

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

The Role of Positive Emotions in Reducing Depressive Symptoms Among Army Wives

Dolphin, K. E., Steinhardt, M. A., & Cance, J. D. (2015). The role of positive emotions in reducing depressive symptoms among army wives. *Military Psychology*, 27(1), 22-35. doi:10.1037/mil0000062

SUMMARY: Army wives participated in a study to examine whether personal resources (e.g., adaptive coping, maladaptive coping, and resilience) plays an important role in the relationship between positive emotions and depressive symptoms following a reunion after deployment. Positive emotions were related positively to adaptive coping and negatively to maladaptive coping, which were in turn related to fewer depression symptoms.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Adaptive coping, maladaptive coping, and resilience affected the relationship between positive emotions and depressive symptoms.
- Wives who experienced a greater number of deployments reported higher levels of positive emotions, adaptive coping, and lower depressive symptoms.
- Higher marital satisfaction was related to more positive emotions.
- Positive emotions had a positive relationship with adaptive coping and resilience and a negative relationship with maladaptive coping.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Include content in their family education curricula on positive coping strategies, such as physical exercise, social support, and regular self-care activities
- Offer peer support programs for wives, allowing those with previous deployment experience to support those for whom this is their first deployment
- Partner with the fitness facilities on the installation to offer events to promote physical fitness for wives and their children

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that offer services to partners and spouses of Service members during deployment
- Continue to support family-based programs and services throughout the deployment cycle
- Recommend the development of a mentoring program in which experienced spouses or partners could support newer wives across the deployment cycle

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METHODS

- Wives whose Active Duty husbands deployed with an infantry unit to Afghanistan were recruited to participate via a link on the Family Readiness Group website.
- Participants completed a web-based survey during deployment, and then approximately 3 months after deployment. The majority (90%) of participants completed the second survey.
- Participants completed measures of demographics, marital satisfaction, and positive emotions at the initial survey, and coping strategies, resilience, and depressive symptoms at reunion.

PARTICIPANTS

- Two hundred fifty-two Army wives participated.
- The majority of participants were White (66%), with an average age of 25 years (SD = 3.63 years).
- Sixty percent were married to junior enlisted Soldiers, 31% noncommissioned officers, and 9% commissioned officers.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was recruited from a family readiness group website which may limit the ability to generalize these findings to other military wives.
- The measures were all self-reported which may introduce some biases.
- The measure of positive affect was not designed to measure the construct as the authors intended, which may influence the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the mechanisms by which previous deployment experience and military rank promote adaptive and resilient behaviors
- Explore whether or not these findings apply to other married couples in highly stressful situations
- Conduct a similar study with Service members from different branches of the military

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