

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



At-Home Partner Sleep Functioning Over the Course of Military Deployment

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SUMMARY: Readiness and Resilience in National Guard Soldier (RINGS-2) data were used to examine sleep complaint trajectories of at-home intimate partners of Guard members throughout the deployment cycle. Pre-deployment and deployment predictors (e.g., psychological well-being, substance use, family factors) associated with these sleep trajectories were also explored. Four trajectories of sleep were found and predictors varied by group. Understanding these patterns may help identify risk factors which would allow for more targeted intervention to support at-home spouses sleep throughout the deployment cycle.

KEY FINDINGS:

- An estimated 62% of intimate partners were categorized as resilient sleepers, those who had low levels of sleep complaints prior to and throughout the deployment cycle.
- Intimate partners were categorized in the deployment-onset sleep problem group (21.7%) if they had low levels of sleep complaints pre-deployment but showed increasing complaints throughout the deployment cycle but declined post-deployment.
- Almost 10% of intimate partners showed improved sleep throughout the deployment cycle, while 7% showed patterns of chronic sleep issues both prior to and throughout the deployment cycle.
- Pre-deployment family stressors and increased depressive symptoms were significantly related to sleep problems for all groups reporting sleep complaints; increased alcohol use during deployment was predictive of spouses who had deployment-onset sleep issues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military couples about how family stressors related to deployment can influence sleep patterns
- Offer workshops to military spouses pre-deployment that focus on ways to enhance healthy sleep behaviors throughout the deployment cycle
- Disseminate information regarding resources and services available to military spouses during deployment to help them cope with deployment-related stressors

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that provide assistance to military families throughout the deployment cycle
- Recommend collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to support military spouses throughout the deployment cycle
- Recommend education for service providers about the possible added stressors of deployment on military families and how these stressors can influence military spouses sleep and well-being

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METHODS

- Participants were part of the RINGS-2 project; participants were recruited during mandatory Family Preparation Academies, where Soldiers could nominate their intimate partners (married or cohabitating) to participate.
- Data were collected at four different time points throughout the deployment cycle: 2-5 months pre-deployment (Time 1), 4 months deployment (Time 2), 8 months deployment (Time 3), and 2-3 month post-deployment (Time 4).
- Baseline data were collected during recruitment and follow-up data were collected via survey measures mailed to participants.
- A total of 824 intimate partners completed baseline data pre-deployment, 608 intimate partners (74%) completed Time 2 measures, 582 partners (71%) completed Time 3 measures, and 487 partners (59%) completed Time 4 measures.

PARTICIPANTS

- Intimate partners were included in the final sample if they completed the baseline measures and at least one post-baseline survey ($n = 686$).
- A total of 528 participants were married and 158 were in a cohabitating relationship with a National Guard Soldier.
- The majority of partners were female (98%), White (94%), and were on average 31 years old.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample only included intimate partners of National Guard Soldiers; therefore results may not be generalizable to other branches of the military.
- The study did not include a validated sleep-specific measure, which may have been able to capture additional sleep complaints related to deployment stressors.
- Data may not be representative of all Guard spouses' sleep trajectories because there were differences found between intimate partners who completed baseline measures and at least one post-baseline measure and those who did not: non-responders were racial minorities and younger.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine whether similar factors (e.g., family stress, spouse well-being, substance use) influence sleep trajectories of Active Duty military spouses
- Examine how programs can effectively promote healthy sleep behaviors among military families
- Explore how other military-specific stressors, such as relocations, influence military spouses sleep trajectories

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