

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Postdeployment Reintegration Experiences of Female Soldiers from National Guard and Reserve Units in the United States

Kelly, P. J., Berkel, L. A., & Nilsson, J. E. (2014). Postdeployment reintegration experiences of female soldiers from National Guard and Reserve units in the United States. *Nursing Research*, 63(5), 346-356. doi:10.1097/NNR.0000000000000051

SUMMARY: Female members of National Guard and Reserve units participated in semi-structured interviews exploring their postdeployment family reintegration experience. Five themes emerged from participants about their postdeployment reintegration experiences, including increased complexity of life, loss of military role, changes due to deployment, reconnecting with partners/spouses, and re-entering the role of motherhood.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The increased complexity of life category consisted of feeling overwhelmed regarding making consumer choices or prioritizing and multitasking to manage activities and family members.
- The loss of military role was difficult, especially for women who lacked meaningful civilian jobs and dealing with negative emotional reactions from deployment called negativity impact reintegration.
- Some participants found moving back into a spousal relationship and parental role to be awkward and uncomfortable.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer informal support groups for female Service members
- Create buddy systems, matching experienced Service members with newer ones to promote transfer of knowledge and exchange of social support
- Disseminate information regarding some of the common challenges experienced by female Service members during reintegration and ways to cope with these challenges

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend partnerships with agencies that provide reintegration services for returning Service members
- Support programs that offer resources to Service members and their families after reintegration
- Recommend that programs offer parenting classes to help Service members re-enter the role of parent after deployment

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METHODS

- Female members of National Guard units from five states were invited to participate in 2012, via flyers and announcements made on the units' Facebook pages.
- Women who had either been recently deployed or several years prior were eligible.
- Semi-structured in-person or telephone interviews focused on changes to families and support systems, and the experience of reintegration.

PARTICIPANTS

- Forty-two female National Guard members participated, 41% of whom were 40-49 years old. Race/ethnicity of participants was not reported.
- The majority of participants were married (40%) and did not have any children (35%).
- Seventy-two percent had experienced one deployment, 23% had two deployments, and 2% had three deployments.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was self-selected and may not be representative of all female Service members.
- The sample is small, limiting the generalizability of results.
- The coding strategy relied heavily on one researcher, and no inter-rater reliability was calculated; therefore, results may be biased.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include female Service members in other branches of the military
- Replicate the study using quantitative measures
- Survey both female Service members and their partners to get a more accurate understanding of their post-deployment reintegration experiences

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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