

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

A Cross-Sectional Survey of the Relationship Between Partner Deployment and Stress in Pregnancy During Wartime

Haas, D. M., Pazdernik, L. A., & Olsen, C. H. (2005). A cross-sectional survey of the relationship between partner deployment and stress in pregnancy during wartime. *Women's Health Issues, 15*(2), 48-54. doi:10.1016/j.whi.2004.12.002

SUMMARY: Having a partner deployed during wartime may increase a woman's stress level during pregnancy. By administering surveys to pregnant military spouses and Active Duty Service members, the study examined the relationship between spousal deployment and prenatal stress. Results suggested a relationship between spousal deployment and stress level during pregnancy.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Women with partners deployed reported higher stress level during pregnancy than women whose partners were not deployment, and they were more likely to report that the media coverage of war worsened their stress symptoms.
- The number of children already at home was positively related with pregnant women's stress level.
- Pregnant women who were Active Duty Service members experienced more stress than their civilian counterparts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for pregnant military spouses during their partners' deployment
- Develop prenatal workshops for military families to promote healthy pregnancy and family well-being
- Continue providing training opportunities for professionals working with military families to learn more about ways to support military spouses and military children during deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training for professionals regarding the unique stressors military spouses encounter during their partners' deployment
- Promote the development of structured workshops for pregnant military spouses to provide support and prenatal knowledge during their partners' deployment
- Raise awareness of the challenges that pregnant Active Duty Service members encounter

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from the Obstetrics Clinic at Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune.
- Anonymous surveys were given to participants presenting for a prenatal visit, and measures included partner deployment status, number of children at home, perceived stress level, and impact of deployment on their pregnancy.
- Analysis explored factors associated with perceived stress level during pregnancy.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 279 pregnant women; 49 of them were Active Duty Service members, and 230 of them were military spouses.
- Forty-nine percent of the women (Mean age = 25.2 years, Mean gestation = 25.8 weeks) had deployed partners, and 51% of the women (Mean age = 24.0, Mean gestation = 26.3 weeks) had partners who were not deployed.
- Most of the military partners were Marines (88%), followed by Navy (7%) and other branches (5%).
- The race/ethnicity of the participants were not indicated in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- All participants' data were analyzed together regardless of how long they were pregnant, which may be a confounding variable of their stress level.
- The survey was developed for the purpose of the study and was not validated, therefore the reliability and validity of the measure were unknown.
- All data were collected during a three-week period, and according to the authors, the media coverage of the war during that period happened to be more optimistic than one month before, therefore results of the study may underestimate the stress level of the participants.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore other factors that may potentially influence pregnant women's stress level during their partners' deployment
- Use an already validated survey tool to measure participants' stress level
- Collect data at different stages of the pregnancy so that the results are more comprehensive

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