

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Deployment and the Probability of Spousal Aggression by U.S. Army Soldiers

McCarroll, J. E., Ursano, R. J., Liu, X., Thayer, L. E., Newby, J. H., Norwood, A. E., & Fullerton, C. S. (2010). Deployment and the probability of spousal aggression by U.S. Army soldiers. *Military Medicine*, 175(5), 352-356. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-10-00048

**SUMMARY:** Deployment can be a significant source of stress, which may result in post-deployment relationship concerns. The association between deployment and spousal aggression was examined among married, Active Duty Soldiers from 1990-1994. The likelihood of Soldiers perpetrating severe spousal aggression was significantly greater for those who had deployed in the past year, and the longer deployment a Soldier experienced, the higher their probability of perpetrating spousal aggression.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- There was a small, but statistically significant relationship between deployment and spousal aggression, with Active Duty Soldiers being more likely to perpetrate severe spousal aggression if they had been deployed in the previous year.
- The longer Soldiers had been deployed, the higher the probability that they would perpetrate spousal aggression.
- The increase in moderate spousal aggression was not statistically significant, although those deployed 6-12 months were 5% more likely to perpetrate moderate spousal aggression than those who were not deployed.
- The likelihood of severe aggression increased significantly between no deployment and less than 3 months of deployment (16%), 3-6 months of deployment (26%), and 6-12 months of deployment (35%).

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer domestic violence awareness and prevention workshops that discuss aspects of the deployment cycle as a potential risk factor for spousal aggression within military couples
- Provide programs that teach healthy relationship skills and conflict resolution skills for Service members experiencing marital conflict
- Tailor efforts to decrease spousal aggression to Service members at the highest risk of perpetration (e.g., based on number and length of deployments, demographic and military characteristics)

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support in-depth research on the relationship between deployment and spousal aggression, identifying risk and protective factors for intervention
- Encourage awareness campaigns to increase knowledge about the relationship between deployment and spousal aggression and to decrease stigma about seeking assistance for spousal conflict and abuse
- Recommend education for professionals working with military couples about how to detect warning signs of spousal aggression

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## METHODS

- Married, Active Duty Soldiers from 47 U.S. Army installations were surveyed about marital conflict from 1990-1994.
- Anonymous surveys, originally collected for the Family Advocacy Program, were randomly collected from 15% of the married, Active Duty Soldiers.
- The relationship between deployment and spousal aggression was examined, controlling for race, age group, Army rank, and children living in the home.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 26,835 married, Active Duty U.S. Soldiers.
- Soldiers were primarily White (63%), male (95%), and enlisted (83%), and 43% had been deployed in the past year.
- No additional demographic information was provided.

## LIMITATIONS

- Due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, it cannot be concluded that deployment causes increased spousal aggression.
- Soldiers may have tried to respond in the most favorable way; therefore, findings based exclusively on self-report of aggression may be biased.
- Other unmeasured variables may have influenced results (e.g., deployment location, combat exposure, history of abuse).

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine potential mechanisms through which deployment may lead to increased spousal aggression (e.g., relationship separation disagreements, mental health difficulties)
- Explore which types of marital conflict incidents progress to severe aggression and how these situations can be de-escalated
- Conduct a longitudinal study of the relationship between deployment and spousal aggression, utilizing reports from multiple sources (e.g., Service members, spouses, commanding officers, family advocacy program personnel)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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