

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Relational Maintenance During Military Deployment: Perspectives of Wives of Deployed US Soldiers

Merolla, A. J. (2010). Relational maintenance during military deployment: Perspectives of wives of deployed US soldiers. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 38(1), 26-Apr. doi:10.1080/00909880903483557

**SUMMARY:** The author of this article conducted interviews with civilian wives of military Service members in order to illustrate the ways in which partners maintain their relationships during deployment and what factors affect relationship maintenance. Results indicated that wives utilized three strategies to maintain their relationship during their spouses' deployments. In addition, both planning and flexibility were important for relational maintenance.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- During interviews, wives described three general strategies they used to maintain their relationship closeness during their spouses' deployments: self-care activities wives did for themselves, interactions with their spouse, and use of support from friends, family and military resources.
- Ninety-one percent of the wives used all three of these strategies to maintain their relationships; the remaining 9% used all except for the social-network support.
- Many of the wives engaged in maintenance behaviors that they had planned out (e.g., talk about only positive things, remind myself of the advantages of the deployment), but were also flexible in using different, unplanned, maintenance behaviors.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military couples about ways to engage in relationship maintenance behaviors during deployment to improve spouses' adjustment during deployment
- Offer support groups to spouses of Service members during deployment to enhance their social networks
- Offer family events while the Service member is deployed for the at-home spouse and children

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs and services that help spouses during deployment
- Support services that ensure regular, efficient, private means of communication between spouses during deployment to help improve couples' relationship maintenance and adjustment during deployment
- Recommend education for professionals working with military couples regarding the possible effects of deployment on couples functioning and spouses' well-being

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## METHODS

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 civilian wives of Service members.
- Participants were recruited through social media at a midwestern university.
- Interviews were between 30 minutes to one hour.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Women ranged in age from 21 to 61 years.
- The majority were White (76%), with 3% identifying as Black, 3% Native American, and six women not reporting ethnicity information.
- Service members were in the Army (27%), Navy (18%), Air Force (15%), Marines (12%), and reserve components (6%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Only civilian female spouses were included, limiting the generalizability of results.
- The small number and demographic background of this sample (e.g., ethnicity, average age, average marriage length) suggest that the sample may not represent all military couples.
- Results were not separated by type of deployment (e.g., warzone, non-warzone) which could influence the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore how often and under what circumstances certain types of relationship maintenance behaviors are used would provide insight to successful maintenance and reintegration
- Expand the sample of spouses to include greater diversity in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, and military status
- Examine maintenance behaviors between parents and children would shed light on how children adapt during parental deployment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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