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


**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:**
- 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:**
- 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

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design

Limited Research Plan and Sample

Methods

Appropriate Measurement and Analysis

Limitations

Several

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:

https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works