The Effects of Deployment on Military Family Roles

Thesis

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Abstract

The United States Department of Defense is the largest employer in the world, employing 3.2 million people, most of whom are military service members. With spouses and children included, the number of Americans considered part of a military family reaches five million, with about two million military children. Over 50% of service members are married and more than 40% have children. Sixty percent of military service members are deployed at least once, with nearly half of this population experiencing between two and four deployments throughout their military careers. This qualitative study examines the effects of deployment on family member roles through the different stages of deployment (pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment-reintegration). The use of structured interviews and the framework of Role Exit Theory provide an opportunity to understand the changes in roles that military families experience. Families discuss the changes faced as well as the opportunities to try out different roles over a deployment period. Though the family members experienced differences in their ways of adjusting to the different periods of deployment, many showed great resilience and adaptability in the face of major life changes. The responses of participants in regards to roles they wished to maintain or relinquish varied greatly and gave a clear picture of the diversity of these families. This study examines a new element of military family life in considering personal perceptions of self and roles changed because of time apart due to military involvement. The findings will contribute to the knowledge base of military families and to the development of military family supports.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father, John F. Hill, in memoriam. My father was an Aviation Structural Mechanic (Hydraulic) Petty Officer 3rd Class in the Navy during the conflict in Vietnam and is the inspiration for this study.

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Chapter One: Statement of Research Topic

Introduction

The United States Department of Defense is the largest employer in not only the US, but also the world, employing 3.2 million people, most of whom are military service members (McCarthy, 2015). The military extends beyond the active duty members to include members of the Reserves and the National Guard, and the oft forgotten military families. With spouses and children included, the number of Americans considered being part of military families reaches 5 million with 2 million children (Clever & Segal, 2013). Over 50% of service members are married and more than 40% have children (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense (ODDASD), 2014). According to the Defense Business Board, as of 2010, 60% of military service members had been deployed at least once, with nearly half of this population experiencing between two and four deployments throughout their military careers (Punaro, Amandi, Chao, Gross, & Wright, 2010). Deployment is an experience many members of the US military and their families will face.

What exactly constitutes deployment? As defined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, "Military deployment is the movement of armed forces…any movement from military service member's home station to somewhere outside the continental US and its territories." Generally movement from one location to another within the continental US is defined as *mobilization*, however mobilization is considered to fall under the umbrella definition of deployment as well (US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), 2014). Deployments take place for a number of different reasons including, but not limited to: combat,

humanitarian aid, a need to evacuate US citizens for safety, the restoration of peace between parties, or to provide additional security (USDVA, VHA, 2014). Deployment can last anywhere from 90 days to 15 months or more (USDVA, VHA, 2014). In recent years, service members have cited that they are experiencing increased frequency of deployments, lengthier deployments, and shorter periods between deployments (Johnson, Sherman, Hoffman, James, Johson, & Lochman, 2007).

Statement of Problem

Previous studies have shown that deployment of a parent or spouse can have significant negative impacts on his or her family members. These may include, but are not limited to: stress, feelings of loss, fear, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems in children, anger, and neglect of children by the at-home parent (Department of Defense, 2010). The reactions of various family members may change based on age and emotional health, especially for children. For months at a time family members experience separation from their service member and may fear their family member will be deployed into combat (Department of Defense, 2010). One significant element of family dynamics that occurs during deployment is the role or roles that the service member and each family member take on in the family. One theory that explains role changes in deployed service members' families is Role-Exit Theory. Throughout the various stages of deployment (pre-deployment, deployment separation, homecoming, reintegration) family members undergo multiple role changes adding to the impact deployment has on families (Gambardella, 2008).

Statement of Purpose

While considerable research has been conducted on the negative effects of deployment on military families, very little has been done to understand the changes in roles and the effects that this has on individual family members military spouses, and children.. By asking military service members and their families' questions about their deployment experiences in group interviews, this study will add to existing knowledge of deployment impact on families as informed by role-exit theory. It will also provide personal insight from family members about their perspectives, which may assist others in better understanding and intervening in the lives of military families.

