

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Preparing for Deployment: Examining Family-and Individual-Level Factors

Troxel, W. M., Trail, T. E., Jaycox, L. H., & Chandra, A. (2016). Preparing for deployment: Examining family-and individual-level factors. *Military Psychology, 28*(3), 134-146. doi:10.1037/mil0000110

SUMMARY: The relationship between individual- and family-level characteristics and engagement in predeployment preparation activities was examined. Military families indicated higher engagement in financial and legal deployment preparation, particularly among Active Duty personnel. More professional support was sought when families were experiencing emotional or relational problems prior to a deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Engaging in deployment preparation was most common among Active Duty families who were older in age, of officer status, and reported higher marital satisfaction.
- Talking with a professional about how the deployment may affect their marriage was greater in couples with higher depressive symptoms and lower relationship satisfaction.
- Families who had children with emotional problems were more likely to seek professional support prior to a deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Evaluate the effectiveness and availability of current programs that focus on pre-deployment preparation for military families
- Provide additional support and resources for families who are experiencing problems, such as depressive symptoms, child emotional problems, and marital dissatisfaction
- Implement beneficial strategies that can be shared among Service members and their families, especially with those who have never experienced a deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to help military families to receive necessary mental health interventions throughout the deployment cycle
- Develop initiatives to disperse educational materials to military families who may lack access or awareness of additional support services for all family needs
- Encourage programs to continue to reach younger, enlisted families and those from the Reserve component to assist them in preparing effectively for a deployment

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METHODS

- Families were recruited randomly via mail inviting them to participate in the Deployment Life Study.
- Participants completed a questionnaire that included measures of pre-deployment planning, depression, marital satisfaction, children's behavior, and quality of family environment.
- Statistical analyses were used to test the relationship between characteristics and engagement in pre-deployment preparation activities.

PARTICIPANTS

- Active Duty (86%), Reserve/Guard personnel and their spouses completed the survey (N = 1,524; 19% officers).
- Of the entire sample, 851 were military parents of at least one child age 3 or older (mean child age = 8.9, SD = 3.93); Average age of spouse was 32 years (SD = 7.23).
- Sample consisted of multiple branches (34% Army, 16% Air Force, 17% Marines, & 32% Navy); 88% had a deployment history.

LIMITATIONS

- The data in this study were cross-sectional, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships among individual- and family-level characteristics and engagement in pre-deployment preparation activities.
- The research does not account for the impact of engagement in preparation activities and whether they buffer or mitigate post-deployment adjustment across time.
- There is a lack of information in determining why the families sought participation in pre-deployment activities, especially engagement in financial and legal deployment preparation.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine characteristics outside of the ones examined in this article that may limit engagement in pre-deployment preparation activities
- Utilize the longitudinal data from the original study to examine if there is a relationship between engagement in preparation activities and post-deployment adjustment across time
- Examine if there are differences among families who have a deployment history versus those who have not

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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