

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Military Wives Emotionally Coping During Deployment: Balancing Dependence and Independence

Cafferky, B., & Shi, L. (2015). Military wives emotionally coping during deployment: Balancing dependence and independence. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 43(3), 282-295. doi:10.1080/01926187.2015.1034633

**SUMMARY:** Individuals who experience the deployment of a spouse often encounter certain difficulties and develop coping strategies to deal with those difficulties. This qualitative study explored how military wives' coping mechanisms were related to their emotional connection with their deployed husbands. The findings demonstrated the use of three distinct types of coping mechanisms during deployment that affected the wives' emotional wellbeing.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- In general, military wives developed three coping strategies to endure the times their husbands were deployed.
- One coping strategy was to attempt to maintain an unrealistic closeness to their husbands, which sacrificed spouses' own emotional well-being.
- Distancing themselves from their deployed husbands was a coping strategy that led to preserving their emotional well-being.
- Another coping strategy that involved connecting emotionally with their deployed husbands strengthened their own emotional well-being.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide support groups for people with deployed spouses to increase social connections
- Offer workshops to increase skills that can strengthen couples' bonds to enhance emotional connection between spouses prior to deployment
- Create opportunities for civilians and military spouses who are experiencing deployment to volunteer together to enhance community connections

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development of programs that increase awareness of deployed military spouses' experiences to increase engagement with community during deployment
- Recommend that Service members engage in activities to maintain relationships throughout their deployment
- Encourage education for professionals on how to best help military spouses develop healthy coping strategies to protect their emotional well being

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## METHODS

- The participants were recruited through online message boards or by word of mouth through hospitals, churches, schools, and family therapists.
- Qualitative data was gathered through 55 to 75 minute face-to-face interviews, which were then transcribed to aid in data analysis.
- Researchers coded the transcripts to analyze major themes throughout the interviews.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The researchers recruited 12 military wives and one military fianc\_e who had husbands who were deployed in the last three years in the Navy, Army, or Marines.
- The mean age of the women was 34 years old. They had been married on average 11 years.
- The sample included ten White women, one Asian American woman, and two women who identified as multi-racial.

## LIMITATIONS

- There was a small sample size that lacked ethnic diversity and did not represent all military branches; this would make it difficult to generalize to other populations.
- The study did not include both spouses so only one perspective was considered.
- The study only included female partners of deployed male partners, which limits the generalizability to families with different structures such as same sex marriages.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how coping strategies change over time by following spouses through multiple deployments
- Explore the coping strategies of both spouses during a deployment
- Conduct studies that include partners in different structured families such as those in dual military couples

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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