

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Gone to War: Have Deployments Increased Divorces?

Negrusa, S., Negrusa, B., & Hosek, J. (2014). Gone to war: Have deployments increased divorces? *Journal of Population Economics*, 27, 473–496. doi:10.1007/s00148-013-0485-5

**SUMMARY:** Due to the high rate of deployment in recent years, it is important to study the relationship between deployment and Service members' divorce rates. This study analyzed the deployment and marital data of 462,444 Service members between 1999 and 2008 to examine the causal relationship between deployment and divorce. Results indicated a negative effect of deployment on marriage and suggested that couples married before 9/11, female Service members, and dual-military families were more subjected to the negative impact of deployment than others.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- The risk of divorce increased with the increase of cumulative deployment time; this was true for both hostile (indicated by the receipt of “hostile fire/imminent danger pay”) and non-hostile deployment, with the former having a stronger impact on divorce than the latter.
- Couples married before 9/11 were more likely to divorce than couples married after 9/11, which may be because they expected a lower risk of deployment when they were married.
- Compared to male Service members and military families with only one person in the military, deployment had a larger impact on divorce for female Service members and dual-military families.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide marriage education classes for Service members and their spouses to promote marital well-being
- Develop marriage education workshops especially for female Service members and dual-military families who are at a high risk for marital problems due to deployment
- Host fun family activities before and after deployments so that Service members, their spouses, and children can bond with each other

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support new recruitment orientations so that all new Service members and their spouses have a realistic expectation of the risk of deployment upon entering the military
- Encourage the development and continuation of marriage education workshops especially for dual-military families and families with female Service members
- Recommend education of professionals on common stressors that military couples encounter during deployment and how to help military couples cope with this stress

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## METHODS

- Data were obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center's Proxy Perstempo and the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. Any enlisted Service members who started their military services and entered into marriage between March 1999 and June 2008 were included in the study.
- Service members' deployment, marital, and demographic information were collected in the study.
- Data were analyzed to examine the relationship between deployment and divorce rates.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 462,444 enlisted Service members; the average age of participants at first marriage was 22.05 years, and 20% of the sample were female.
- The majority of participants were White (61%), followed by Black (17%) and Latino (10%); the race/ethnicity of the other 12% of participants was not specified.
- The military branches participants served in were Army (29%), Navy (28%), Air Force (27%), and Marines (16%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Only enlisted Service members were included in the study; therefore, caution must be taken to generalize the results to officers.
- Length of marriage was not taken into consideration; therefore, the finding that couples who married before 9/11 were more likely to divorce than couples who married after 9/11 could be possibly due to the fact that those couples were married longer.
- The study did not distinguish between Service members who were married once and those who were married multiple times, which may limit an accurate description of the relationship between deployment and divorce.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore factors other than deployment that may contribute to divorce in the military
- Recruit both officers and enlisted Service members so that the results can be better generalized
- Examine ways that help military families to cope with marital stress associated with deployment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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