

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Military Wives' Stressful Disclosures to Their Deployed Husbands: The Role of Protective Buffering

Joseph, A. L., & Afifi, T. D. (2010). Military wives' stressful disclosures to their deployed husbands: The role of protective buffering. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 38(4), 412-434. doi:10.1080/00909882.2010.513997

SUMMARY: Survey data were used to explore communication between military wives and their deployed spouses. Specifically, the authors examined the factors related to military wives decisions to either disclose their stressors to their deployed husbands or to shield husbands from information that may increase stress (that is, protective buffering when people hide concerns or problems to protect others). The authors also examined how military wives communication decisions were associated with their physical and mental health and marital satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Wives who perceived their deployed husbands as being in greater danger were less apt to share at-home stressors.
- Perceived support from husbands to share stressors was positively associated with disclosure.
- Women who did share at-home stressors reported higher levels of marital satisfaction.
- Withholding of stressors from husbands was associated with worse physical and mental health for wives.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes for military spouses pertaining to how best to talk about stressors with Service members during deployment
- Offer opportunities for military wives to share their experiences with each other to bolster emotional support
- Provide resources for Service members about how to support their spouses during deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that programs offer communication training for deploying military Service members and spouses to enhance their ability to support one another during the separation
- Continue to support programs that offer counseling or other services to military couples following deployment
- Continue support of family readiness groups for non-deployed spouses/partners

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through online advertisements (e.g., Craigslist, military spouse websites).
- The online survey took 40 minutes to complete.
- Questions assessed perceived threats to husbands safety, social support from husband, marital disclosure about wives stressors, perceptions about common military stressors, physical and mental health, and marital satisfaction.

PARTICIPANTS

- One hundred and five military wives whose husbands were deployed and who had at least one child in the home.
- The majority of wives were White (75%) with an average age of 31 years (SD = 6.9 years).
- Wives were from the Army (38%), Navy (37%), Marines (18%), and Air Force (8%).
- Eighty-eight percent were enlisted Service members and 12% were officers.

LIMITATIONS

- This was a convenience sample, and results may not generalize to all military wives.
- The relatively small sample size may have limited the ability to detect significant associations.
- The measures did not account for communication about specific stressors, but stressors in general, limiting what can be ascertained from the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Use a longitudinal design to examine communication and satisfaction across the deployment cycle
- Conducted a similar study with military wives whose Service member experiences injury during deployment
- Incorporate reports from both partners/spouses

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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