

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Parenting Stress Among US Army Spouses During Combat-Related Deployments: The Role of Sense of Coherence

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SUMMARY: Associations between length of deployment, parenting stress, family coping, and sense of coherence on contentment among Army spouses of deployed Service members were explored. Coherence was defined as perception of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness in daily life. Spouses with a higher sense of coherence were more content with their lives during their husbands' deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The longer the Service member was deployed, the lower the levels of family coping, a sense of coherence, and the less life contentment reported by the military spouse.
- Higher levels of parenting stress among spouses was associated with lower levels of family coping, sense of coherence, and life contentment.
- Spouses who were better able to use family coping and had a greater sense of coherence reported higher levels of contentment in their lives.
- White participants had a greater sense of coherence than non-White participants.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide additional parental support to those who experience difficulties with coping and greater amounts of discontent during deployments
- Ensure that requisite information and assistance is more widely disseminated to spouses in need
- Increase opportunities for those spouses that have less experience with the military to interact with those spouses that have more experience with the military

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage programs that provide education on the relationships between length and number of deployments and family functioning
- Support the design of interventions to expand existing services provided on and off installations for military spouses
- Recommend pre-deployment screening for Service members' spouses so as to detect stressors (e.g., financial stress) that may worsen during deployment

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METHODS

- Participants were eligible for the study if they were spouses of Active Duty Service members with at least one child residing in the household.
- Spouses were randomly selected from military families living on an installation in southeastern U.S.
- Surveys were mailed to family housing units for spouses to complete.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 200 female spouses or significant others of deployed Soldiers. Average length of deployment for Soldiers was 4.6 years (range = 0-11 months).
- Participants' average age was 28.1 years (range = 19-55 years). Service members' average age was 30.0 years (range = 20-52 years).
- Race/ethnicity of the sample was 45% White, 22% Black, 19% Latino/Latina, 8% Asian-American, and 6% multiethnic.

LIMITATIONS

- This study was on a small sample of Active Duty Army spouses, and the findings may not generalize to the spouses of Service members in other branches of the military.
- Self-reports may bias the data (e.g., participants may have tried to respond in the "best" way).
- Participants may differ from non-participants in a way that was not measured, but affected the outcome variables (e.g., those who responded may be functioning better than those who did not respond).

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study in a larger, more demographically diverse sample
- Explore family dynamics and coping strategies across the span of a particular deployment cycle using longitudinal study designs
- Conduct follow up assessments to measure stress levels after reintegration

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