Research Questions

With influence from deployment literature and role exit theory the research questions developed for the structured family interviews are as follows:

1. What are the effects of military deployment on military family member perspectives and roles?

2. How does experiencing deployment affect the way military family members view various roles?

3. What impact do role changes that are a result of deployment have on military families?

4. How does Role-Exit Theory apply to military families?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Military involvement leads to a number of significant, at times difficult experiences not only for the millions of active duty service men and women, but also for their spouses and children. Over half of military service members are married, additionally there are those unmarried with significant others, and nearly 45% of these two groups have children (Clever & Segal, 2013). As of 2014, one in every forty-second child in the United States was a member of a military family and statistics show that the vast majority of these children are under the age of 15 (MacDermid, Wadsworth, Baily, & Coppola, 2017; Clever and Segal, 2013). While significant research has been conducted regarding members of the United States Armed Forces, military dependents, and the impact of deployment, very little research has focused directly on the ways that deployment affects the family dynamics and roles of these families.

Stressors

Service members and their families undergo many stressors unique to their military involvement. Many of these difficulties can be attributed to the demands of military jobs, separation from loved ones, frequent moves, un- or under employed spouses, and fear especially if a service member is deployed to a combat area (Lester, et. al, 2016; Lowe, Adams, Browne, & Hinkle, 2012; Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013; Wadsworth, et al., 2016). There exists stress-inducing aspects of military life that are specific to times of war. War deployments generally come with less notice, they tend to be longer, more dangerous, and communication is usually less reliable. . Deployments can cause barriers to communication for a number of reasons

including limited access to communication devices, network shutdowns, and time zone changes (Wadsworth, et al., 2016). Military-related injuries, such as traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), PTSD, and other physical and mental health issues, can increase stress and pain for military families as well (Paley, et al., 2013). Injuries and trauma cause added anxiety to family members back home and complicate adjustment when service members return home. This is especially true for families with young children, as parental stress grows child stress and difficulties coping are also likely to increase (Wadsworth, et al., 2016).

Pre Deployment

For the purposes of this study, pre-deployment refers to the period between when the service member receives deployment orders and when he or she departs for active deployment. Pre-Deployment is the least studied period of deployment despite the fact that deployment preparation plays a role in setting the tone for how the rest of the deployment will go. Evidence has shown that 'active coping', or a series of preemptive measures to plan and prepare for familial separation, is a significant factor that contributes to familial resilience during times of separation and other stressors (Troxel, Trail, Jaycox, & Chandra, 2016). Many military service members spent time talking with spouses and children about their thoughts and feelings regarding deployment to better prepare. Over 90% of families participating in one study reported that couples had discussed deployment and parents had discussed deployment with their children. Many had also spoken to clinicians regarding the future effects of deployment on marriage and parenting to prepare for separation and role change during deployment. Speaking with clinicians provides an

opportunity for military families to get counseling and advice regarding preparation for deployment. (Troxel, et al., 2016).

Active Deployment

Active deployment refers to the time that the service member is actually away from the family in the deployment location that may or may not be in a combat zone. The period of deployment is considered the most explicitly stressful period of the deployment cycle. During deployment military families may experience barriers in communicating with one another, fear for the safety of service members in combat zones, and added stress for the parent remaining at home (Lowe, et al., 2012). As the spouse and children begin adjusting to life without the service member, many family members may begin to experience symptoms similar to grief such as emptiness, pain, and abandonment. These feelings are described as 'ambiguous loss', which is experiencing the service member being physically away from the family but psychologically still present (Laser & Stephens, 2010). The deployed family member is separated from their family yet their absence is a preoccupation for family members. This 'ambiguous loss' can cause an increase in physical and mental health problems during deployment, but may dissipate as the family has had a chance to adjust to their role changes and settle in to a sense of 'new normal'. Eventually service members and their families usually adapt to the separation and fall into a routine.

Deployment is a stressful time for family members. It can be difficult for family members to stay engaged with one another while the military service member is away. This struggle to stay engaged is often caused by physical

separation which contributes to the stress of taking on responsibilities that were previously held by the service member. The service member has been prepared for the worst-case scenarios of deployment to a combat zone, which can lead to increased fear, anxiety or even boredom. One study found that the high demands of military jobs can assist the deployed family member in resilience with heighted fear, anxiety, and boredom by keeping service members busy while deployed. (Delahaij, Kamphuis, & Berg, 2016). Military service members are called to find the balance between self-efficacy and family support. While away it is important for military service members to have some sense of distance from family members since they spend such lengthy periods of time apart. On the other hand however, it can be detrimental for service members and their families to be fully separated and have diminished communication from one another for extended periods of time, especially since deployments are temporary (Delahaij, et al., 2016).

