Communication of Military Couples During Deployment and Reunion: Changes, Challenges, Benefits, and Advice

SUMMARY: Deployment means changes and adjustments for military couples. Using open-ended questions, the study investigated military couples' views and experiences during deployment and reintegration. Results supported the emotional cycle of deployment model, which indicated that military couples faced specific obstacles and opportunities at each stage of deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- About 44% of the participants noted better relationship dynamics from pre-deployment to post-deployment, whereas 21% reported no change, and 35% reported more destructive communication.
- At the reintegration stage, over 25% of the responses showed problems between parents and children, and challenges in re-acclimating to family routines and reorganizing family roles.
- Of those responding to the open-ended questions, 93% identified at least one positive outcome of the deployment experience.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for military spouses that promote healthy coping and family well-being
- Develop curricula that teach military couples about effective communication skills
- Design effective prevention and intervention programming that is more specific to each stage of the deployment process

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness of the importance of communication for the well-being of military families
- Continue to offer support to military spouses so that they develop effective coping strategies associated with each specific stage of deployment
- Encourage awareness campaigns on installations regarding the positive aspects that arise from the deployment experience

REACH

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited by posting information to online forums tailored to military families and circulating materials to military family life professionals.
- Couples were tested at the beginning of the study (Wave 1), the 31st day (Wave 2), and the 61st day (Wave 3).
- Couples answered open-ended questions about changes to their communication, challenges of reunion, benefits of deployment, and advice for reintegration.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 118 heterosexual couples (Mean age = 33.03 years, SD = 6.84) with one or both partners who returned home from deployment within the past 30 days and had one or more children.
- The participants were predominately White (84%), followed by Latino (6%), Black (4%), Native American (3%), Asian (2%), and Other (1%).
- The military branches that the participants served in were Army (57%), Army National Guard (21%), Air National Guard (13%), Air Force (6%), and Marines (3%).

LIMITATIONS

- The pre-deployment stage, a potentially important stage of uncertainty, was not investigated in the study, so it is hard to get a holistic view of the entire deployment cycle.
- The on-line survey method prevented the researchers from probing people's answers, therefore the results may lack depth.
- The majority of the participants were affiliated with the Army and the Army National Guard, so the results may not be applicable to other military branches.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Consider coping in conjunction with the emotional cycle of deployment to identify coping strategies that are more or less useful across the deployment cycle
- Use an interview procedure to gain in-depth insights of the research questions
- Include the pre-deployment stage into the study to identify specific challenges and coping strategies associated with that stage

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design
★★☆
Appropriate
Research Plan and Sample

Methods
★★☆
Appropriate
Measurement and Analysis

Limitations
★★☆
Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
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