

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
National
Guard

Exploring Stress and Coping Strategies among National Guard Spouses during Times of Deployment: A Research Note

Wheeler, A. R., & Torres Stone, R. A. (2010). Exploring stress and coping strategies among National Guard spouses during times of deployment: A research note. *Armed Forces & Society*, 36(3), 545-557. doi:10.1177/0095327X09344066

SUMMARY: A number of studies have shown that deployment can impact family functioning in Active Duty families; however, less is known about the experiences of National Guard families. This study interviewed nine female spouses of Army National Guard Soldiers in order to understand their stressors and coping strategies. Results indicated that spouses of Army National Guard Soldiers experience challenges that are common to all Service members as well as challenges that are unique to National Guard families.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants reported the following common stressors related to their husbands' deployment: unstable emotional and physical state, child care responsibilities, and uncertainty about future military involvement.
- Several coping strategies were reported by participants: expressive activities, support from family and friends, religiosity and spirituality, communication technologies, and avoidance of the situation.
- Participants reported gaining new awareness in various areas of their lives, including life's priorities, their husbands' roles in the military, world politics, and understanding of other people's situations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for spouses of National Guard Service members so that they can communicate with and support each other
- Develop workshops where military spouses and children can learn skills for new household responsibilities (e.g., repairing household items) during Service members' deployment
- Educate military families on helpful communication skills during the deployment cycle

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage training for civilian professionals who work with National Guard families so that they are more aware of the military culture
- Recommend professional development for professionals working with National Guard families to better understand the unique stressors that National Guard families have
- Continue to promote peer support groups for Service members' families during deployment

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.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were recruited by flyers, newsletters, and word of mouth.
- All participants were interviewed in-person by a female researcher whose husband was also a deployed Army National Guard Soldier; questions were about the spouses' perceptions of deployment on their lives.
- Data were organized into categories and themes to examine spouses' stress and coping strategies during time of deployment.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were nine wives of Army National Guard Soldiers between 21 and 46 years old; the average of participants was not reported.
- All participants were White and were married between one to 25 years.
- Seven of the participants had husbands who were deployed at the time of interview; the other two participants' husband were not deployed at the time of interview.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was small and convenient (i.e., the sample was made up of people who were easy to reach); therefore, it may not represent the Army National Guard spouses population.
- Only spouses of Army National Guard Soldiers were included in the study, so caution must be taken to generalize the results to other military branches.
- The interviewer's husband was also a deployed Army National Guard Soldier; therefore, the interviewer may not hold a neutral point of view and her perspectives may influence participants' answers.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit a bigger sample from multiple military branches so that the results can be better generalized
- Examine whether spouses' perspectives vary at different stages of the deployment cycle
- Examine male military spouses' perspectives about their wives' deployment to explore the potential gender differences

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>