

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Association of Spouse Deployment on Pregnancy Outcomes in a U.S. Military Population

Tarney, C. M., Berry-Caban, C., Jain, R. B., Kelly, M., Sewell, M. F., & Wilson, K. L. (2015). Association of spouse deployment on pregnancy outcomes in a U.S. Military population. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 126(3), 569-574.
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SUMMARY: Relationships between spousal deployment, maternal outcomes, and neonatal outcomes were examined via chart review and surveys of 397 pregnant women. Pregnant women with a deployed spouse had a greater risk of preterm delivery and postpartum depression than women whose husbands were not deployed during pregnancy. No significant findings were found between the deployed and non-deployed groups regarding neonatal outcomes (e.g., birth weight).

KEY FINDINGS:

- Pregnant women whose spouses were deployed were three times more likely to both have a preterm delivery and experience postpartum depression than spouses of non-deployed Service members .
- There were no significant differences in neonatal outcomes (e.g., birth weight, Apgar score) between the deployed and non-deployed group.
- Researchers also compared traditional to group prenatal care (in which a group of eight to 12 women go through their prenatal care together in order to increase social support) and found no differences in preterm delivery or postpartum depression rates between the groups.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes to military families on effective parenting practices with newborns
- Provide support groups for pregnant mothers whose spouses are deployed in order to increase social support
- Offer professional education to community-based obstetric and gynecological providers to inform them of the potential challenges pregnant women may face during spousal deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for Service members and their spouses who are new parents
- Continue to support programs for pregnant mothers whose spouses are deployed
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families so that they can better understand the potential challenges faced by a pregnant woman whose spouse is deployed

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited at obstetrician visits at an Army medical center at the end of their first trimester.
- Prenatal data were gathered by electronic medical records, and postpartum data were gathered at participants' postpartum visit.
- Statistical analyses compared deployed vs non-deployed pregnant participants on both maternal and neonatal variables.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 397 pregnant spouses of Active Duty Soldiers.
- Women were primarily White (64%), Black (17%), and Latina (11%).
- Average age of women whose husbands were deployed (n = 183) was 25.4 years old (SD = 4.7) and women whose husbands did not deploy (n = 214) was 25.7 years old (SD = 4.8).

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was limited to women whose spouses were deployed during the entire pregnancy; findings cannot be generalized to spouses who were deployed for a portion of the pregnancy.
- A screener questionnaire was used to determine postpartum depression; women may have responded in a way they felt was more socially acceptable, which may influence results.
- Participants' spouses were from solely an Army population, which limits generalizability to spouses of Service members in other branches.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate additional factors that may contribute to increased rates of preterm delivery and postpartum depression for military-affiliated women
- Examine mothers over a longer period of time during and after spousal deployment to assess postpartum depression rates at different time intervals
- Evaluate rates of preterm delivery and postpartum depression among female Service members

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