

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Anxiety, Social Support, and Physical Health in a Sample of Spouses of OEF/OIF Service Members

Fields, J. A., Nichols, L. O., Martindale-Adams, J., Zuber, J., & Graney, M. (2012). Anxiety, social support, and physical health in a sample of spouses of OEF/OIF service members. *Military Medicine*, 177(12), 1492-1497. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-12-00036

**SUMMARY:** Eighty-six spouses of military Service members who had been deployed participated in this study that explored the connections between mental health, social support, and physical health. Findings revealed that anxiety symptoms were related to lower social support and poorer physical health.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Less social support was associated with more anxiety, more physical health problems, and diminished self-perceived health.
- More anxiety was associated with more physical health problems and worse self-perceived health.
- Greater social support did not mitigate the relationship between anxiety and worse physical health.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes for spouses of Service members that aim to increase coping behaviors in order to lessen anxiety and potentially improve health
- Offer peer support groups for spouses of Service members in order to increase social support
- Disseminate information to Service members and their spouses regarding possible connections between anxiety and physical health

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for Service members' at-home spouses during deployment
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families to educate them about the associations among anxiety, social support, and overall health
- Encourage the development of programs that aim to increase social support among military spouses

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## METHODS

- Spouses of Service members who had been returned from deployment for at least one month were recruited through a national pilot trial of a telephone support group for military spouses. The pilot program had recruited spouses through several avenues, including email, in-person events, and Wounded Warrior Project referrals.
- Participants completed surveys to measure anxiety, social support, and physical health.
- Data were analyzed to determine relationships among anxiety, social support, and physical health.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 86 female spouses of Service members who had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.
- These spouses were primarily White (85%), with an average age of 37.4 years old ( $SD = 8.97$ ). On average, they had been married 10.4 years ( $SD = 8.17$ ), and most (62%) were married to noncommissioned officers.
- Service member spouses were Soldiers (83%), Marines (8%), Sailors (6%), and Airmen (3%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Participants in this study opted into a trial of a telephone support program, so they may differ from other spouses in important ways that may influence results.
- Because physical health and self-perceived physical health were measured by three self-report questions, participants' responses may be influenced by their anxiety regardless of any objective physical health problems.
- The sample only included female spouses, so results may not extend to male spouses of Service members.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the role of deployment on the well-being of spouses, specifically whether deployment impacts the associations among anxiety, social support, and physical health
- Replicate these findings with a larger and more representative sample of military spouses
- Examine the efficacy of programs designed to increase social support among Service member's spouses

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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