

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
National
Guard

National Guard Service Members' Perceptions of Informal and Formal Supports: An Exploratory Study

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SUMMARY: An exploration of informal and formal supports that National Guard Service members use was conducted. Using an ecological systems perspective, this exploratory pilot study assessed awareness, access, use, satisfaction, and perceptions of the effectiveness of informal and formal supports in a small group of National Guard Service members. Results indicated that although Service members were aware of many formal (e.g., TRICARE, military supported child care) and informal (e.g., religious services, support groups) supports, use of many of the supports was limited.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants' awareness of formal supports varied from 65% awareness of military child care, to 100% awareness of the chapel or chaplain.
- Participants' awareness of informal supports varied from 72% awareness of social activities, to 94% awareness of health care.
- Participants' usage of most informal and formal supports was reported between never and yearly, and with supports such as military informational websites and TRICARE they reported usage monthly.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop workshops that educate Service members on available formal and informal supports
- Offer pre and post-deployment support groups for Service members and their families
- Disseminate information to community organizations regarding available formal and informal supports for Service members and their families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide support for informal and formal supports that work to increase Service members and their families readiness for deployment or relocations
- Recommend education of professionals who work with deployed Service members and their families on ways to mitigate the effects of stressors (e.g., deployment, reintegration)
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to build awareness about available informal and formal supports for Service members and their families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited during a monthly drill meeting from a National Guard Readiness Center in eastern Washington.
- Participants were asked to respond to the questions about their awareness of, access to, usage of, and satisfaction with eight informal and ten formal supports.
- Data analysis examined percentages and mean responses for survey items in order to assess awareness, access, and usage of the different supports.

PARTICIPANTS

- There were 42 Service members who participated in the study.
- Participants ranged in age from 19 to 50 years old.
- The majority of participants were male (98%), White (68%), and were employed outside of the military full time (64%).

LIMITATIONS

- The sample in this study was small and participants were mostly White men from one region of the U.S.; therefore, generalizability is limited.
- Participants that stated they were not aware of supports were still asked to respond to the access, satisfaction, and usage questions; which could bias the findings around the usefulness of the support.
- Various demographic data such as length of service and deployment were not collected; which could affect the study outcomes.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore, in more depth, the awareness and usage of informal and formal supports with a more diverse population of Service members and families
- Investigate the relationship between length of service and informal and formal support awareness and usage
- Examine why supports are or are not useful and how to improve use of supports for Service members and their families

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