

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
International
Military

The Impact of Deployment on Female Italian Partners of Peacekeepers: Stressful Experiences and Coping Strategies

Zamperini, A., Restuccia, A., & Menegatto, M. (2016). The impact of deployment on female Italian partners of peacekeepers: Stressful experiences and coping strategies. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22(2), 172-176. doi:10.1037/pac0000142

SUMMARY: Stress related to military deployment among Italian peacekeepers and their families is reportedly often denied or minimized by Italian military officials. This study is a qualitative investigation into the stressors of Italian peacekeepers' wives and partners and the coping mechanisms used to manage those stressors. Participants reported increased stress and negative emotions during deployment, as well as the need for additional services for Italian peacekeepers' families.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Lack of social support was the most commonly reported stressor (95%), likely due to a lack of military resources and aid and many military families moving locations during deployment.
- Partners also reported common stressors of emotional desperation (90%), feeling overwhelmed or confused (80%), and infrequent communication with the deployed peacekeeper (65%).
- Coping strategies focused on changing emotions, including staying distracted (90%), accepting the deployment (80%), and seeking emotional support (65%), were used most commonly.
- Problem-solving coping strategies, such as planning (20%) or actively communicating with or thinking about the deployed peacekeeper (50%), were also reported.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military families on adaptive coping strategies to manage stress related to deployment
- Offer workshops to teach military spouses skills needed to complete new household tasks and responsibilities during deployment
- Connect military families who have recently moved with military programs designed to welcome new families and foster social support

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide social support programs for families of deployed Service members
- Promote the development of programs providing new and more reliable ways for military families to communicate with Service members during deployment
- Recommend professional education on adaptive coping strategies for service providers

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METHODS

- Italian peacekeepers' wives and partners were recruited via email and social media postings.
- In-home, semistructured interviews were used to gather data on participants' stressors and coping strategies related to their peacekeeper's deployment.
- Interview statements were analyzed for themes by both independent coders and thematic analysis software, and statements were grouped into themes and subthemes.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 20 Italian peacekeepers' female wives and cohabitating partners, with an average age of 31 years old.
- The average length of the participants' relationships was eight years, and 40% had children.
- The large majority of peacekeepers had been located in Afghanistan (95%) during deployment.

LIMITATIONS

- The small sample size and non-random sampling makes generalizing to larger groups difficult.
- The methods of the study were unclear, and it is possible that the three participants reported as excluded from analyses for incomplete data may have differed from those with complete data.
- Although the study categorized coping strategies of peacekeepers' wives and partners, no theoretical model of coping was included, resulting in a vague mention of adaptive coping.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the coping strategies military families use during deployment that are most adaptive
- Investigate the effects of availability of communication with Service members during deployment on military families' stress and well-being
- Explore differences in common stressors and most frequently used coping strategies between military families with and without children

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