

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Relational Coping During Deployment: Managing Communication and Connection in Relationships

Rossetto, K. R. (2012). Relational coping during deployment: Managing communication and connection in relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 20(3), 568-586. doi:10.1111/per.12000

SUMMARY: Interviews with female spouses or fiancées of deployed male Service members were conducted to examine relational coping during spousal deployment. The women reported overwhelmingly positive reports of their relationships, and identified mediated communication via technology and open communication as key strategies for coping during spousal deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Mediated communication (via technology) allowed couples to conduct activities together, such as playing games; however, some women valued letter writing as a source of communication and a means of coping with the distance.
- The women reported that talking with their partners through different mediated channels allowed them to keep positive aspects of the relationship intact.
- Spouses reported that at times, they restricted sharing everything to protect themselves and/or their husbands; however, most valued communicating about everything which they saw as important to maintaining the relationship.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military couples regarding strategies to improve communication and minimize struggles while a partner is deployed
- Offer pre-deployment workshops for spouses and Service members to help them find patterns of communication that support effective coping and work best for their relationships
- Provide concrete information regarding the impact of communication during deployment on marital relationship quality

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support educational programs intended to identify and normalize a variety of communication patterns utilized during deployment
- Continue to support services that provide a variety of communication platforms for deployed Service members
- Recommend education for professionals working with military couples regarding communication patterns during deployment

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METHODS

- Online and organizational outreach and snowball sampling were used to recruit female spouses and fiancées of deployed military Service members.
- Semi-structured Individual interviews were conducted either face to face or over the phone.
- Participants had to be 18 years of age or older and currently living in the U.S. while their partners was deployed to combat (e.g., Afghanistan and Iraq) or non-combat zones (e.g., Korea).

PARTICIPANTS

- Twenty-six females with male partners currently serving in the Army, Air Force or Marines were included.
- Partners were deployed to Iraq (54%), Afghanistan (23%), Korea (12%), Kuwait (4%) or multiple or undisclosed locations (8%); 38% first deployment, 23% second, 27% third.
- The majority of participants were White (81%), with an average age of 27.42 years.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was small and limited to female heterosexual partners of military Servicemen which may limit generalizability.
- This study did not make comparisons across different time points or longitudinally, limiting what can be garnered from the results.
- Demographic data and information on the specific interview questions are missing, reducing the validity of results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal research in an effort to further understanding the effectiveness of the different relational coping and communication patterns utilized during deployment
- Examine relational coping strategies during spousal deployment with male spouses or fiancés of deployed female Service members
- Explore how communication during deployment influences Service members effectiveness on the job

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