

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Marines

The Role of Online Communication in the Lives of Military Spouses

Rea, J., Behnke, A., Huff, N., & Allen, K. (2015). The role of online communication in the lives of military spouses. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 37(3), 329-339. doi:10.1007/s10591-015-9346-6

SUMMARY: Spouses of Marines who had experienced deployment or extended separation were interviewed to explore use of online social media. Participants reported that social media was their primary method of staying connected to their spouses during separations, but online communication can cause misunderstanding and conflict. Participants shared ways in which family life professionals could use technology to support military spouses.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants used social media primarily to stay in touch with the deployed Service member and stay connected to family and friends.
- Military spouses reported that social media can facilitate open communication during deployment, but some communication can be misunderstood and result in relationship conflict.
- Some military spouses used social media during deployment to share concerns regarding finances, household maintenance, and loneliness with family and friends.
- Spouses reported that family life professionals could be supportive by providing educational tools about maintaining relationships during deployment and teach appropriate online etiquette.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop and post interactive resources on social media for military couples experiencing deployment
- Provide classes for military spouses about how to use social media and appropriate online etiquette
- Create online portals where military spouses can exchange peer support with other spouses experiencing a Service member's deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration among DoD military family programs and community-based organizations to create and support an online resource hub for military couples experiencing deployment
- Recommend professional development for family life professionals working with military families about how to use social media
- Continue to provide resources to support internet access for deployed Service members so they can maintain contact with at-home family members

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited by a Family Readiness Officer, the primary researcher, and snowball sampling.
- Participants completed semi-structured interviews via Skype.
- Questions addressed spouses' use of social media during deployment, and how professionals can support spouses during relocation and separation via technology.

PARTICIPANTS

- Ten women married to Marines who had experienced a separation due to training or deployment.
- Age of participants ranged from 24-34 years (M = 26 years).
- Racial/ethnic composition of the sample included: 70% White and 30% Latino/Latina.
- Length of marriage ranged from 1-15 years (M = 5 years).

LIMITATIONS

- Spouses who choose to participate in the study may have been different (e.g., functioning better or worse) than those who did not.
- Only female spouses of Marines were included in the sample; it is unknown how results might generalize to male spouses or military spouses in other branches of the military.
- Results may be biased due to the primary author's experiences as a military spouse.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore spouses' use of different social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Skype)
- Examine other relationship maintenance strategies couples use during deployment and extended separations
- Focus on additional factors related to relationship functioning, such as mental health, stressors, and relationship history

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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