

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Deployment and the Use of Mental Health Services Among U.S. Army Wives

Mansfield, A. J., Kaufman, J. S., Marshall, S. W., Gaynes, B. N., Morrissey, J. P., & Engel, C. C. (2010). Deployment and the use of mental health services among U.S. Army wives. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 362(2), 101-109.
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SUMMARY: Deployment is often stressful, not only for Service members, but also for their partners. Using Army wives' medical records from 2003 to 2006, the association between Service member deployment and wives' mental health visits and diagnoses was examined. Wives whose husbands deployed had more mental health visits and diagnoses than wives whose husbands did not deploy, and longer deployments were also associated with more mental health visits and diagnoses than shorter deployments.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Military wives whose husbands were deployed during 2003-2006 were more likely to seek mental health services than those with non-deployed husbands, with 19% higher rates for women whose husbands deployed 1-11 months and 27% higher rates for women whose husbands deployed 11 or more months.
- Women who experienced a spouse's deployment were more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health disorder (37%), compared to women who did not experience a spouse's deployment (31%).
- Lengthier deployments were associated with higher rates of mental health diagnoses, with wives experiencing 1-11 months of deployment receiving 4% more diagnoses and wives experiencing 11 or more months of deployment receiving 6% more diagnoses.
- Mental health diagnoses associated with the largest increases among wives experiencing spousal deployment were sleep, anxiety, acute stress, depressive, and adjustment disorders.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes that provide information and skills about mental health resilience and healthy coping to wives of deployed Service members
- Disseminate information regarding both military and community mental health resources for military spouses
- Provide childcare military spouses can utilize when seeking mental health services

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend collaboration with mental health service professionals and the military to increase accessible, affordable services for military family members
- Encourage education and professional development for professionals who serve military families about the special mental health needs of this population
- Promote awareness campaigns that reduce the stigma surrounding seeking mental health services for military family members

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METHODS

- Data regarding mental health visits and diagnoses of wives of Active Duty Soldiers were gathered from billing and diagnosis codes in electronic medical records from military facilities and military medical insurance records from 2003-2006.
- Military information (e.g., rank, deployment, length of service) about wives' Active Duty Soldiers were gathered from the Defense Manpower Data Center from 2003-2006.
- The relationships between husbands' deployment and wives' mental health visits and diagnoses were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Records were gathered for 6,585,224 outpatient visits by 250,626 Army wives, who were 18-49 years of age.
- Wives' Service members had been Active Duty for at least 5 years and had either been deployed to Iraq (55%), Afghanistan (7%), or both (7%) or had not been deployed (31%).
- Race/ethnicity was not reported due to 53% missing data.

LIMITATIONS

- Service members' deployment dates were not gathered; therefore, the temporal relationship between deployment and wives' mental health visits and diagnoses could not be assessed.
- The generalizability of the sample was limited in several ways (e.g., excluding spouses who were male, over the age of 48 years, married to National Guard or Reserve members, and users of non-military facilities and insurance).
- The validity and reliability of the medical records and diagnostic codes are unknown, potentially influencing results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study with a more diverse sample (e.g., ethnicity, gender, service branch)
- Examine other variables that may influence the relationship between Service member deployment and spousal mental health concerns (e.g., Service member mental health, spouses' additional responsibilities, financial strain)
- Explore whether brief, preventative mental health services pre-deployment can decrease mental health concerns among military spouses across deployment

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