

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Problems With Veteran-Family Communication During Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Military Deployment

Hinojosa, R., Hinojosa, M. S., & Hognas, R. S. (2012). Problems with veteran-family communication during Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom military deployment. *Military Medicine*, 177(2), 191-197. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-10-00385

**SUMMARY:** In-depth interviews with male Veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) and used to explore the reasons for miscommunication during deployment between Service members and their civilian family members. Results indicated that miscommunication occurred for a variety of reasons, and miscommunication during deployment may influence Service members reintegration experiences.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Family of Service members may feel hurt and frustrated when military Operational Security (OPSEC) limits what the Service members can discuss, and when technical problems occur during communication which can lead to miscommunication (e.g., disconnections are mistaken for intentional hang-ups).
- Miscommunication can also occur when the meaning of important experiences are lost in translation when communicated using letters and/or phone calls, leaving Service members and their family with feelings of confusion, frustration, or a sense of lost intimacy.
- Communication after the first few months of deployment may become strained between the Service member and family as everyone adjusts to the separation and there is nothing new to say to one another.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military couples regarding communication strategies to help identify and prevent communication difficulties that arise during deployment
- Continue offering pre- and post-deployment workshops to military families to prepare for and cope with the deployment cycles
- Disseminate information to military families regarding strategies to effectively communicate during deployments

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support efforts to improve accessibility and quality of communication during deployment between Service members and their families
- Promote reintegration programs that support military families as they re-adjust following a deployment
- Recommend professional education regarding how miscommunication during deployment can influence post-deployment family reintegration

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## METHODS

- The authors used in-depth semistructured interviews and asked participants about their predeployment, deployment, and reintegration experiences.
- The authors used the well-established Ground Theory Method to identify common themes from interview transcripts.
- Participants included 20 Reserve and Army National Guard men who were deployed as part of Operational Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF).

## PARTICIPANTS

- All participants were men between the ages of 18-48 years (average age = 27 years).
- Ethnic makeup of the participants was 70% White, 25% Latino/Latina, and 5% Black.
- Participants were 100% Reserve and National Guard (90% Army; 10% Marines).

## LIMITATIONS

- Without follow-up, it is unknown whether reported communication issues were linked with long-term problems.
- The authors relied on retrospective accounts of communication during deployment; thus, reports of these Service members may be biased.
- A small sample of only male Reserve and National Guard Service members were included. The extent to which findings may describe experiences within other Service branches is not known.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess the quality of communication and family interactions prior to deployment
- Gather similar information from spouses to determine whether Service members and their spouse report similar miscommunication patterns
- Examine how communication during deployment impacts Service members readiness

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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