

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

A Model for Assessing the Impact of Combat-Related Deployments on U.S. Army Spouses

Everson, R. B., Herzog, J. R., Figley, C. R., & Whitworth, J. D. (2014). A model for assessing the impact of combat-related deployments on U.S. Army spouses. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 24(4), 422-437.
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SUMMARY: It is important to understand what factors contribute to Service Members' stress. In this study, researchers examined the length of deployment, number of deployments, and rank of the Soldier as predictors of family, personal, and parenting stress. Results suggest that rank and number of deployments influenced spouses perceptions of family stress; rank and length of deployment influenced parental stress; and rank, length, and number of deployments influenced personal stress.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Spouses of lower-ranking Soldiers experienced greater parenting, family, and personal stresses and strains (regardless of length of deployment) than spouses of commissioned officers.
- In general, few differences emerged between the spouses of non-commissioned officers and spouses of enlisted Soldiers in parenting, family, or personal stress.
- Increases in the number of deployments were associated with increased family and personal stress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Engage spouses of deployed Service members who have experienced multiple deployments, are of lower rank, or are in the midst of a long deployment to help cope with the increased stressors
- Partner with surrounding communities in ways that support these spouses via mentoring, childcare, or recognizing the spouses' important contributions
- Target programs that focus on increasing parenting and communication skills to families who are at risk for increased stress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support military spouses during deployment as these individuals may experience stress in many different areas
- Recommend collaboration between community professionals and military programs to provide additional assistance to those families most at risk for high levels of stress during deployment
- Encourage training for professionals who work with military spouses and their families regarding possible changes in stressors during deployment

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METHODS

- Participants were randomly selected female spouses of Soldiers currently living on a U.S. Army Installation.
- Wives completed questionnaires regarding family, parenting, and personal stress.
- Data were analyzed to determine associations between wives' levels of stress and length of deployment or husbands' rank.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 192 randomly selected female spouses of Soldiers with a mean age of 28.1 years (SD = 11.2).
- Average length of participants' husbands' deployment was 4.7 months (SD = 2.3); average number of deployments was 1.6 for enlisted, 4.6 for non-commissioned officers, and 3.4 for commissioned officers.
- Of the spouses, 41% percent reported working outside the home.

LIMITATIONS

- This was a cross-sectional analysis and did not allow an examination of changes in stress over a deployment cycle or across multiple deployments.
- Since the average number of deployments differed among the groups, examination of associations between stress levels and number of deployments may be impacted by Soldier's rank.
- The sample consisted only of female U.S. Army spouses and may not generalize to other branches or to male spouses.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Focus on evaluating stress levels during deployment for spouses of Service members from other branches
- Use a longitudinal design to examine cumulative effects and long-term consequences of deployment on Service members' partners
- Examine the relationship between number of deployments and levels of stress for different ranks

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