

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## The War at Home: Consequences of Loving a Veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

Demers, A. (2009). The war at home: Consequences of loving a veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. *The Internet Journal of Mental Health*, 6(1), 1-25. doi:10.5580/5ac

**SUMMARY:** Research on military families is often related to Service members' spouses and children. This study explored the impact of deployment experiences on additional family members (e.g., parents and siblings) and the family members' experiences of seeking and receiving support to cope with the impact of deployment.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Most respondents (75%) indicated that deployment had a negative impact on their lives, while less than half (45%) indicated that deployment had a negative impact on the life of the Veteran.
- The major themes that described participants' responses about living with deployment were: facing uncertainty and finding ways of coping.
- The primary themes that emerged when participants discussed reintegration were related to adapting to changes in the Veteran's personality and demeanor and changes in how participants interacted with Veterans.
- When discussing support, participants' responses were related to difficulties related to reaching out for support and feeling that participants were silenced by past attempts to obtain support.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide separate support groups for military-related family members, as the type of support they need may be different than the support needed for spouses and children
- Offer training for professionals who work with military families on the unique needs of parents, siblings, and other relatives of Service members
- Host workshops that educate Service members how to discuss experiences related to military service with members of their extended families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support programs that provide structured activities for military families that increase family cohesion and prosocial family values
- Encourage training of professionals who work with military families that emphasizes how to promote resiliency among Service members and their families
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to support a smooth transition for returning Service members and their families

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 via flyers posted at Veteran centers, colleges, and coffee shops as well as an ad on an internet advertisement website.
- Data were collected through an online survey where participants were asked demographic questions, about their relationship to their Veteran family member, and how deployment impacted their lives.
- The same participants attended focus groups to discuss the impact of deployment and the types of support that participants sought and received to cope with deployment-related experiences.
- Survey data were used to organize demographic data and focus-group data were coded to explore themes of experiences related to deployment, reintegration, and support.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 23 military family members; four people were Veterans and 13 were women.
- The sample was comprised of family members of 20 Iraq War Veterans (some participants were related to the same family member).
- Four service branches were represented, Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force, with most family members (n = 9) related to an Army Veteran.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study design is cross-sectional and therefore there it is unclear if deployment was a cause of some of the relationship concerns the participants reported.
- Data were not collected on Veterans' or participants' levels of support before deployment, so it is impossible to know if deployment impacted support without knowing prior support experiences.
- None of the demographic data were linked to the focus-group data during the analyses which limits the ability to know if certain experiences are associated with certain demographic factors.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies with Service members and their extended families before and after deployment to explore links between deployment and those relationships
- Gather more quantitative data about these variables to test different variations of these relationships
- Collect data from a larger sample of Service members, including from the National Guard and Reserve

## 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>