Reintegration

The period of reintegration is difficult to define because it can be different for each family. Reintegration or reunification begins when the service member returns home from deployment to his or her family. This time can last for weeks or even months, as long as it takes for the military family to settle in to what they would consider readjustment to the return of the deployed family member. It is often surprising how difficult the period of reintegration can be not only for the military service member, who was away from home for a number of months, but also his or her spouse and children. There is usually a sense of excitement and anticipation, when the family is looking forward to the service member's return and a

honeymoon phase after he or she returns. This time of joy and excitement at a service member's return is influenced by the changes both parties experience during the time of deployment. Children have grown and may have hit new developmental milestones; the spouse at home has learned to handle life as a pseudo-single or solo-parent and all that this entails, and the service member has experienced possible trauma or injury related to deployment (Laser & Stephens, 2010; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014).

Reintegration can be especially difficult for military families in re-establishing roles within the family unit. Children may have trouble remembering the service member or respecting his or her role as a parent (Laser & Stephens, 2010). The military spouse may find it difficult to let go of a sense of independence that he or she maintained during the span of the deployment, particularly if the spouse enjoyed a sense of comfort from being in control. (Marek & D'Aniello, 2014). Each military family and family member responds differently to the prospect of reintegration and changes in roles that this stage of deployment brings. Despite early beliefs that most military families experience a decrease in stressors during the reunification period, Marek and D'Aniello found that, "current research shows that reintegration issues, such as role stress, role confusion, individual/family adjustment can last months, even years after the service member returns home." (Marek & D'Aniello, 2014 p. 443).

Role-Exit Theory

Helen Ebaugh spearheaded research in Role-Exit Theory in the 1970s and 1980s. Ebaugh defines role-exit as "the departure from any role that is central to

one's self-identity" (Gambardella, 2008). Military service members, spouses, and children's role-exit during deployment differs in families. In one study ex-nuns, experienced deployment to be temporary with clear start and end dates.

Very little research has been done regarding Role Theory or Role-Exit Theory in the last several decades. Role theory centers on the idea that people act in ways that are expected or predictable depending upon the individual's social identity and the given circumstances (Biddle, 1986). However, when the family situation changes through the loss of a deployed family member, all family members exit the roles they are accustomed to and must readjust to new and differing roles and relationships.

A number of perspectives have developed concerning Role Theory over the years. A functional perspective considers pieces of society working together, similar to a machine, in a way that runs smoothly (Mooney, Knox, & Schacht, 2007). This point of view looks at roles in terms of promoting a well functioning social system. The social interactionist perspective considers roles as expressions of personal attitudes and needs of the situation. This school of thought emphasizes roles as being 'informal interactions' (Biddle, 1986). Structural Role Theory categorizes people based on their role within a 'social structure' and interactions with others in various positions. The organizational perspective is based on a bureaucratic view of roles, viewing social systems as "pre-planned, task-oriented, and hierarchical," (Biddle, 1986, p. 73). The final Role Theory perspective is cognitive role theory, a viewpoint that considers the relationships between parties and the ways in which they interact. The cognitive perspective describes roles in terms of the part that

expectations and conditioning play on the development of an individual's roles in a community or system (Biddle, 1986).

As mentioned previously, there has been scant Role Theory research since the mid-1980s. This coupled with the significant research in the field of military and deployment research supports the need for research considering the impact of role changes on military families through deployment. Role-Exit Theory is a specific sub-category of Role Theory that looks at a person's transition of leaving one role in exchange for another (Gambardella, 2008).

This theory has not been studied extensively; however it may be useful when considering frameworks for family members experiencing deployment. One study, conducted by Gambardella, considers Role-Exit Theory and the marital conflict that arises from extended military deployment. In this study, Gambardella's goal was to determine whether or not using role-exit theory in counseling military couples post-deployment would have a positive impact on the couples' ability to adjust to life after deployment (Gambardella, 2008). Participants in this study were each given a 'Self-Identified Role Worksheet' and a "Preferred Role Distribution Worksheet' to promote self-awareness and discussion. Findings from this study were severely limited due to a sample size of only ten couples, however they do suggest that including role-exit theory in post-deployment counseling was helpful for more than half of the participating couples. The methodology of this research in particular guided and informed this thesis as it gave an example of role-theory studied in the context of military families.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Design

This study is heavily qualitative and was conducted using a constant comparative approach research method with the intent of gaining information from the personal stories of military families and their experiences with deployment. Respondents provided information through a 10-question, guided interview informed by a previous study conducted by Gambardella (2008). This research study was designed to gain insight into the changes in roles that family members experience throughout the various stages of deployment: pre-deployment, active deployment, and reintegration/post-deployment. A complementary goal of this study, specifically in the data analysis portion, is to provide some basic understanding of possible trends in military family deployment experiences. It is expected that deployment will have significant effects on military families and individuals' roles. Significant energy went into preparing for this study since the initial goal was to include minors in the family interviews. This caused additional IRB approval processes. The final IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix C.

