The views expressed are those of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The Unique Challenges of Military Families
Center for Deployment Psychology
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Learning Objectives
1. Discuss factors that impact marriage, divorce, and relationships in military families.
2. Recognize stressors and risk factors for military families throughout the stages of the deployment cycle.
3. Recognize mechanisms of resilience and protective factors for military families throughout the stages of the deployment cycle.
4. Identify relevant themes for therapy with military families through the stages of the deployment cycle.
Agenda

- The Definition of the Military Family
- Military Marriages
- Military Family Life
- The Impact of the Deployment Cycle on Military Families
- Resources

The Definition of the Military Family

“When one person joins the military the whole family serves.”

Family Demographics

Total Force Military Personnel & Family Members

- Family Members (n=2,978,341) 57.5%
- Military Personnel (n=2,204,839) 42.5%

Military Families

- Dependents
  - Spouses **
  - Children
  - Stepchildren
- Non-Dependents
  - Parents *
  - Siblings *
  - Extended family
  - Unmarried partners
  - Adult children
Military Marriages

“If the Army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one.”

Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>(n=1,065,430)</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married to Civilian</td>
<td>(n=1,030,345)</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Military</td>
<td>(n=109,064)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marriage and Divorce in the Military

- Young marriages
- Marriage/divorce rates
- Impact of deployment
- Marital quality
- Infidelity

Unique attributes of military marriages:

- When the military calls, the Service member must go
- Separation is standard
- Reunification is also a normal occurrence
- Separation from family/friends is common
**Increased Hazard of Divorce**

- Greater cumulative time deployed
- Couples married before 9/11
- Effect of deployment greater for:
  - Female Service members
  - Service members in dual-military marriages

**Marital Quality**

Examined 2003-2009 trends in marital functioning indicators:
- Marital quality declined
- Reports of past-year infidelity increased
- Reports of separation/divorce intent increased
- *No increases observed* in marital dissolution rates

**Impact of Deployment on Couples**

![Graph showing percentage reporting interpersonal conflict](image)

**Evidence-Based Couples Counseling in the DoD/VA**

- Gottman Method Couples Therapy
  - [http://www.gottman.com](http://www.gottman.com)
- Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples (EFT)
  - [http://www.iceeft.com](http://www.iceeft.com)
- Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT)
  - [http://ibct.psych.ucla.edu](http://ibct.psych.ucla.edu)
- Cognitive-Behavioral Conjoint Therapy for PTSD (CBCT) *
  - [http://www.coupletherapyforptsd.com](http://www.coupletherapyforptsd.com)
Military Families

“Military families are families with unique challenges.”

Parental Status

Total Force Parental Status

Military Personnel with Children (n=940,926) 57.3%
Military Personnel without Children (n=1,263,913) 42.7%

2013 Demographics Profile of the Military Community (2014)

“Greedy Institutions”

Both the military and families demand:
- Commitment
- Loyalty
- Time
- Energy

Family Stressors

Normative • Occur for most families • Expected
Normative Military • Occur for most military families • Expected
Catastrophic • Do not occur to most families • Unexpected

Blaisure et al. (2012), Segal (1986)
Normative Stressors of Military Family Life

- Frequent relocations (PCS)
- Spouse employment opportunities
- Separations
- Deployments
- Risk of injury or death

If you knew you had to move your entire household every 2-3 years, how would you live your life differently than you do now?

2014 Blue Star Families Survey

Top Stressors Associated with the Military
- 69% = Deployments
- 51% = Isolation from family & friends

Military Spouse Employment
- 84% (employed) = military lifestyle negatively impacted pursuit of career
- 53% (unemployed) = would like to be employed outside the home

Normative Military Stressors for Children

- Relocation
- Education
- Child Care
- Deployments
Resiliency in Military Children

- Sense of belonging/community
- Adaptable
- Tolerant of diversity
- Responsible/independent
- Respect for authority

Easterbrooks et al. (2013); Hall (2012); Park (2011)

Blended Families

- Children of different developmental ages and stages
- Higher risk of emotional / behavioral problems
- Torn between biological parents
- Two households
- Issues of isolation

Adler-Baeder et al. (2005); Hall (2008)

LGB Families

- 20 September 2011 = Repeal of DADT
- 26 June 2013 = Repeal of Section 3 of DOMA
- Prejudice/Discrimination
- Identity Concealment
- Relocation Issues
- Social Support

Ender et al. (2012); Herek (2009); Oswald & Sternberg (2014)

Keys to Family Resilience

- Family Belief Systems
  - Making meaning of adversity
- Family Organizational Patterns
  - Flexibility
  - Connectedness
  - Social & economic resources
- Family Communication Processes
  - Clarity
  - Open emotional expression
  - Collaborative problem solving

Walsh (2006)
Resilience-Building Skills

- Mind-Body Skills
- Cognitive-Behavioral Skills
- Communication Skills

Mechanisms of Resilience in Military Families

- Psychoeducation & developmental guidance
- Shared family narratives
- Open & effective communication
- Family resiliency (coping) skills
- Effective & coordinated parent leadership

