

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Hard is Normal: Military Families' Transitions Within the Process of Deployment

Yablonsky, A. M., Barbero, E. D., & Richardson, J. W. (2016). Hard is normal: Military families' transitions within the process of deployment *Research in Nursing and Health*, 39(1), 42-56. doi:10.1002/nur.21701

SUMMARY: Deployment is often a stressful time for military families, and U.S. Service members have been deployed more often and for longer periods of time since 2003 and the start of OIF. This study synthesizes 21 qualitative articles related to the process of deployment among military families. The authors detail important tasks and specific challenges related to each stage of deployment, including pre-deployment, deployment, household adjustment for the family, and post-deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- During pre-deployment, Service members and their families were faced with uncertainty about time and location of deployment and had to prepare practically and emotionally for separation.
- During deployment, Service members balanced focusing on their assignment and continuing family communication, as well as adjusting to receiving social support primarily from comrades.
- Household adjustment for the family during deployment included fulfilling new roles while staying connected to the Service member and receiving support from other military families.
- During post-deployment, families managed reintegration expectations, the need for all family members to feel understood and appreciated, and another shift in roles and responsibilities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military families on useful communication techniques for each stage of deployment
- Provide programs or events that acknowledge the contributions of military spouses and children
- Offer workshops where military spouses and children can learn skills for new household responsibilities during deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of programs to aid military families in early completion of pre-deployment tasks, such as documenting wills and powers of attorney
- Continue to promote peer support groups for Service members' families during deployment
- Recommend education of professionals on common expectations and challenges of post-deployment family reintegration

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METHODS

- A total of 21 peer-reviewed articles, based on 19 data sets, regarding the deployment process among military families during OIF/OEF/OND were included in the review.
- Included articles were published from 2004 to 2013 with a military family sample, defined as a married couple with at least one Active Duty Service member, with or without children.
- Each statement in all results sections of the 21 articles was coded into 104 categories, which resulted in 19 different meaning themes and 14 tasks important for families during deployment.
- These themes and tasks were discussed in relation to each stage of deployment.

PARTICIPANTS

- The samples were aggregated across the 19 data sets and resulted in 874 participants, with 316 Active Duty Service members (80% male), 328 military spouses (99% female), and 146 children.
- Of the 690 participants reporting race, most identified as White (71%) or Black (12%).
- Of the 466 participants reporting branch affiliations, Service members or spouses represented the Army (79%), Air Force (11%), Navy (6%), and Marines (4%).

LIMITATIONS

- No conclusions could be drawn regarding differences in the deployment process between military branches since differences were not reported in several of the articles reviewed.
- Search terms related specifically to OEF were not included in the literature search, possibly resulting in missing relevant articles.
- Reviewed articles were primarily focused on post-deployment, and the conclusions drawn about pre-deployment and deployment are based on a limited number of studies.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine potential differences in the deployment process between the military branches
- Investigate the deployment process among other family structures, such as those with deployed mothers or same-sex couples and parents to understand their unique challenges
- Evaluate which types of family communication are most beneficial in each stage of deployment

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