

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
National
Guard

Family Stressors and Resources: Relationships with Depressive Symptoms in Military Couples During Pre-Deployment

Collins, C. L., Lee, K-H., & Wadsworth, S. M. M. (2017). Family stressors and resources: Relationships with depressive symptoms in military couples during pre-deployment. *Family Relations*, 66, 302-316. doi:10.1111/fare.12251

SUMMARY: It is just as important to engage in preventative interventions to improve military couples' mental health during the pre-deployment period as it is during the deployment and reintegration periods. To assess pre-deployment mental health, this study had 151 National Guard members and spouses completed an online survey regarding their family stressors, resources, and depressive symptoms four weeks before deployment. Results revealed that informal resources (e.g., family functioning) and expanded resources (e.g., instrumental support) were both important for military couples to deal with depressive symptoms.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Stress pile-up (e.g., financial or health problems in the previous year), but not the number of prior deployments, was related to depressive symptoms.
- Only the lack of informal resources (but not formal resources) was positively associated with participants' depressive symptoms.
- Good deployment preparation (e.g., logistic and instrumental tasks completed by military couples) was associated with fewer depressive symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Help military families to recognize and strengthen their support systems in order to improve their family functioning
- Disseminate information on military bases regarding the logistical and instrumental tasks that are necessary for deployment preparation
- Identify military families with problems (e.g., financial difficulty, health issues) and provide appropriate support for them

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness on military basis regarding the importance of pre-deployment preparation for military families' adjustment
- Recommend pre-deployment workshops for Service members and their spouses to help them prepare for the upcoming deployment
- Encourage the development of programs that assist military families with identifying and utilizing family resources

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were recruited by mail invitations and advertisements by research staff at Family Readiness Group meetings and brigade briefings.
- Participants completed an online survey four weeks before their or their spouse's deployment; measures included depressive symptoms, stressors (number of previous deployment, problems in the previous year), informal resources (years in the relationship, family functioning, social support), and formal resources (military support services, deployment preparation).
- Data were analyzed to examine the relationship between family stressors and resources and military couples' depressive symptoms.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 56 male National Guard members (average age = 37.00 years, SD = 8.30) and 95 female National Guard spouses (average age = 33.70 years, SD = 7.90).
- The majority of the Guard members (96%) and the spouses were White (97%); the race/ethnicity of the non-White participants were not reported.
- All National Guard members were affiliated with the Army.

LIMITATIONS

- All the National Guard participants were male and all the spouses were female, so the sample may not represent issues or concerns related to same-sex couples or couples with female Service members and male spouses.
- All the military participants were affiliated with the Army National Guard, so caution must be taken to generalize the results to other military branches.
- The cross-sectional design of the study made it impossible to examine the causal relationship between family stressors, resources, and participants' depressive symptoms.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit both male and female Service members from all military branches to increase the generalizability of the findings
- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationship between family stressors, resources, and military couples' depressive symptoms
- Examine whether Service members and spouses benefit differently from informal and formal supports

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>