

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Unsilencing of Military Wives: Wartime Deployment Experiences and Citizen Responsibility

Davis, J., Ward, D. B., & Storm, C. (2011). The unsilencing of military wives: Wartime deployment experiences and citizen responsibility. *Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy*, 37(1), 51-63. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2009.00154.x

SUMMARY: Focus groups and interviews were held with military wives to gain insight into their experiences while their husbands were deployed during wartime. Two primary themes emerged: wives' emotions were like "a roller coaster" (i.e., intense and contradictory emotions), and wives generally felt silenced in their interactions with civilians.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Contrary to the belief that military wives' emotions during deployment are linear, a theme emerged in this study suggesting wives have wavering periods of happiness, sadness, stress, excitement, and fear.
- Many wives felt "silenced," in which they withheld information in their civilian interactions because of the concern about civilians' reactions.
- Wives usually felt silenced through one of three ways: forgetting ("no one is listening"), making assumptions ("I know how you feel"), and requiring protection (staying positive for the kids' sake).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide training to community-based programs about how to improve coping skills of military wives whose husbands are deployed
- Include curricula that address military spouses of deployed Service members changing and complex emotions during transition periods
- Offer additional programming and opportunities for military wives to engage in activities with other military families to reinforce peer support

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support training for military personnel about how to recognize signs that military families are having a difficult time coping with the deployment of a Service member
- Increase support of programs that provide services for military wives who have a difficult time coping when their husbands are deployed
- Recommend further education for military personnel about the wide range of emotions that many military wives experience when their husbands are deployed

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METHODS

- Military spouses were recruited by making announcements at unit events. Civilian participants were recruited using the snowball method, starting with personal acquaintances of the research committee.
- Data were gathered by group interviews and focus groups.
- All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and later transcribed.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 11 wives of Active Duty Army Soldiers deployed to Iraq and six civilians.
- Most military wives were White (55%) and average age was 26 years (range: 20 - 34 years).
- All of the civilian participants were married, most were White (84%), female (67%), and the average age was 39 years (range: 24 - 56 years).

LIMITATIONS

- Sampling bias is present due to the convenience sample from where the data were gathered.
- There is bias on behalf of the first author, who, at the time of research study, was an Army wife of a deployed Soldier.
- The small sample size of Army wives limits generalizability across the other branches of the military as well as to diverse groups among Army wives, both nationally and abroad.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the experiences of male military spouses to explore the uniqueness of their experiences
- Conduct quantitative research to better examine the relationships between military wives' personal experiences and different outcomes (e.g., parenting skills, marital relationship)
- Include more diverse samples, such as the experiences of same-sex couples when the military spouse is deployed

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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