

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Experiences of U.S. Military Couples During the Post-Deployment Transition: Applying the Relational Turbulence Model

Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A. (2012). Experiences of U.S. military couples during the post-deployment transition: Applying the relational turbulence model. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 29(4), 423–450.  
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**SUMMARY:** The post-deployment period can be difficult for Service members and their spouses. To better understand the difficulties that can arise after deployment, Service members and military spouses completed online questionnaires (e.g., changes to their relationship) regarding their recent reintegration experiences. Results indicated that military couples encountered both challenges (e.g., relationship uncertainty) and opportunities (e.g., closer relationship) during the reintegration period.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants reported both positive (e.g., they valued their relationship more) and negative (e.g., problems reconnecting) changes to their relationships after deployment.
- Participants experienced relational uncertainty (e.g., questions about commitment) and encountered interference from partners (e.g., control issues) during the reintegration period.
- Women, at-home partners, and Reserve couples were most likely to report that they experienced difficulties during the reintegration period.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops during reintegration to help military families adjust to the Service member's return
- Provide Service members and their intimate partners classes that aim to increase communication skills after deployment
- Disseminate information regarding possible stressors for military couples during the reintegration period

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support reintegration programs that assist military families in adjusting to the Service member's return
- Encourage the development of programs that support Service members to reintegrate into the community after deployment
- Recommend professional development courses for professionals working with military families regarding the unique challenges that military couples experience after deployment and ways to assist military couples with the transition

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited by distributing advertisements at family readiness offices, reintegration workshops, and online military family forums; people were eligible to participate if they were currently involved in a romantic relationship and if they or their romantic partner had returned from deployment in the last six months.
- Participants answered online questionnaires regarding changes to their relationship, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners during the post-deployment period.
- Data were analyzed to extract common themes from participants' answers.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 259 individuals including 137 (109 males and 28 females) Service members and 122 (2 males and 120 females) military spouses.
- The average age of participants was 33.13 years (age range = 19-58 years, SD = 8.56); the majority of them were White (84%), followed by Black (7%), Latino (5%), Asian Americans (2%), Native Americans (1%), and other (1%).
- The military branches that Service members served in were National Guard (60%), Army (32%), Marines (4%), Air Force (3%), and Navy (1%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Data were collected individually rather than by couple; therefore, some important information about couple interactions may have been missing.
- Most participants (92%) were affiliated with the National Guard or the Army; therefore, the results may not apply to the Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard.
- Data were collected within six months of return from deployment, so participants' long-term reintegration experience was unknown.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine how military couples' reintegration experiences fluctuate over time
- Collect dyadic data from military couples to examine the potential interdependence between their answers
- Recruit participants from all military branches so that the results can be better generalized to the broader military population

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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