

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Quality of Life Among U.S. Army Spouses During the Iraq War

Everson, R. B., Darling, C., Herzog, J. R., Figley, C. R., & King, D. (2017). Quality of life among U.S. Army spouses during the Iraq war. *Journal of Family Social Work, 20*(2), 124-143. doi:10.1080/10522158.2017.1279578

SUMMARY: This study utilized the ABC-X model of family stress and resiliency theory to provide information about specific family and parental stress, family coping, appraisal of stress and coping abilities, and quality of life for spouses at various stages of a recent military deployment. Three groups of spouses participated in this study. These groups consisted of spouses of non-deployed Service members, spouses of Service members deployed less than six months, and spouses of Service members deployed more than six months. Overall, significant differences related to functioning were found between groups of spouses.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Non-deployed spouses experienced significantly lower levels of stress, higher levels of coping, and better well-being than the other two groups of spouses.
- Spouses of Service members deployed more than six months had greater levels of family stress and lower quality of life experienced than spouses of Service members deployed less than six months.
- There were no significant differences between the two groups of spouses with deployed Service members for parental stress, well-being, and sense of coherence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Include activities that help military families develop a sense of community and a support system
- Develop curriculum for military spouses that focuses on managing stress during deployment
- Offer support groups for spouses of Service members and their families during deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend collaboration between DoD programs and local community organizations to support programs for spouses of Service members to enhance their well-being
- Build awareness across military branches around the importance supporting military spouses during deployment with accessible service programs
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families (e.g., childcare providers and education professionals) on ways to strengthen community ties

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- A purposive sample of 500 spouses were selected for this study from the population of spouses living in a U.S. Army installation serving the deployed infantry division.
- Along with demographic variables and questions, this study included items from six instruments designed to assess factors within the ABC-X model of family stress and resiliency theory.
- Statistical analysis were conducted to determine the relationships between groups and the influence of stress, coping, well-being, and sense of coherence on quality of life within spouse groups.

PARTICIPANTS

- All 201 participants were married and ranged in age from 19 to 55 years with the mean age of 29 years.
- Participants identified as White (45%), Black (22%), Latino (18%), Asian American (6%), Other (6%), Pacific Islander (2%), and Native American (1%).
- The ranks of the Service members were 37% non-commissioned officer, 32% enlisted, 28% officer, and 3% warrant officer.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample of spouses in this study were from one U.S. military installation; therefore, generalizability is limited.
- The study did not look at the differences in spouses of Soldiers deployed multiple times compared to those experiencing deployment for the first time, which could have affected the variable outcomes for each of the study groups.
- The participants could have rated themselves as more stressed and perceived poorer coping as a result of the danger associated with the earlier stages of hostile military action in Iraq; this possible influencing factor was not accounted for in the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Use a longitudinal approach where spouses of Soldiers are surveyed at several time points during the Soldier's deployment
- Investigate Soldiers' spouses stress and coping in combat related military service since the Iraq conflict
- Include spouses of Soldiers deployed from multiple U.S. Army installations

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