

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Using military friendships to optimize postdeployment reintegration for male Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom veterans

Hinojosa, R., & Hinojosa, M. S. (2011). Using Military Friendships to Optimize Postdeployment Reintegration for Male Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 48(10), 1145-1158. doi:10.1682/JRRD.2010.08.0151

SUMMARY: Interview data from Reserve and Army National Guard men deployed in support of OIF/OEF were examined to explore the importance of military friendships during and after deployment. Qualitative analyses revealed that military friendships helped Service members deal with deployment, and that these friendships were missed post-deployment. Also, findings indicated that many of the men reported difficulty maintaining their military friendships post-deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Friendships helped Service members deal with deployment; all had developed close friendships during deployment and vocalized the support that these friendships provided, particularly when Service members were overcome by the strain of deployment.
- Many Service members reported missing military friends and having difficulty finding connections with civilian family and friends post-deployment.
- Veterans may reconnect with other Veterans or unit members during Guard or Reserve weekend drills or via group therapy at the VA.
- Men who worked low-paid hourly wage jobs were more likely to work actively to maintain military friendships outside of drill for longer time periods than those with higher incomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Facilitate social connections among Service members during reintegration, such as structuring opportunities for formal and informal socializing
- Provide educational services about the importance of military friendships during reintegration
- Maintain and distribute a list of military related support groups for Service members and their families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can promote resilience in Service members, their partners and children
- Recommend programs that develop and evaluate of a range of support groups for Service members and Veterans
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to support a smooth transition for departing Service members

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METHODS

- In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2008-2009 focusing on Veterans' deployment and reintegration experiences.
- Interviews were coded using grounded theory methods.
- Four subcategories of military friendship emerged: transition to war, growth of the military family, reintegration, seeking to reconnect with the military family.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included Reserve component and Army National Guard men (n = 20) deployed as part of OIF/OEF missions who served and had not been seriously injured or were in rehabilitation.
- Among the sample, the average age was 27 years, and the majority of the participants were white (70%).
- Among the sample, 65% were Army National Guard, 25% were Army Reserves, and 10% were Marine Reserves; 70% deployed as part of OIF while 15% were part of OEF, and 15% were part of both OIF and OEF; and 20% were getting ready to deploy again post-interview.

LIMITATIONS

- Retrospective interviews only capture the Veterans' view at that moment in time and may not be representative of feelings and ideas over time.
- The sample was composed of only male Reserve and National Guard Service members and may not be representative of Active Duty personnel, women, or Service members from other military branches.
- There were no details on recruitment strategies, which limits the ability to understand if how participants were recruited may have impacted the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore how the meaning of work is facilitating or impeding reintegration
- Utilize a longitudinal design to better understand when and how Veterans begin to share deployment experiences with civilians, how military friendship "drift" occurs, and the impact of military friendship drift
- Conduct interviews with Active Duty personnel to get another perspective of military friendships

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