

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

A Scope of the Problem: Post-Deployment Reintegration Challenges in a National Guard Unit

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SUMMARY: National Guard Soldiers are at risk for a number of post-deployment challenges in part due to the rapid transition from civilian to military to civilian duties. Guard Soldiers from a National Guard aviation battalion returning from a one-year deployment to Iraq were surveyed for a wide range of issues they may face during reintegration. Results include mental health symptoms, alcohol misuse, relationship difficulties, and unemployment rates as potential areas for concern for Guard Soldiers, despite low-level combat exposure.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Employment and financial problems were observed in the participants' scores, particularly with participants being more likely to be unemployed at baseline than at 3 or 6 months and also more likely to be behind in rent or mortgage payments at 6 months compared to 3 months or baseline.
- Relationship satisfaction was higher at 3 months than it was at baseline or 6 months, more family reintegration challenges were present at baseline than at the 3- or 6-month marks, and more child behavioral problems occurred at 6 months than at baseline or 3 months.
- Alcohol misuse was present but did not vary in the sample across baseline, 3-month or 6-month mark.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Support Service members and families throughout the deployment cycle, including during the period following the "honeymoon phase" immediately upon returning from deployment
- Offer curriculum regarding role shifting for Service members and their families in order to smooth the transition and family reintegration for both the Service member and civilian spouse
- Provide parent-child bonding activities in order to re-establish connections and aim to reduce child behavioral problems upon Service member's return from deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that Service members be assessed for mood and behavioral health as well as satisfaction with relationship and family life prior to deployment
- Recommend that parenting courses are emphasized in existing curricula for military families
- Encourage more collaboration between the private sector and community-based programs to facilitate job fairs and skill-building workshops for Service members and families re-entering the workforce

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METHODS

- Researchers briefed the returning battalion at their decompression site and later mailed a study packet to each member; 126 Soldiers signed the informed consent and completed baseline assessment.
- Measures for combat exposure, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, aggression, employment status, alcohol problems, relationship satisfaction, and family reintegration challenges were collected via self-report survey.
- Data were collected and analyzed at baseline, 3-months, and 6-months post-deployment.

PARTICIPANTS

- This study consisted of an aviation battalion that returned from a one-year deployment to Iraq and was a part of a larger, multi-unit study regarding reintegration challenges of National Guard soldiers.
- The sample of 126 Guard soldiers was demographically similar to the 2010 Army National Guard population, with an average age of 33.15 years (SD = 8.76) and 88.4% were male.
- The sample was more ethnically diverse (54% White, 4% Black, 9.5% Asian American, 3.2% Native American, 27.8% Other), more educated, and more likely to be married than the general Army National Guard population

LIMITATIONS

- There were no pre-deployment assessments conducted in the study so challenges that participants faced could have been present prior to deployment and not necessarily a result of deployment.
- The study did not include any mental or behavioral health data from the military spouses which can potentially impact reintegration if the spouses are also experiencing their own challenges.
- The sample was drawn from one battalion and data could have been influenced by selection bias as the study had a 42% response rate, possibly leading to having more married, educated, and diverse participants than what is representative of the Army National Guard population.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect and analyze data at pre-deployment and multiple time points during post-deployment in order to understand whether deployment had influence on Service members' reintegration challenges
- Incorporate spousal data with Service member data to learn how reintegration impacts the family unit
- Seek to expand the study to compare National Guard soldiers with Active Duty Service members to examine the impacts of the rapid civilian-military-civilian transition on reintegration

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