

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Navy

## Navy Mothers Experiencing and not Experiencing Deployment: Reasons for Staying in or Leaving the Military

Kelley, M. L., Hock, E., Bonney, J. F., Jarvis, M. S., Smith, K. M., & Gaffney, M. A. (2001). Navy mothers experiencing and not experiencing deployment: Reasons for staying in or leaving the military. *Military Psychology, 13*(1), 55-71.  
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**SUMMARY:** An exploration on what influenced women in the military to reenlist was conducted. More specifically, the focus of this study was on better understanding factors such as deployment, psychological adjustment, and a woman's commitment to family and motherhood. Seventy-one Navy mothers were interviewed and completed standardized questionnaires before (Time 1) and after (Time 2) a scheduled deployment; 83 Navy mothers assigned to shore duty served as controls. Findings suggested that intentions to reenlist did not differ between the two groups.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Women who experienced deployment were more likely than women in the non-deploying control group to report commitment to a Navy career as a reason for planning to stay in the Navy.
- Women's commitment to a Navy career, satisfaction with benefits, and a perception that workday separations may benefit children predicted intentions to reenlist at the initial assessment.
- Factors that influenced reenlistment intentions in the final assessment were Time 1 reenlistment intentions, commitment to a Navy career, satisfaction with benefits, work-family concerns, and dissatisfaction with the military.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer Active Duty mothers mentoring that focus on unique military family stressors, such as deployments and relocations
- Develop workshops for Active Duty mothers and their families that focus on how to maximize their benefits
- Provide support for Active Duty mothers that focuses on career commitment and work-life balance

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for programs that specifically address deployed Service members and their need for family stability and a work-life balance
- Promote recruitment and retention programs for highly skilled female Service members
- Recommend professional development courses for community providers to educate them about unique factors that Active Duty mothers experience, especially during times of stress

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited through a point of contact at the Atlantic Fleet Command. The POC identified ships with mixed-gender crews stationed in the Hampton Roads area (southeastern Virginia) that were scheduled to deploy
- Active Duty Navy mothers participated twice (8-9 months apart) in semi-structured interviews and standardized questionnaires that addressed factors associated with reenlistment intentions.
- Analyses of quantitative and qualitative data looked at differences between groups of Active Duty Navy mothers in their intentions to reenlist.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants met the following criteria: (a) had a child living in the same home (b) planned on remaining at their current command for one year, (c) their Expiration of Active Obligated Service would not occur during the study interval, and (d) their child did not have a significant developmental disability.
- Participants identified as 53% White, 36% Black, 4% Latino, and 7% Other.
- Forty-seven percent of participants were married and 40% had a GED or high school diploma, 53% had taken some college courses, and 7% held bachelor's degrees.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study identified global rationales for reenlistment intentions, and although women's reports of commitment to a Navy career were related to reenlistment intentions, this methodology did not precisely assess workplace commitment.
- The number of women surveyed was small, and only with Active Duty Navy mothers; therefore, the findings are exploratory and not generalizable.
- The study did not examine female officers with children; therefore, these findings may not generalize to Navy officers who are mothers.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore in more depth the factors that affect reenlistment intentions of military women and parents
- Develop more precise assessments of workplace commitment among women across all military command units
- Qualitatively examine factors that influence female officers with children reenlistment decision

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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