

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Staying Connected on the Home Front: Communication and Well-being of Civilian Spouses During Deployment

Meek, N. A., Totenhagen, C. J., Hawkins, S. A., & Borden, L. M. (2016). Staying connected on the home front: communication and well-being of civilian spouses during deployment. *Journal of Family Studies*, 1-18. doi:10.1080/13229400.2016.1248856

**SUMMARY:** Survey data were used to examine the association between the frequency of asynchronous (e.g., letters, email) and synchronous (e.g., telephone, video) communication on marital quality and psychological well-being (i.e., anxiety, depression, sleep, and loneliness) of civilian spouses during their husband's deployment. The frequency of asynchronous and synchronous communication during deployment influenced spouses' psychological well-being and marital quality differently.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Synchronous communication most commonly occurred via telephone, while asynchronous communication most commonly occurred via e-mail or Internet.
- Increased use of asynchronous communication during deployment was associated with increased marital quality and psychological well-being of civilian spouses.
- Increased use of synchronous communication during deployment was associated with greater marital quality if it occurred an average of once a week or less; synchronous communication at rates more than an average of once a week or less resulted in reduced marital quality.
- No association was found between synchronous communication and spouses' psychological well-being.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to Service members and their spouses regarding the potential problems associated with synchronous communication (e.g., scheduling conflicts, technological glitches) that may negatively impact communication during deployment
- Continue to offer marriage workshops to military couples to support relationship functioning throughout the deployment cycle
- Offer support groups for spouses of deployed Service members

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of services that offer military families ways to communicate during deployment
- Recommend education of professionals regarding communication issues families may experience during deployment and the impact this may have on spouse well-being
- Continue to provide support for programs that work to increase family readiness

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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## METHODS

- Data from the 2006 U.S. Department of Defense Survey of Active Duty Spouses were utilized for this study.
- Spouses of Active Duty Service members who had at least six months of service at the beginning of the survey period (November 2005) were sent a paper survey in the mail, as well as instructions on how to complete the survey online.
- A total of 11,138 spouses completed the survey. A subset of this sample was utilized for the current study, which included only civilian females married to a male Service member (n = 2,230).

## PARTICIPANTS

- Spouses were married to a Service member in the Army (38%), Marine Corps (30%), Navy (20%), or Air Force (12%).
- The majority of participants were White (67%) and between the ages of 21-25 years (26%) or 26-30 years (22%).
- About 48% of spouses had been married for at least one year but less than six years, and 68% had at least one child under the age of 18 years living with them during deployment.

## LIMITATIONS

- The availability, quality, and platforms (e.g., video, Instant Message) used to communicate have advanced within the last 10 years; therefore, results may no longer be applicable or accurately reflect military couples use and experiences with technology.
- This study was correlational and therefore it may be possible that asynchronous communication frequency influenced marital quality or marital quality influenced asynchronous communication frequency during deployment.
- This study only included civilian spouses and may not be generalizable to spouses in dual-military marriages or male spouses married to female Service members.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the type of content (e.g., conflictual, reminiscent, daily updates) that is relayed via asynchronous and synchronous communication to explore similarities and differences
- Explore how asynchronous and synchronous communication during deployment influences Service members psychological well-being
- Investigate how different types of synchronous communication during deployment (e.g., video versus telephone) influences marital quality

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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