



A Mixed-Method Approach to Understanding the Experiences of Non-Deployed Military Caregivers

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SUMMARY: Understanding the experiences of non-deployed military spouses is important to improve services to military families. Qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys were conducted with at-home spouses of deployed Service members to assess their experiences during deployment and the effects of deployment on well-being. Spouses of Service members with more cumulative months of deployment reported significantly poorer emotional well-being and more relationship challenges.

KEY FINDINGS

- Navy spouses reported poorer well-being than spouses from other service branches; National Guard spouses reported poorer emotional well-being compared to Active Duty Service members.
- The intensity of the changes in parenting was a key factor in the spouses' hassles and additional household responsibilities affected spouses' well-being (anxiety, sense of feeling overwhelmed).
- Difficulty expressing emotions with Service members and cumulative months of deployment were related to poorer relationship satisfaction and more household hassles for non-deployed spouses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Develop peer support groups for non-deployed military spouses, especially targeting those experiencing more cumulative months of deployment
- Provide education to military spouses about self-care and the impact of their own well-being on the family
- Offer information on normative versus problematic children's responses to deployment and strategies to address the deployment-related distress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Recommend the development of in-home supportive programs for spouses during Service members extended deployments
- Encourage the training of professionals who work with military families to better identify military spouses who have difficulties managing changes in roles and responsibilities during deployment
- Suggest integrating programming related to family readiness and marital relationship functioning for military spouses before deployment

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- To gather qualitative data, non-deployed military spouses were recruited from a list of families who applied to attend Operation Purple Camp (a camp for children of military Service members).
- For qualitative data, spouses participated in semi-structured interviews focused on deployment experiences, their changing roles, and quality of communication with the deployed Service member.
- To gather quantitative data, a separate group of non-deployed military spouses were interviewed via phone surveys. The phone survey gathered data on the Service members' deployment characteristics and the non-deployed spouses' well-being.

PARTICIPANTS

- Qualitative data were collected from female non-deployed military spouses (n = 50) with at least one child. The average age of the children of the spouses in this sample were 12.7 years (SD = 1.6).
- Quantitative data were collected from a separate sample of female non-deployed military spouses (n = 1,337). Average age of spouses is 38.1 years (SD = 5.9) and no data on spouses' race and ethnicity were provided.
- The average age of the children of the second sample of spouses is 12.8 years (SD = 1.5); about half of the children are male (53%) and most of the children are White (73%).

LIMITATIONS

- The study is cross-sectional and causation between deployment, well-being, and relationship satisfaction cannot be determined.
- It is unclear where or how the sample of participants for the quantitative portion of the study were recruited, which limits to what extent the research methods can be understood and evaluated.
- For the qualitative data, the sample was recruited from applicants to Operation Purple Camp; these families may differ in important ways from other military families that was not considered.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Gather data on functioning of non-deployed military spouses before and after deployment
- Explore the role of intervention programs to help improve well-being of military spouses
- Conduct qualitative views that examine non-deployed male spouses' experiences of deployment

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