Resiliency Training for Military Families

- FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress)
  - http://www.focusproject.org
  - http://www.focusworld.org
- HomeFront Strong
  - http://m-span.org/programs-for-military-families/homefront-strong

FOCUS: Families OverComing Under Stress

- Training in core resilience skills
  - Emotion regulation
  - Communication
  - Problem solving
  - Goal-setting
  - Managing deployment reminders
- FOCUS World (online resiliency training)
- FOCUS On the Go! (mobile app)
The Deployment Cycle & Its Impact on Family Members

Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Pre-Deployment

Post-Deployment

Deployment

Re-Deployment

Sustainment

MilSpouse Cycle of Deployment

Image courtesy of: Patricia Santiago (2010)
Parenting Cycle of Deployment

Pre-Deployment
- Looking Ahead
- Saying Goodbye

Deployment
- Parenting (War Zone / Home Front)
- Surviving the Home Stretch

Post-Deployment
- Facing Reality
- Moving Forward

Pre-Deployment Stage
“A holding pattern during which life cannot yet begin.”

Emotional Reactions
- Pre-Deployment
- Grief
- Detachment
- Conflict

Parenting
- Looking Ahead
  - How/when to communicate with children about impending departure
  - Handling feelings & responding to children
- Saying Goodbye
  - Importance of saying goodbye face-to-face
Helping Families

- Facilitate communication
  - Sharing of feelings
  - Discussion of expectations
- Foster connection
- Teach positive coping skills
- Emphasize the importance of support
- Help couples address practical issues
- Discuss parenting issues

Helping Children

- Encourage quality time with each child
- Emphasize honesty
- Help parents provide reassurance
- Foster connection
- Create communication plan
- Facilitate conversations with schools/teachers

Themes for Therapy

- Affective Education
- Exploring Roles
- Exploring Unresolved Conflicts
- Expectations of Fidelity

Deployment Stage

“Repeat after me ... I can do this.”
**Emotional Reactions**

- **Deployment**
  - Disorientation, mixed emotions
  - Relief that anticipation is over

- **Sustainment**
  - Self-growth, independence
  - Less angry, but lonelier

- **Re-Deployment (Anticipation of Return)**
  - Excitement, apprehension

**Parenting**

- **Parenting from the Home Front**
  - Increased responsibilities = increased stress

- **Parenting from a War Zone**
  - Relinquishment of daily involvement
  - Adaptation of new strategies

- **Surviving the Home Stretch**
  - How will children respond to reunion?

**Deployment Protective Factors**

- Family readiness
- Active coping styles
- “Making meaning” of the deployment
- Strong community of social support
- Acceptance of military lifestyle
- Optimism
- Self-reliance
- Ability to adopt flexible gender roles

**Family Risk Factors During Deployment**

- Rigid coping style
- History of family dysfunction/behavioral health problems
- Families experiencing first military separation
- New to duty location

- Young families
- Pregnant spouses
- Single parent families
- Dual military families
- Families with foreign spouses
- Blended families
- Selected Reserve

References:

- DeVoe & Ross (2012)
- Pincus et al. (2001)
- Hammer et al. (2006); Patterson & McCubbin (1984); Rosen et al. (1993); Walsh (2006); Weins & Ross (2006)
- Blount et al. (1992); Darwin (2012); Huffman & Payne (2006); Kelley (2006); Weins & Ross (2006); Huffman et al. (2005)
Impact of Deployment on Children

- Emotional / Behavioral Difficulties
- Cumulative Months of Deployment
- Child Maltreatment

Parental Deployment & Adolescent Mental Health

Reporting of any familial deployment (parent or sibling) was associated with increased odds of experiencing:

- Sadness/hopelessness
- Depressive symptoms
- Suicidal ideation

2014 Blue Star Families Survey

Top 5 Positive Impacts of Deployment on Children

- Adaptability
- Increased Independence
- Personal Growth
- Increased Resilience
- Increased Pride

Top 5 Negative Impacts of Deployment on Children

- Separation Anxiety
- Worry
- Irritability
- Difficulty Sleeping
- Difficulty Concentrating

Signs of Distress in Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>Moods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>Change in eating/sleeping</td>
<td>Listlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddlers</td>
<td>Crying, tantrums</td>
<td>Irritability, sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Schoolers</td>
<td>Clinginess, potty accidents</td>
<td>Irritability, sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age Children</td>
<td>Body aches, whining, problems at school</td>
<td>Irritability, sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>Isolation, drug use</td>
<td>Anger, apathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chandra et al. (2011); Flake et al. (2008); Gibbs et al. (2007); Lester et al. (2010); Rentz et al. (2007)

Cederbaum et al. (2013)

Blue Star Families (2014)

Military OneSource (2012); Pincus, et al. (2001)
Helping Families

• Facilitate setting personal goals
• Encourage creation of a support network
• Teach stress management techniques
• Highlight the importance of self-care

Helping Children

• Encourage consistency & routine
• Highlight the importance of support from other adults
• Help parents model self-care
• Facilitate good communication
• Emphasize the importance of fun
• Remind parents to let kids be kids