Participant Population and Recruitment

The initial goal of the study was to have units of participants including a military service member who had experienced at least one deployment, the service member's spouse, and at least one child who was age 10-18 during the period of deployment interviewed together. Interviewing the service member, his or her spouse, and child all together provided knowledge of the different roles played by various members of the family and insight to each different perspective. Having at least three family members interviewed together provided the opportunity family members would interact with one

another as they answered questions and provides each other insight into their experiences as well. Including children in the interviews meant that participants could have been as young as 10 or 11 years old at the time of the interview. Choosing to involve children in this study was a difficult decision to make. It also led to additional wait times for IRB approval as well as child assent and parent permission forms. Ultimately the goal of the study was to understand the perspectives and role-changes of various family members during the period of deployment including minor dependents.

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling, also referred to as 'chain sampling' is a process of recruitment that involves a contact, who is not directly involved in the study, finding initial participants who in turn recruit additional participants (Snowball Sampling). The research advisor had a contact that is the spouse of a military service member and this person reached out to friends and Bible study members to find others who may have been interested in being a part of the study. This contact provided prospective participants with a signup sheet to fill in contact details if interested in more information about the project. The researcher sent general information about the study and involvement to interested parties and set up research interviews. The participant who volunteered to assist with recruitment shared a sign-up sheet with those she believed might be interested. Military family members interested in more information wrote their contact information on the sign-up sheet and the researcher emailed a scripted recruitment email. This recruitment email, found in Appendix A., included the purpose of the study, the nature of the interviews including the scripted questions, descriptions of confidentiality measures and incentives, as well as a link to the electronic consent form by way of a Qualtrics survey. Survey data was collected using an

online survey developed through Qualtrics. Qualtrics is secure online survey software provided through The Ohio State University for faculty and student research. The survey was developed specific to this research. The initial email script includes an introduction to the researcher and the goals of the study along with attachments and links to applicable information and forms. The consent form, in Appendix B., clearly outlines the purposes of and methodology used in the research study, the risks, benefits, and rights of participation, as well as research contact information and the consent form.

Data Collection

Data was collected through FaceTime and Skype, video calling, to obtain interviews with military couples and one individual interview with one couple's son. FaceTime is a proprietary video telephone product developed by Apple. Inc. This application can be used in an audio version or in a combination version of audio and video (Use FaceTime). FaceTime allows users to speak directly with one another at no cost. Skype, a similar application, is an online video conference call service that functions similar to FaceTime. Skype can also be used at no cost to participants (About Skype).

Video calling and recording software was especially useful for conducting interviews with military families because all of the family members that were interviewed lived outside of Columbus, most in other states. Use of this technology overcame the difficulties associated with distance communication and interview recording for future review. A link to the online consent form and the interview questions were sent to all prospective participants so that full knowledge of study information would be shared with those who were interested.

Each guided interview was recorded using Ecamm Call Recorder. Ecamm Call Recorder is trademarked software created by the Ecamm Company for use with FaceTime and Skype applications on Mac or PC computers. The Call Recorder application permits users to easily record audio and video conversations without interference, for later playback and editing. Call Recorder has an initial cost to download but may be used with no cost to study participants.

The ten scheduled interview questions asked of participants are listed below:

1. What were your roles in your family before deployment? / while you were preparing for deployment?

2. What were your roles in your family while the service member (you/your spouse/your parent) was deployed?

3. What were your roles in your family when the service member (you/your spouse/your parent) came home from deployment?

4. Was it difficult for you to get used to new role(s)/changes in role(s)?

5. How did the changes in roles affect you?

6. Are there any roles you wish you had maintained (been able to keep) after deployment ended?

7. What is a role you wanted to relinquish (let go of/give up) once deployment ended?

8. Were there any roles that created conflict within your family?

9. What is a role you enjoy having in your family?

10. How do you think deployment affected your role(s) in your family?

In addition to the scheduled interview questions, interviews began with the researcher gathering general demographic information such as military branch, whether they were career or enlisted, station location while overseas, and the number of children that the couple had at the time of deployment. Throughout each interview, the researcher asked clarifying and additional questions to gain more information about the military family's personal experiences. When the scheduled interview questions were completed, the researcher asked if any of the participants had any further questions or concerns and confirmed the email address to send a $25 Amazon gift card as incentive. Incentive was given to show gratitude for participants' willingness to be a part of the study.

