

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Deployment-Related Benefit Finding and Postdeployment Marital Satisfaction in Military Couples

Renshaw, K. D., & Campbell, S. B. (2016). Deployment-related benefit finding and postdeployment marital satisfaction in military couples. *Family Process*. doi:10.1111/famp.12249

SUMMARY: The effect of deployment on marriage is often perceived negatively, and the potential benefit of deployment is relatively less studied. Sixty-seven military couples with husbands who had been back from deployment for over one year completed surveys about benefit finding (i.e., thinking positively in stressful situations), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, and marital satisfaction. Results suggested that wives' deployment-related benefit finding was more influential than husbands' on military couples' relationships.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Reports of benefit finding in Service members and wives were only weakly related to each other.
- Wives', but not Service members', deployment-related benefit finding was significantly related with Service members' relationship satisfaction.
- Service members' PTSD severity was associated with both wives' and Service members' relationship satisfaction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop workshops that help military couples to see the benefit of deployment on their relationships and personal growth (e.g., self-reliance)
- Offer support groups for military spouses who are experiencing deployment of their Service members
- Create family activities that allow military couples to engage with each other and express feelings about deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to offer support to military spouses to facilitate their personal growth
- Recommend professionals who work with military spouses to pay special attention to their needs during their spouses' deployment
- Raise awareness of the importance of deployment-related benefit finding for military couples' relational satisfaction and well-being

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through marital enrichment workshops via a larger study on romantic relationships in military couples.
- Each couple completed a self-report survey at the beginning of the study, and a follow-up survey four to six months afterwards; the attrition rate for the follow-up survey was 31%.
- Measures included posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, relationship satisfaction, and deployment-related benefit finding.
- Associations among benefit finding, PTSD symptom severity and relationship satisfaction were analyzed.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 67 married couples; the husbands were all Service members who had been back from deployment for a little over one year.
- The husbands were mostly White (94%) with a mean age of 35.67 years (SD = 8.49), and they served in the Army National Guard or Reserves (84%) and the Air National Guard or Reserves (16%).
- The spouses were female and mostly White (93%) with a mean age of 33.17 years (SD = 7.81).

LIMITATIONS

- All couples were married with husbands as Service members and wives as civilians, therefore the results may be hard to generalize to unmarried military couples, couples with wives as Service members, or dual military couples.
- All couples were recruited from marital enrichment workshops, so they might be different from couples who did not attend such workshops.
- The measures were administered several months after the deployment, so it is possible that military couples' deployment-related benefit finding may have changed since their deployment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Increase the diversity of the sample by recruiting participants of different race/ethnicity
- Explore military couples' deployment-related benefit finding at different stages of deployment cycle
- Examine factors that influence Service members' and military spouses' benefit finding

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