White (76%) with a mean age of 30.24 years (SD = 6.64).
- Participants had been married (94%) or cohabitating (7%) for a minimum of two years and 66% of participants had at least one child (66%).

LIMITATIONS

- This study had a very high level of attrition (over 50% from pre- to post-deployment), possibly reducing validity of results.
- The majority of participants were Air Forces spouses; therefore, results may not be generalizable to spouses of Service members in other branches of the military.
- The window of measurement (two weeks pre- and post-deployment) may be too narrow to determine long-term changes in relationship satisfaction, limiting what can be garnered from the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine long-term effects of deployment on relationship satisfaction and marital cohesion
- Investigate the influence of deployment on relationship satisfaction and marital cohesion with a larger and more diverse sample of military families across all service branches
- Gather data from both Service members and their spouses in order to get both perspectives of relationship satisfaction and marital cohesion throughout the deployment cycle

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