Data Analysis

After all interviews with participants were completed, the researcher and assistants transcribed the interview recordings and began the coding process. Since this research study was almost entirely qualitative a coding method was used to analyze data from the interviews. To begin the coding process, the researcher and advisor individually read through each interview transcription and noted information of interest that pointed to overarching or deeper themes throughout the military families' stories. Together, the researcher and advisor used the constant comparative method to code and analyze data into primarily unanimously agreed upon themes..

The constant comparative method is not used to guarantee universality of results, but to organize and understand the content. It provides a system for analysis of heavily qualitative data and allows a means to develop theory in future quantitative study (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). There are four stages of the constant comparative method when it is used to generate theory; the first is to organize content into applicable categories. After

categorizing data, the analyst may compare and contrast the classifications and their attributes to see patterns emerge. This step may be repeated several times to ascertain a fuller understanding of the content. The third step of the constant comparative method is 'delimiting the theory' or developing boundaries to hone in on a more specific focus. The final stage is writing the theory or specifying fixed categories that the data falls into (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). The purpose of the study was not to generate validated theory but rather to explain and better understand the lives of military families. Role exit theory was used to inform code collected data and in the organization of data and themes.

Chapter Four: Results

Each deployment is different and every military family unique. It is difficult to analyze and organize the nuanced stories and experiences that naturally coincide with the stress and separation that deployment causes. The results of this study are not intended to provide information regarding the military family population at large, however it does give insight into several specific cases. Some overlap in the topics and trends discussed by families are present..

Unfortunately, due to the constraints of this research, the study population looked differently. The final population included four military service members, their four spouses, and one couple's 23-year-old son interviewed separately, see Table 1. All of the military service members were white Air Force officers. The homogeneity of this population was likely due to the nature of snowball sampling that people generally gravitate toward others similar to themselves.

Table 1.

Population Demographics

n=4	Race	Military Branch	Career	Number of Deployment(s)	Location of Deployment(s)	Children at Time of Deployment
Couple 1	White	Air Force	Officer	2	Iraq, Afghanistan	0
Couple 2	White	Air Force	Officer	1	Liberia	1
Couple 3	White	Air Force	Officer	1	Qatar	2
Couple 4 + son	White	Air Force	Retired Officer, Contractor	4	Iraq, Cuba,	2

The effects of deployment on military family member perspectives and roles were rather varied throughout the participants. Most families said that after a short period of time, interactions returned 'back to normal' indicating that many of the role changes were temporary. Many described the functional roles of the household returning to normal rather quickly after the service member returned home. The effects of changes in relational roles that family members experienced lasted longer and were more difficult to examine. Several service members, especially those with older children at time of deployment, described the difficulties of readjusting as they came home. These service members found that it took time to reconnect with spouse and children, and in one case, significant effort to regain the role of shared decision-maker. Overall it seems that while these families have been impacted by their experiences with deployment, many of the role changes have not been lasting.

Experiencing months-long separation provided an opportunity for military family members to recognize and appreciate roles that one another play in the family. The spouses at home learned to navigate the running of the household without their partner, older children took on added responsibilities, and service members witnessed their families grow and change in their temporary absence.

Role-Exit Theory applies to military families during deployment, despite the indication that role changes are temporary. Stepping out of the role of active father and physically present member of the family are examples of military service members exiting roles that, in the context of these families, are generally part of their self-identities. To support the family during deployment older children took on added responsibilities, exiting roles of 'just being a kid' for a little while. The military

spouses also left roles of being part of a team when working with their service member to run the home and raise children. Deployment had significant effects on many military family members and caused need for noteworthy adjustment in some cases.

Pre-Deployment:

Again, pre-deployment is defined as the period between when the service member received deployment orders and when he or she left for active deployment. The preparation period looked different for each family unit. Family 1 practiced roles that the spouse was going to take on, for example in this case electronic bill paying was practiced in preparation of the service member's deployment.

