

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Internal and External Adaptation in Army Families: Lessons From Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm

Pittman, J. F., Kerpelman, J. L., & McFadyen, J. M. (2004). Internal and external adaptation in Army families: Lessons from Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. *Family Relations*, 53(3), 249-260. doi:10.1111/j.0197-6664.2004.0001.x

SUMMARY: Survey data were used to examine post-deployment coping on internal (e.g., communication, marital quality, child rearing) and external (families response to work-life interference and willingness to make accommodations for these demands) outcome of Army families reunited after a member's deployment for Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm (ODS/S). In addition, this study examined whether and how family support services influenced families' adaptation outcomes. Results indicated families' experiences with support services and unit-level support influenced their ability to cope adaptively with deployment and post-deployment military demands.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Successful coping in the deployment period predicted greater internal and external adaptive outcomes during post-deployment reunions.
- When families were satisfied with family support services, they were better able to cope adaptively during deployment and cope with military-related demands post-deployment.
- Positive family service experiences during deployment increased families' perception of unit-level support, which led to more positive internal and external adaptive outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military families regarding coping strategies and stress management to help families manage deployment and post-deployment stressors
- Offer pre- and post-deployment workshops to help families understand the deployment cycle and the effects of deployment on Service member and military family functioning
- Disseminate information regarding programs and services available to military families when a Service member is deployed

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that offer resources and services to families throughout the deployment cycle
- Recommend that military leadership be informed how they can support military families throughout the deployment cycle and make appropriate referrals
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs that support military families during pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration

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METHODS

- Data were from the 1992 Survey of Army Families II, which assessed personal and family adaptation during deployment, use of community and unit services, family reunification, and family adaptation following reunification.
- Participants included civilian wives of active duty Army members, who had been deployed for at least one month because of ODS/S, and who had been reunited following deployment for at least two months.
- Participants who left 5% or more of the survey blank were excluded from the study.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 1,064 civilian wives, who were mostly White (79%), with a mean age of 31 years.
- Participants had been married to their Soldier for an average of eight and a half years, and 73% had children.
- The average length of service for Soldiers was 11 years; most Soldiers were enlisted personnel (55%).

LIMITATIONS

- Those that participated in the survey may have been functioning better (or worse) than those who did not participate, which could influence the results.
- Only civilian wives of Active Duty Army members were included in this study, limiting the generalizability of the results.
- The use of self-report measures means that participants could have responded in a way that did not accurately reflect their experience, which could influence the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study using longitudinal study designs to better understand the long-term effects of deployment on family adaptation
- Investigate unit-level characteristics to better understand how unit leader support influences families' perceptions of leadership support
- Examine the effectiveness of military programs aimed at enhancing family readiness prior to deployment and program focused on helping families reintegrate following a deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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