

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Is Military Deployment a Risk Factor for Maternal Depression?

Nguyen, S., LeardMann, C. A., Smith, B., Conlin, A. M. S., Slymen, D. J., Hooper, T. I., & Smith, T.C. (2013). Is military deployment a risk factor for maternal depression? *Journal of Women's Health*, 22(1), 18-Sep. doi:10.1089/jwh.2012.3606

**SUMMARY:** Survey data were used to examine the relationships among deployment (before and after childbirth), combat exposure, and maternal depression with a sample of female Active Duty Service members. Women who deployed and reported combat exposure after giving birth were at increased risk of depression compared to non-deployed female Service members who gave birth.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members who deployed and reported combat-associated exposures after childbirth were significantly more likely to screen positive for maternal depression than Service members who did not deploy after childbirth.
- Deployment before childbirth, regardless of combat exposure, was not significantly associated with maternal depression.
- At follow-up, 11% of the Service members screened positive for depression; of those with depression, 58% also screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide additional depression screens for female Service members who deploy with combat exposure after childbirth
- Include information regarding maternal risk factor for mental health issues during post-deployment reintegration workshops
- Disseminate information regarding the services and resources available to Service members and their families post-deployment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide support for reintegration and debriefing programs to prevent mental health problems and provide early intervention for deployed Service members
- Continue to support programs that offer services to female Service members with children during and after deployment
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based services to offer seamless care to Service members coping with mental health issues following deployment

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## METHODS

- This study used data from the Millennium Cohort Study comprised of a random sample of U.S. Military personnel surveyed every three years.
- Participants included Active Duty female Service members who completed a baseline survey and at least one follow-up questionnaire between 2001 and 2008, and who had a child between baseline and follow-up.
- Demographic and military-specific data (e.g., service branch and component) were obtained via electronic personnel files.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,660 female Service members who gave birth between 2001 and 2008.
- The majority of participants were White and born between 1970-1979.
- Most female Service members who deployed both prior to and after childbirth were enlisted Army or Air Force members.

## LIMITATIONS

- Studies could replicate this methodology with National Guard and Reserve personnel.
- Loss to follow-up may have impacted these results.
- Reservists and National Guard Service members were not included, nor were those women with non-singleton births; relationships may differ in these groups.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Continue to assess the effectiveness of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration program
- Explore why female Army Service members are at an increased risk for maternal depression compared to other Service branches
- Examine the prevalence of maternal depression among samples of Reserve and Guard members or with a more ethnically diverse sample of Service members

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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