> *For the first deployment we sat down and we even wrote it down because I didn't want to forget the steps, I didn't want to miss any bills.*

For Family 3 the pre-deployment period looked significantly different,

> *It was like full throttle right until we, or until I deployed. There was no like 'okay we're preparing to change roles' our lives were just crazy with so much to do and not enough time.*

The service member in Family 4 also discussed the difficulties of preparing for deployment. In his case it required learning how to balance his role as a father with the constant vigilance required to be prepared for deployment:

> *As a military member you always try to be ready. And you want your family to know that at a moment's notice you could be called upon…But when it comes to family you still have the responsibility or feel you have the responsibility to help out around the house, to help out with the kids, to be there as a parent for the*

kids…I tried to be as involved as possible. But when you get tagged with a

deployment you have to turn that off.

Active Deployment

The time when a military service member is away from home on deployment is generally when family members experience the majority of significant stress and role changes. During this period service members may miss children's developmental milestones or achievements, spouses may or may not view themselves as 'acting single parents', and tensions can be high from fear or changes in responsibilities.

Much of the discussion with members of military families regarding the period of deployment itself centered on several specific topics including: outside supports for family at home, couples working as a team, and communication between the family members. Participants also talked about specific stressors that they faced, adjustment to life during deployment, and what it was like to undergo multiple deployments.

Outside supports. It was very difficult for family members, especially spouses, to experience the increase in responsibility of deployment required. The spouse from Family 3 stated: "

I had no like break really, unless, I'd say that we, I, made a conscious effort to

have a babysitter on call so that if the kids were driving me crazy I could

escape.

When the spouse from Family 2 needed to travel during deployment she said,

I had to tell two sets of babysitters how to run my life.

Having the very practical support of babysitters was essential for these spouses while their service members were gone.

In Family 1 the military spouse discussed how being involved on base and in a Bible study specifically for military wives were both helpful in providing a chance for her to feel understood and supported during deployment. She also mentioned a specific friend, who helped her to adjust early on,

She reached out to me, took my hand and led me, through all of this, and helped me figure out how to access all the base services, so she's still a friend today actually.

Family 3 had a number of family members and other visitors regularly throughout deployment to assist with their two small children and provide support for the spouse:

But we have friends; having visitors probably every other weekend so there was never really a time…when I was on my own for months at a time. Which was really great because we had such great military community and family that came to support us while we were gone.

Later on this wife from Family 3 expounded on her initial comments about being involved in community:

And I think, um, I don't know, I think a big change for me was that once he left I really integrated myself in the community and in the church so I became very busy and I think that's just how I coped with him being gone.

The spouses from Family 3 also discussed the peace of mind that familial support provided for the deployed service member:

One thing that he said before he left was 'I feel good leaving because I know that you have people here.' In the past where we didn't necessarily have that network and military family, it caused some rough times for us so knowing that I was in a better place, our family was in a better place, I think that helped you [service member] to focus a little more.

There was considerable diversity in the levels and sources of external support that military families received during deployment. These supports were particularly important for the wellbeing of the military family members still at home. By taking on some of the responsibilities that the service members were unable to while away, family, friends, and others also experienced indirect role changes as a result of deployment.

Working as a team. Several of the service members and their spouses touched on the idea of working as a team while discussing their marriages. When asked to discuss roles within the family both spouses generally talked about how they appreciate the even distribution of chores and the benefits of working together to ensure that the household runs smoothly. When describing the division of labor within their relationship the spouse from Family 4 stated:

I was the only one who grocery shopped. I was the only one who made sure the laundry was all done and put away. I had to just make sure the house was in order.

The service member affirmed this, adding:

We share those responsibilities. That's the way we've always been in our marriage. Try to evenly. So then [Wife] had to take all that on. In that regard my role changed because I wasn't there to help out.

Families 1 and 3 described their reliance on one another in terms of appreciating the roles that were left to fill while the service members were away. The service member from Family 1 said of his wife:

She can correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like, by her picking up those tasks, that it gives her a better appreciation for the stuff that I did while I was here. It doesn't really work well the other way since I'm not really doing the things that she's doing.

The spouse from Family 3 echoed a similar sentiment:

It made me appreciate having a partner, everyone was like 'Oh you're like a single parent,' and I was like 'no not at all it's like solo parenting,' because even though he wasn't physically there, if something happened at school, good or bad, the kids would show you and you would still have your say in it and I think that was important for them to see…so like even when he leaves now, the boys are just like 'Oh Daddy's going to fight some bad guys'…it's kind of our life.

