

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
National
Guard

Perceptions of Individual and Family Functioning Among Deployed Female National Guard Members

Kelly, P. J., Cheng, A., Berkel, L. A., & Nilsson, J. (2016). Perceptions of individual and family functioning among deployed female national guard members. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 22(3), 419-434. doi:10.1177/1074840716642791

SUMMARY: An internet-based survey was used to examine the impact of deployment on 239 female National Guard Service members and their families. Results found that deployed female Service members reported significantly higher posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) scores and lower coping mechanisms (i.e., exercise, meditation) compared to female Service members who have never deployed. When compared with non-deployed female Service members, deployed female Service members reported of higher parenting strain, lower family functioning, and family hardiness (i.e., resilience).

KEY FINDINGS:

- Deployed female Service members were shown to have considerably higher scores on PTSD and tended to report fewer healthy coping mechanisms than their non-deployed peers.
- There is positive relationship between PTSD and depression symptoms in non-deployed Service members, indicating the higher one scored on PTSD diagnostic scale, the more likely one would have depression.
- Results indicated that deployed Service members who reported higher parenting strain, were more likely to report lower family functioning and family hardiness.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops during deployment reintegration to help families and Service members adjust to the Service member's return, especially when the deployment has included combat exposure
- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping behaviors and dealing with PTSD symptoms
- Provide education for all Service members that focus on emotion regulation and parenting, especially those with deployment history

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can promote resilience in Service members, their partners, and children
- Recommend integrating parenting education into existing service delivery systems for military families
- Endorse education for service providers around the possible effects of deployment on Service members' families

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Service members from National Guard units in four Midwestern states were recruited via email to participate in an internet-based survey.
- Measures assessed individual, family, and deployment-related influences, such as mental health diagnoses (i.e., depression), family functioning, coping mechanisms (i.e., exercise, meditation), and parenting strain.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to examine the impact of deployment on women and the relationships between PTSD/depression and family functioning, parenting strain, and family hardiness.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were comprised of 239 female National Guard Service members from military units; 164 have been deployed at least once, whereas 75 have never been deployed.
- Average age of participants was 34.8 years (SD = 10.3), where deployed Service members were older (37.5 years) compared to non-deployed (28.9 years).
- Demographics showed 25.5% of deployed Service members were single or never married, compared to 35.5% nondeployed; both groups had an average of approximately two children.
- There was no demographic data regarding race/ethnicity given in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- The findings that were presented were incomplete, which included not explaining certain findings, and limits the readers' ability to interpret results correctly.
- The survey was presented to a select group of female National Guard Service members in a certain geographical area, which could limit the ability to generalize to the larger National Guard population.
- Other variables (i.e., number of deployments, number of deployments in combat zones, if their partner was also deployed) were not tested and could have influenced the results not accounted for by the authors.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the impact of deployment on the family and couple relationship when both partners are Service members
- Survey a larger population of female National Guard Service members to gain results that are generalizable to the population
- Examine family functioning and parenting strain during integration after combat-zone deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>