

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
International
Military

Effect of Multiple Deployments on Military Families: A Cross-Sectional Study of Health and Well-Being of Partners and Children

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SUMMARY: Military families that experience multiple deployment usually face unique challenges. This study examined the association between multiple deployment and family health of Australian Defense Force (ADF) members by having their partners answer self-report surveys. Results suggested that the adverse effects of parental absence due to deployment on children may accrue as the number of deployments increased.

KEY FINDINGS:

- No correlation was found between the physical and mental health of the partner and the number of deployments the partner experienced while in the relationship.
- Children who experienced more deployments were more likely to have behavioral difficulties and less likely to show prosocial behaviors.
- Children's negative behaviors were highest when they experienced more than three deployments.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for military spouses that promote healthy coping and family well-being
- Develop after-school activities for military children that encourage them to express their feelings associated with parental deployment, as well as teach them about effective coping skills
- Create family activities that allow Service members and their children to engage with each other and express feelings about deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to offer support to military children so that they develop effective coping strategies associated with their parents' deployment
- Raise awareness of the potential behavioral outcomes of military children when their parents experience multiple deployment
- Recommend professionals who work with military families monitor partners' and children's physical and mental health during deployment of the Service member

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METHODS

- Participants were selected from nominal rolls of all ADF members who were deployed between 1999 and 2010; of the 3,866 participants selected, 1,332 (36%) consented to their partners being contacted for the research.
- Partners answered a self-report survey about their physical and mental health, the Service members' deployment history, and the emotions and behaviors of their children aged between 4 and 17 years.
- The association between military service and family health was examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,332 ADF partners (Mean age = 41.70 years, SD = 9), and 86% of them were female.
- The military branches that the ADF members served in were Australian Army (59%), Royal Australian Air Force (22%), and Royal Australian Navy (19%); the majority of the ADF members were non-commissioned officers (58%), followed by commissioned officers (35%), and lower ranks (7%).
- The race of the participants were not specified in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- The researchers needed ADF members' consent to contact their partners, therefore the partners who were in the study may only represent a specific type of military spouses.
- The study only examined the number of deployments but not the total length of deployment, therefore it is unclear whether it was deployment or the time apart that contributed to children's behavioral problems.
- The children were examined as an entire group, so it is hard to explore which age group of children is most influenced by deployment compared to other age groups.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how the length of deployment is related to family well-being
- Explore whether children of different ages respond differently to their parent's deployment
- Use interviews to gain in-depth insights of the partners' perception of deployment

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