In the midst of the stressors of deployment and the difficulties of separation, military spouses were able to recognize the ways that the family unit struggled to function while apart. The system or team of the military couple could not continue to run as it had previously, while one spouse was overseas.

Communication. One of the most highly discussed topics across the majority of interviews; communication played a crucial part in lives of military family

members, especially during deployment. The first couple interviewed discussed the difficulties they faced with communication during a deployment in the mid-2000s:

Communications weren't that good. We had one satellite phone that we could use for the 100 of us, our unit. (Service Member)

And there were times, even when we were on the phone, it would be, it would just cut out because a mortar had just flown over the wall or just scary things were happening. (Spouse)

I tried to make sure that I called her, because that was the most important person to contact while I was gone... There were times, even when we were on the phone, it would just cut out because a mortar had just flown over the wall or just scary things were happening... (Service Member)

He would just say 'I have to go' and then the conversation ended suddenly...I'm so thankful that technology has advanced because I think about the ladies back in the day, you know WWI, WWII. They had to wait for; maybe they didn't even get a letter. I was always grateful for the times I did have, that we could communicate. (Spouse)

Communication provided a way for military family members to support one another and share aspects of their day-to-day lives. It also allowed family members to maintain some of the roles that they played in the family even while apart. In stark contrast from the single satellite phone that the Family 1 service member had to communicate, the spouse from Family 3 described an app that kept their service member up to date on what was going on with his family at home:

We do this app, it's called 'Tiny Beans' and that's, that's how we connected while he was deployed. Since we only got to Skype like once, maybe twice a day, that was how we stayed connected. So this app...it kept it in a calendar form and he would go in and look and see 'oh what did they do on this day' you know, that would kind of be a journal of our lives, so we kept that.

It is worthy of note that this family, who experienced deployment in 2016, had access to Skype video chat software to stay in touch daily. In some ways, however, the constant communication was difficult for the service member because it gave him a clear look at the stressors affecting his spouse and children:

Because we're so connected I think that made it difficult because you can see everything that they're going through and know like, oh she's going to do this and she like needs that break at the end of the day when I come home and take the kids, to kinda let her unwind or you know get things in order and you know being connected and watching it was kind of tough because like I know she needs the help.

The spouse from Family 2 viewed communicating with the family as a role of the service member while deployed,

I think his role in the family was to answer Face Time and Skype calls every now and again and my role was to make the household run.

She recognized that communication with the family was the primary role of the service member during deployment and chose to do all she could to keep things running smoothly while he was away.

Participants in the study also considered the historical value of being able to communicate with one another so easily compared to those deployed in previous conflicts. The spouse from Family 1 discussed how difficult it must have been for wives of service members in the past to only receive an occasional letter, if anything, and how precious she views the letters her husband sent:

> *I just, I always think, I'm so thankful that technology has advanced, because I mean, I think about the ladies back in the day, you know, WWI, WWII, they had to wait for, maybe they didn't even get a letter...I still have 'em, I have like a box of my letters from war...*

The service member from Family 4 also discussed the impact that the changes in communication had on his family:

> *I have an uncle who is a WWII veteran and he thought that was the greatest thing because he served through North Africa and Italy and they didn't have that capability...Yeah, he would write letters and he said it would take 3 weeks to get to his wife...He was pretty much floored when I said I was calling from Baghdad.*

Communication has changed the way that military families function during deployment and provided a connectedness that was not available to those in the past. Initiating and responding to communication also became a role that changed for military service members and their families through the different stages of deployment.

Other thoughts. A number of other elements of active deployment were discussed with participants in this study over the course of the interviews. Many of

the military family members discussed difficulty with adjusting to new roles and changes in the family. This often led to feelings of being overwhelmed or for the son in Family 4, a pressure to perform:

> *I was the responsible child because I had to be like the 'man of the house' since I was the oldest...there was definitely a bunch of pressure, definitely a lot for it, uh, and there were some points where it was kind of overwhelming, just a little bit, because in 2008, 2009 I was pretty young so definitely a lot of 'I just wanted to be a kid'*

Spouses discussed taking on the role of relaying information to service members' extend families and keeping them in the loop. One family even experienced a cross-country move while the service member was deployed. Overall the military family members learned to be flexible and what they were capable of handling.

Post-Deployment/Reintegration

Post-Deployment or Reintegration is a stage of deployment generally marked by a number of conflicting emotions and reestablishing a sense of normal or 'new normal'. Family members are often excited to see one another and settle back into life as a family unit. Several of the families interviewed for the purposes of this study reported that they experienced very little difficulty adjusting to life after deployment while others struggled.

