

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Strong Army Couples: A Case Study of Rekindling Marriage After Combat Deployment

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SUMMARY: Couples' relationship quality can be greatly impacted by stressful life events; posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) in at least one partner of the couple can increase that stress. The role of PTSS in couple functioning during reintegration was explored in this study. Findings revealed several strategies of which individuals and couples engaged in to overcome post-deployment challenges.

KEY FINDINGS:

- To rekindle their marriages during reintegration, spouses allowed negative emotions, gave each other time and space to do the work of rediscovery and accept a changed reality, and recognized and addressed individual needs of the other.
- Successful reintegration among couples included: going with the flow, opening your heart, becoming best friends, maintaining trust, and communicating effectively.
- As a family, two strategies used by couples in rekindling their marriages were normalizing schedules and family time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate families on beneficial ways to rekindle marriages following times of transition
- Offer support groups for couples that promote healthy communication, relationship building, and family well-being
- Provide ongoing education regarding stress related to military-life for Service members and their families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support the development of interventions that promote healthy ways for families to maintain successful marriages
- Propose ongoing and longer-term follow ups for Service members who have PTSS
- Continue to advocate for the availability of high quality reintegration support and resources for Service members and their families

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METHODS

- Online recruitment of couples with at least one spouse with PTSS involved announcements in military magazines, websites, blogs, and Facebook pages.
- Couples participated in open-ended, semi-structured telephone interviews asking them about their experiences with deployment and reintegration.
- Common themes on how couples rekindled their marriages following a deployment were analyzed and categorized into separate cases by each couple's experiences.

PARTICIPANTS

- Five couples (10 participants) with high scores of couple functioning, resilience, and couple satisfaction were interviewed for this in-depth case study.
- Participants were predominately White, non-Hispanic, and heterosexual married couples (90%), with an age range from 19 to 49 years.
- Two spouses served in the National Guard and four were Active Duty (one dual service couple); two were non-commissioned sergeants, one enlisted, two warrant officers, and one officer.

LIMITATIONS

- Couples with lower levels of couple functioning and satisfaction were underrepresented in this study, leading to an incomplete understanding of how all couples are affected during reintegration.
- Participants were all currently receiving counseling, thus individuals who did not receive counseling may have different opinions and experiences regarding reintegration and marriage rekindling strategies.
- This study only used data from the Army which limits the ability to generalize the data to other branches in the military.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize samples of couples who are of more diverse races, ethnicities, and various types of relationships in hopes to develop and test interventions that support healthy couples and families
- Include children in the study to obtain a more complete picture of family reintegration in both successful and struggling families
- Include information on other branches of the military as well as Service members with multiple deployments

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