

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

A Relational Turbulence Model of Military Service Members' Relational Communication During Reintegration

Theiss, J. A., & Knobloch, L. K. (2013). A relational turbulence model of military service members' relational communication during reintegration. *Journal of Communication*, 63(6), 1109–1129. doi:10.1111/jcom.12059

SUMMARY: In this study, researchers examined associations between relational turbulence (i.e., relational uncertainty and partner interference), relational communication (i.e., openness and aggressiveness), and relational inferences (i.e., affiliation and dominance) during the post-deployment transition (N = 220 Service members). Higher levels of relational turbulence predicted lower levels of openness and higher levels of aggressiveness during the post-deployment transition.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Less certainty about the state of their relationship for Service members and their partners was associated with fewer positive messages in the relationship from the Service member.
- When partners interfered with Service members' goals, Service members were also less likely to send positive messages to their partners.
- There was less openness and more interference for couples in which both individuals experienced deployment compared to those in which only one individual experienced deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops that assist military couples in navigating post-deployment reintegration
- Provide education to military couples to teach communication skills, such as increased responsiveness
- Offer a range of educational workshops or courses to meet the needs of couples with varying communication styles and challenges

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families regarding the potential challenges dual-military couples face
- Continue to support family programs and activities over the course of the deployment cycle
- Encourage the development of programs that enhance positivity in relationships within military families

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through emails to family readiness officers, flyers at reintegration workshops, and posts in online forums for military families.
- Online questionnaires were filled out by one eligible member of a military couple within six months of post-deployment reunion.
- Existing measurement scales were used to assess the following variables: self, partner, and relational uncertainty; interference from partners; relationship satisfaction; relational maintenance behaviors; partner responsiveness; and appraisals of turmoil.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 235 members of military couples (128 Service members, 107 at-home partners) living in 30 states, with an average deployment length of 11.4 months and an average time home from deployment of 3.16 months.
- The sample included military Service members (98 men, 30 women), civilian partners (2 men, 105 women), and dual-military couple members (11).
- Of the participants, 85% were White with an age range of 19-55 years old representing all branches of the military.

LIMITATIONS

- The study only examined the post-deployment phase of the deployment cycle, and only one partner per couple was eligible to participate.
- U.S. Army and National Guard members dominated the sample, and at-home partners were predominantly women, making it difficult to generalize to other populations.
- These data do not give information regarding what may cause changes in relationship satisfaction or how it varies over time.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include both partners of the couple in order to gain a better understanding of the functioning of the relationship from both sides
- Explore these relationships during other transitions (becoming a parent, career changes) to provide a more complete picture of how military couples navigate transitions
- Include a more diverse sample, including more dual-military couples and a variety of family structures

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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