

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Depressive Symptoms, Relational Turbulence, and the Reintegration Difficulty of Military Couples Following Wartime Deployment

Knobloch, L. K., Ebata, A. T., McGlaughlin, P. C., & Ogolsky, B. (2013). Depressive symptoms, relational turbulence, and the reintegration difficulty of military couples Following wartime deployment. *Health Communication*, 28 (8), 754-766.
doi:10.1080/10410236.2013.800440

SUMMARY: Using the relational turbulence model, an examination of military couples and their experience reuniting after wartime deployment was conducted. More specifically the study explored how individual's depressive symptoms, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners predicted their difficulty with reintegration. One hundred and eighteen military couples, living in 20 states, completed an online questionnaire once per month for the first three months upon reunion following wartime deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Women's depressive symptoms were positively associated with men's reintegration difficulty; whereas, men's depressive symptoms were unrelated to women's reintegration difficulty.
- A partner's relationship uncertainty were negatively associated with reintegration difficulty.
- At-home partners reported more reintegration difficulty than returning Service members.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue providing training opportunities for professionals working with Service members and their families to learn more about ways to develop supportive structures that facilitate Service members and their partners mental well-being
- Engage Service members' and their partners in support groups that help couples set realistic expectations on the reintegration relationship process
- Provide spaces (online or in person) for Service members' partners to discuss the reintegration process and its effects upon their romantic relationships

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the strengths, assets, and resources that military couples bring to the deployment cycle and leverage opportunities to cultivate these during reintegration following deployment
- Recommend collaboration between the Department of Defense programs and local community organizations to support programs for military couple that address their mental well-being post-deployment
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can support military couples through stressful transitions (e.g. deployment, reintegration post-deployment, relocation)

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

- Participants were recruited through online forums, message boards, and Facebook pages for military families, and e-mails to family readiness officers and chaplains.
- Participating couples met the following criteria; (a) They or their partner had returned home from deployment in the past 30 days, (b) they were custodial parents of one or more children, (c) partners had separate e-mail accounts, and (d) both partners were willing to participate.
- Analyses were run to understand how change in participant's depressive symptoms, relational uncertainty, and interference from partners predicted change in their reintegration difficulty.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants identified as White (84%), Latino (6%), Black (4%), Native American (3%), Asian American (2%), and Other (1%).
- Of the 119 deployed Service members, 115 were men (97%) and four were women (3%). About 14% were dual-career military couples, but only one dyad was a dual-deployed couple.
- Military personnel were affiliated with the U.S. Army (57%), Army National Guard (21%), Air National Guard (13%), Air Force (6%), and Marines (3%).

LIMITATIONS

- Without baseline data it is difficult to evaluate whether the transition from deployment to reintegration is directly related to an increase in depressive symptoms or relational uncertainty.
- Recruitment was based upon participant self-selection, and may have been biased towards high-functioning couples. If so this may bias study outcomes.
- Participants were parents, and most were affiliated with the U.S. Army, the Army or the Air National Guard and were deployed men which limits the generalizability of the findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how military couples communicate during deployment, and how it effects their reunion experiences
- Ascertain a greater understanding around the availability, frequency, and content of communication between military couples across the deployment cycle
- Examine whether the studies' findings generalize to other military populations (e.g., nonparents, Service members from other branches, couples containing deployed women)

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>