Themes for Therapy

• Deployment: Stress Reduction
• Sustainment: Resilience & Growth
• Re-Deployment: Expectation Management

Post-Deployment Stage

“Hello, Stranger. Let’s cohabit and raise these kids.”
Emotional Reactions

- Elation
- Relief
- Frustration

Reunition

- Tension
- Resentment
- Comfort

Reintegration

Parenting

- Facing Reality
  - Reconnect & rebuild parent-child relationships
  - Role negotiation / co-parenting challenges
- Moving Forward
  - Re-establish family equilibrium
  - Develop new parenting routines
  - Incorporate legacy of deployment

Post-Deployment


Parenting

The Impact of Mental Health Issues

- Depression, PTSD
- Caregiver Burden
- “As goes the parent, so goes the child”

Facilitating Successful Reunions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Member’s Expectations</th>
<th>Partner’s Expectations</th>
<th>Therapist’s Role (how to help)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isolate vs. great sex 24/7</td>
<td>Fairy-tale reunion</td>
<td>Set realistic expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate return to “old ways”</td>
<td>New routines</td>
<td>Remind that adjustment takes time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated from family</td>
<td>Earned a break</td>
<td>Stress that both made sacrifices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one understands</td>
<td>Drill with questions</td>
<td>Teach communication skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Blaisure et al. (2012); Blow et al. (2011); Flade et al. (2009); Goff et al. (2007); Lester et al. (2010); Tanielian et al. (2013); Saltzman, et al. (2014); Sayers et al. (2009); Saltzman et al. (2013); Military OneSource (2012); Parkinson (2001)
Successful Reunions with Children

Things to remember:
- Children react differently to homecoming depending on their age & relationship with deployed parent.
- Children are often loyal to the parent that stays behind.
- Children may feel anxious about the Service member leaving again.
- Children will wonder if rules at home will change.

Child Development and Reunion & Reintegration

Children respond differently to homecomings and parental reintegration depending on their age and developmental stage.

Themes for Therapy

- Revisiting Family Roles
- Opening Communication
- Creating Opportunities for Appreciation and Caring

Resources
Military OneSource

- Confidential services available via telephone & online
- Comprehensive information on every aspect of military life:
  - Deployment
  - Reunion
  - Relationships
  - Grief
  - Spouse employment & education
  - Parenting & childhood

http://www.militaryonesource.mil

Military Kids Connect

- Online community for military children (ages 6-17)
- Access to age-appropriate resources to support children dealing with the challenges of military life
- Additional resources for parents & teachers

http://www.militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil

Sesame Street Toolkit: Talk, Listen, Connect

- DVDs: Deployment, Homecomings, Grieving
- Website: Military Families Near & Far
- Mobile Apps:
  - Sesame Street for Military Families
  - The Big Moving Adventure

http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/tlc
Department of Defense
2013 Demographics Profile of the Military Community

http://www.militaryonesource.mil
Click on “Reports and Surveys”

Online Resources
Please see Military Families Online Resources Handout for additional military family resources.

CDP Website: Deploymentpsych.org
Features include:
• Descriptions and schedules of upcoming training events
• Blog updated daily with a range of relevant content
• Articles by subject matter experts related to deployment psychology, including PTSD, mTBI, depression, and insomnia
• Other resources and information for behavioral health providers
• Links to CDP’s Facebook page and Twitter feed

Online Learning
The following online courses are located on the CDP website at: http://www.deploymentpsych.org/content/online-courses
NOTE: All of these courses can be taken for free or for CE Credits for a fee
• Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) for PTSD in Veterans and Military Personnel (1.25 CE Credits)
• Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD in Veterans and Military Personnel (1.25 CE Credits)
• Epidemiology of PTSD in Veterans: Working with Service Members and Veterans with PTSD (1.5 CE Credits)
• Provider Resiliency and Self-Care: An Ethical Issue (1 CE Credit)
• Military Cultural Competence (1.25 CE Credits)
• The Impact of Deployment and Combat Stress on Families and Children, Part 1 (2.25 CE Credits)
• The Impact of Deployment and Combat Stress on Families and Children, Part 2 (1.75 CE Credits)
• The Fundamentals of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (1.5 CE Credits)
• Identification, Prevention, & Treatment of Suicidal Behavior in Service Members & Veterans (2.25 CE Credits)
• Depression in Service Members and Veterans (1.25 CE Credits)

All of these courses and several others are contained in the Serving Our Veterans Behavioral Health Certificate program, which also includes 20+ hours of Continuing Education Credits for $350.
Provider Support

CDP’s “Provider Portal” is exclusively for individuals trained by the CDP in evidence-based psychotherapies (e.g., CPT, PE, and CBT-I).

Features include:
- Consultation message boards
- Hosted consultation calls
- Printable fact sheets, manuals, handouts, and other materials
- FAQs and one-on-one interaction with answers from SMEs
- Videos, webinars, and other multimedia training aids

Participants in CDP’s evidence-based training will automatically receive an email instructing them how to activate their user name and access the “Provider Portal” section at Deploymentpsych.org.

How to Contact Us

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