

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Work Adjustment After Combat Deployment: Reservist Repatriation

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SUMMARY: An exploration of U.S. Army Reservists' concerns and obstacles to returning to the civilian workforce following a combat deployment was conducted. A longitudinal, qualitative study was employed using a person-environment fit perspective to explain the adjustment process and obstacles encountered by the returning Reservists. Overall, Reservists in the study went through four phases adjusting back to civilian work: Return to Home, Return to Work, Activation, and Settling In.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The Return to Home phase described by participants involved excitement overshadowed by anxiety and unmet or met expectations as families formed schedules and resumed routines.
- In the Return to Work phase participants experienced disappointment when they found reduced responsibility at work.
- In the Activation phase some participants hoped to use new skills acquired during deployment, and others questioned whether or not they wanted to stay working in their current jobs.
- The Settling In phase represented a new pattern of behaviors resulting from the decisions made during the Activation phase.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate returning Service members on how to communicate newly developed skills to current or potential employers
- Offer workshops during reintegration to help families and Service members adjust to the Service member's return, new schedules, and routines
- Disseminate information regarding career counseling for return Service members so as to support career exploration and advancement

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for programs that specifically address returning Service members' career development needs
- Promote reintegration programs that include attention to assisting Service members in adjusting to family routines and roles
- Recommend professional development courses for community providers to educate them about unique factors that returning Service members may face re-entering the workforce

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited at a combat debriefing unit meeting. Fifty-eight Reservists were asked, face-to-face, to participate in the longitudinal study.
- Seven interviews of each participant were conducted during the 12 months following return from combat deployment. Questions covered topics such as well-being, major stressors, coping methods, returning to work, and relationships. A total of 69 interviews were conducted.
- Analysis included two members of the research team independently reading each interview transcript, discussing divergent coding, and establishing consensus on common themes.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 16 (14 males and 2 females) members of an U.S. Army Reserve unit.
- Seven participants were married, three co-habited with a partner, six were single, and eight had children.
- Eighty-six percent of the sample identified as White and 14% as Black.

LIMITATIONS

- None of the participants in the sample had experienced significant injuries during combat, which could have influenced the findings of the study.
- Reservists that are more comfortable talking about and confronting difficult or awkward transitions may have self-selected to be in the study, which could have biased the findings.
- Participants in this sample only consisted of individuals who had been deployed for the first-time, which could have affected the outcomes of the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine in more depth the processes proposed in this study with larger, more representative samples which will allow inferences to be made to larger populations
- Explore the degree of difference between home and overseas work environments for Service members on levels of anxiety or work expectations
- Investigate what factors such as roles, age, and different personality types influence how soon Reservists return to work, face a decision of activation, and begin to feel settled again

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