

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Distraction During Deployment: Marital Relationship Associations With Spillover for Deployed Army Soldiers

Carter, S. P., Loew, B., Allen, E. S., Osborne, L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2015). Distraction during deployment: Marital relationship associations with spillover for deployed Army soldiers. *Military Psychology*, 27(2), 108-114. doi:10.1037/mil0000067

SUMMARY: Military spouses are often concerned about how their communication will affect the Service member's work performance during deployment. The relationship between spousal communication and deployed Soldiers' negative spillover was examined in the study. Results showed that poor marital relationship was strongly related to spillover for deployed Soldiers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Negative spillover was defined as the extent to which a Soldier thought his conflict with his wife interfered with his work functioning.
- Lower marital satisfaction, problem-focused communication, and conflictual communication were each strongly correlated with Soldiers' work spillover; however, none of the above mentioned factors influenced the relationship between negative spillover and communication frequency.
- When experiencing poorer marital satisfaction and more conflicts, military couples usually reduce their communication frequency during deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop classes and workshops for military families on how to communicate positively during deployment
- Educate professionals who work with military families on recognizing the signs of marital distress in Service members to prevent spillover at work
- Offer support groups for civilian spouses that promote healthy coping and family well-being

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs in order to increase military family well-being during deployment
- Encourage training for professionals who work with military families on the importance of positive communication on Service members' work performance
- Raise awareness of the importance of marital satisfaction and communication on Service member's work performance

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METHODS

- Data were drawn from a large clinical trial where participants completed self-report questionnaires six months after marriage education intervention.
- Communication frequency, conflictual communication, proportion of conversation focused on problems, and marital satisfaction were assessed with questionnaires.
- Correlational analysis were used to examine the relationship between variables.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 161 Active Duty Soldiers who were married to civilian women, and were deployed during the assessment.
- The average age of the participants was 28.07 years (SD = 5.84), and they were mostly White (70%), followed by Latino (14%), Black (11%), Multiracial (3%), and Asian-American (2%).
- The ranks of the participants were: junior non-commissioned officers (35%), Specialists (33%), company grade officers (10%), senior non-commissioned officers (9%), Private first class (7%), Privates (3%), and field grade officers (2%).

LIMITATIONS

- The participants were mostly very satisfied with their marriages, therefore the results may be hard to generalize to military couples who experience more marital distress.
- Other potentially important characteristics of communication, such as who initiated the communication and the content of the communication, were not assessed in the study.
- The cross-sectional design of the study made it difficult to determine the direction of the association between marital relationship and spillover.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Broaden the pool of participants so that Service members with different levels of marital satisfaction would be included
- Have more comprehensive assessment of marital communication, and take both the Service members' and the civilian spouses' view into consideration
- Include both objective and subjective measures of Service members' negative spillover during deployment

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