

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Decision-Making During the Deployment Cycle

Martindale-Adams, J., Nichols, L. O., Zuber, J., Graney, M., & Burns, R. (2016). Decision-making during the deployment cycle. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 24(3), 216-221.
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SUMMARY: During deployment, it can often be harder for military couples to communicate and make decisions together. This study examined how couples make decisions during deployment compared to when Service members are home, as well as the role of communication in decision-making. Findings suggest that spouses take responsibility for making many more decisions while Service members are deployed, and communication ability may affect changes to decision-making roles.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall, spouses took much greater responsibility for household, child-rearing, and financial decision-making during deployment than while their Service member was home.
- The percentage of couples keeping the same responsibility for decisions during deployment depended upon the type of decision, with major household (66%) or financial (55%) decisions more commonly kept the same than child-rearing (38%) or minor household (28%) decisions.
- Changes in decision-making may have been partly due to communication ability, with 70% of spouses reporting difficulties and 80% reporting stress communicating during deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate Service members and their spouses about different decision-making methods and possible changes between deployment and when the Service member is home
- Offer pre-deployment workshops for Service members and their spouses to discuss plans and expectations regarding decision-making responsibilities during deployment
- Offer post-deployment support groups for Service members and their spouses who are having difficulty renegotiating their roles in household decision-making

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that help Service members and spouses communicate during deployment
- Recommend professional education, including information on decision-making processes and communication throughout the deployment cycle, for providers working with military families
- Encourage military research organizations to study the effects of changes in decision-making about child-rearing on military children throughout deployment

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METHODS

- Participants were military spouses who were part of a large, national clinical trial on deployment support and were recruited through several military research and intervention programs.
- Military spouses self-reported information regarding decision-making, communication, and deployment in phone interviews.
- Usage of different communication modes and decision-making methods were calculated, and decision-making when Service members were home or deployed was compared.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 161 deployed Service members' spouses, 97% female with an average age of 35.6 years (SD = 8.2), who had an average of 8.6 years of marriage and 1.6 children.
- Spouses identified as primarily White (80%) or Black (8%), with 16% reporting Latino ethnicity.
- Service members from the Army (45%), Navy (37%), Air Force (9%), and Marines (9%) were represented and had served an average of 12.6 (SD = 7.5) years in the military.

LIMITATIONS

- Spouses reported retrospectively on couples' decision-making methods when the Service member was home, which may have biased their reports or reduced accuracy.
- The cross-sectional data do not allow causal conclusions to be drawn about the associations between deployment, communication, and decision-making.
- Interview questions used to assess decision-making were adapted from another survey about household decisions, but the new measure had not been assessed for reliability or validity.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Compare perceptions of decision-making during deployment between military spouses and Service members
- Examine the changes in decision-making methods among military families across time, including post-deployment, to understand how decision-making responsibility is changed or redistributed
- Investigate the impact of decision-making responsibility and potentially related stress on deployed Service members' job performance and emotional well-being

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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