

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Stressful Experiences, Coping Strategies and Predictors of Health-related Outcomes Among Wives of Deployed Military Servicemen

Dimiceli, E. E., Steinhardt, M. A., & Smith, S. E. (2010). Stressful experiences, coping strategies, and predictors of health-related outcomes among wives of deployed military servicemen. *Armed Forces & Society*, 36(2), 351-373.
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SUMMARY: Interviews and survey data were used to identify common stressors experienced by military wives and explore whether problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., acceptance, planning, active coping, religion, and using emotional support) or emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., self-distraction, venting, humor, self-blame, and denial) were better at reducing distress and reduced physical symptoms. Wives perceived control over these stressors were also examined. Problem-focused coping strategies were more successful at reducing distress and physical health symptoms, regardless of wives perceived control over the stressor.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Qualitative analysis revealed that 85% of spouses identified various deployment-related issues as the most difficult of the military-related stressors they experienced in the past five years.
- Military spouses used more problem-focused coping, compared to emotion-focused coping.
- Using more emotion-focused coping predicted experiencing more physical symptoms, regardless of whether spouses felt they had control over the situation or not. Problem-focused coping was somewhat protective against physical symptoms, but only when spouses perceived little control. In contrast, when spouses perceived high control, problem-focused coping was associated fewer depressive symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military couples about appropriate coping strategies to specifically deal with the competing demands of military and family life
- Provide workshops to military spouses learn about the available resources supportive services to handle increased household responsibilities during deployment
- Publicize information regarding common stressors military spouses experience during deployment and strategies to cope with these stressors

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that increase family readiness
- Recommend assessing military spouses health and well-being throughout deployment and offer services to those in need
- Encourage the training of professionals regarding coping strategies used by military spouses and ways to support more problem-focused strategies

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METHODS

- A mixed-methods approach was used with a convenience sample of spouses who completed a survey.
- This article is focused on military spouses of Active Duty Army Service members who were currently deployed.
- Participants were recruited from the Army's Fourth Infantry Division at Fort Hood during a Spouse Appreciation Day event.

PARTICIPANTS

- Seventy-seven military wives participated in the current study.
- Eighty percent of participants were White and the average age was 33 years.
- Participants had been married for a mean of 8.5 years, and had an average of two children.

LIMITATIONS

- Participants were all voluntarily participating in a Family Readiness Group (FRG) event and may differ significantly from spouses of Service members from other branches, and with those who choose not to participate in FRG events.
- Participants may have been influenced to provide socially desirable information by the nature of the study methodology thereby biasing results.
- Measurement issues included inadequate measurement of perceived controllability and issues recognized by other researchers with the Brief COPE scale; therefore, results should be interpreted with caution.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the current study with a more representative sample using multiple informants
- Explore different coping strategies used by military children and adolescents who are affected by military deployment and other military issues such as relocation
- Investigate whether male spouses of deployed Service members utilize different coping strategies

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