

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Health-Related Impact of Deployment Extensions on Spouses of Active Duty Army Personnel

SteelFisher, G. K., Zaslavsky, A.M., & Blendon, R. J. (2008). Health-related impact of deployment extensions on spouses of active duty Army personnel. *Military Medicine*, 173(3), 221-229. doi:10.7205/MILMED.173.3.221

**SUMMARY:** Survey data from Army spouses were used to evaluate the association between Army deployment extensions and spouses' health and well-being (e.g., depression, anxiety), deployment-induced difficulties with daily life operations (e.g., house maintenance, childcare), and perceptions of the Army during deployment. Deployment extensions negatively affected spouses' well-being and daily life operations, as well as their perceptions of the Army.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Extensions of deployment had a negative impact on spouses' mental health, including increased feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety.
- Extensions of deployment were also associated with difficulties in daily operations at home for the spouses, such as problems with household and car maintenance, having to quit their job or work fewer hours, and difficulty effectively communicating with their Service member.
- Spouses' assessments of Army support during deployment were significantly worse if they experienced an extension.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops to help deployed military members' spouses learn about available supportive services to cope with the increased household responsibilities
- Disseminate information to military families about how to prepare for deployment extensions
- Offer support groups for spouses of deployed Service members to help alleviate anxiety, depression, and loneliness during extended deployment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for military leaders and service providers regarding the negative impact of deployment extensions on military spouses' mental health
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that support military families during deployment, particularly during deployment extensions
- Encourage collaboration between military leaders and family readiness groups to accurately keep military families informed regarding deployment extensions

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## METHODS

- Survey data were collected via telephone using a random-digit dialing design between January and February 2004.
- Participants included spouses of Active Duty Army personnel who were either currently deployed or recently redeployed.
- Data from spouses of Active Duty Army personnel who were either currently deployed or recently redeployed and had experienced an extension of deployment were compared to spouses who had not experienced an extension.

## PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 798 spouses completed the survey; 355 spouses experienced an extension to their Service members' deployment.
- About 61% of spouses who experienced an extension of deployment were White, while 65% of spouses who did not experience an extension of deployment were White.
- The mean age of spouses who experienced an extension of deployment was 31.2 years, while the mean ages of spouse who did not experience an extension of deployment was 29.8 years.

## LIMITATIONS

- Spouses' functioning prior to deployment and the deployment extension was not assessed, making it difficult to understand the impact of deployment and deployment extension on spousal functioning
- This study only used data from Army spouses and may not be generalizable to other branches of the military.
- Data were self-report, collected via the telephone, and with health screening measures which could bias results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the impact of a deployment extensions on retention rates in the military
- Assess spouses' mental health prior to deployment and during deployment extensions
- Examine ways to promote support service utilization among spouses of Service members during deployment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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