

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Implications of Attachment Theory for Military Wives: Effects During Post-Deployment Period

Vincenzen, K. A., Haddock, L., & Hickman, G. (2014). The implications of attachment theory for military wives: Effects during a post-deployment period. *The Professional Counselor*, 4(2), 122-128. doi:10.15241/kav.4.2.122

SUMMARY: Military deployment can have both a positive and negative impact on military wives. Military wives participated in an online study examining the relationship between length of deployment and their psychological distress. There was a significant association between duration of deployment and psychological distress.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Length of deployment within this sample ranged between 6-16 months, with an average length of nine and a half months.
- Length of deployments ranges from zero to 12 month, with an average of six months.
- A significant association existed between the duration of the Service member's deployment and wives' psychological distress, such that deployments over six months led to significant increases in wives psychological distress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to military spouses and families regarding the potential distress they may experience while Service member is deployed, especially for those facing longer deployments
- Offer support groups to help military wives manage the stressors of deployment
- Provide post-deployment workshops to Service members and their spouses that offer strategies to reduce distress during reintegration

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that military leaders consider the impact of length of deployment on military wives' psychological well-being when making decision about deployment
- Continue to support research efforts looking at the impact of deployment on military families and wives
- Support programs that offer mental health services to military spouse throughout the deployment cycle

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METHODS

- Emails sent to military advocacy groups and several military networks recruited females currently married to a U.S. Military Service member who had returned from a deployment within the previous 12 months to volunteer for a study.
- Participants completed a measure of depression and demographic questions.
- Duration of deployment equaled the total number of months the Service member was deployed, from the day he left and to the day he returned.

PARTICIPANTS

- Fifty-eight military wives participated.
- The average age of participants was 31.2 years (SD = 6.7 years); no race/ethnicity information was provided.
- Participants were 57% Army, 22% Air Force, 12% Navy, and 1% Marine Corps; 5% were National Guard and 2% were Reserves.

LIMITATIONS

- The participants were non-random volunteers and the results may be biased.
- The sample is small and appears unrepresentative of typical military wives; results may not generalize.
- The variable assessed (deployment length) accounted for a small percentage of the variance in psychological distress; other unmeasured variables may be implicated.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate the experiences of non-deployed husbands and their distress levels while their partners are deployed
- Examine deployment of more than six months regarding the struggles, challenges, resiliency, and other impacts on military wives and families
- Investigate the effectiveness of military programs and services meant to reduce distress among military spouses during deployment

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