Most spouses took on roles, generally chores that they did not enjoy while the service members were away. These were easy for the spouses to 'relinquish' or give back once the service member returned home whether the service member was ready or not. Some of the more subtle roles that spouses took on or were given by

children were harder to return, roles such as making decisions for the family or doing the bed and bath time routine with small children. The service member and spouse from Family 4 described the years it took for things to return to 'normal' after he returned from back to back deployments:

> *We've always had our marriage where we share in the responsibilities equally, so for me to come back and not having that share of say 50-50, it was tough for me...we went head to head on some of it. When I knew I was deploying again, I just had to back down and say 'you've got it again. I'll pick it up again when I get home.* (Service Member)

> *It was hard to say 'oh you're back now, I have to talk it over with you."* (Spouse)

> *It took time to regain confidence that I could take on some of those roles, that I'm here, to make decisions. She was the decision maker and she wanted to keep that. She never wanted to go to committee.* (Service Member)

The service member from Family 3 also discussed the adjustment that his children initially required when he got home:

> *I think that was the biggest change when I got back, that's where the resistance was because they wanted bath time with Mommy, they wanted Mommy to put them to bed...that change in roles, that delay in getting back over to me doing it affected me, kinda made me, it made me sad I guess but at the same time I'm a very patient person, so I just knew it was gonna take some time for the reintegration...we, it eventually got there, but it was, it was just one of those*

things, you look forward to picking all that stuff back up when I get back and

they're like 'nope we wanna stick with doing what we've been doing.'

The stories from these several military families demonstrate the diversity in family member responses to the return of a service member from deployment. For some families it is not difficult for

Chapter Five: Discussion

This study affirms previous findings asserting that deployment is a complex time for military families and that it can impact relationship dynamics as well as roles within family systems. While each family member had a unique perspective on the deployment and his or her role within the family and every participant also experienced a change in his or her roles whether in practical chore-responsibilities or relational and interactive roles. Spouses and learned to cope with the temporary separation from their service members, service members took steps to prepare their families for their eventual departure and/or reintegrate themselves back into the family system after returning home, and children provided company and support for spouse while at home.

Each stage of deployment is distinct and is accompanied by unique challenges for military families to face. Pre-deployment found service members and their families preparing for significant time apart and the exceptional impact this would have on the family system. During the period of active deployment, spouses fought to keep their homes running as smoothly as possible while managing children and responsibilities very much on their own. These military families received support from a number of outside sources that not only provided rest for the spouses at home but also peace to the service members overseas. As mentioned previously, these military couples demonstrate great resilience and discussed a number of times that they divide chores up and work together as a team to parent their children and run their homes. This sense of teamwork became clear while the service members were away and others had to fill roles that were temporarily left

behind. Communication also played a significant role in the lives of military family members during deployment. Service members and their spouses discussed at length the impact that the ability to communicate while deployed had on their relationships.

In terms of roles, most military family members discussed chores and interactions with families to be the most significant of role changes experienced during deployment. Family members did not view mowing the lawn or doing laundry as central to their self-identity, however, many family members did step out of roles in regards to family interactions. One service member discussed missing his role as decision-maker in regard to parenting and the one military child participant expressed that during deployment he was looking forward to 'just being a kid again'.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations that impacted the scope and depth of this study, one of the most notable being the population size and sampling method. There were only four families interviewed for this study, and in those families only nine individuals participated. This is a significant limitation to the research study as it is a very small fraction of a percent of the number of members of air force family members, let alone military families of all branches. This information is only applicable to the families who participated and not the general public.

The use of snowball or chain sampling was useful in this context, however it did limit the study in that participants were requested to join and therefore were not randomized at all. Using snowball sampling may have also led to the lack of diversity within the population of participants. Each military service member was a

white, male, member of the air force, who either is or was an officer; it is likely that the original participants found to join the study were from similar demographic backgrounds because people frequently interact with others similar to themselves.

Another limitation is the lack of any sort of quantitative scaling. The participants did not take any sort of quantitative scaling assessment to provide an objective evaluation or provide comparison of their ability to adjust to deployment or the difference in roles before and after deployment. A measurement of pre and post deployment roles would have given a much clearer explanation of the impact of deployment on roles.

Practice Implications

The results of this research may not be generalized among a larger population, however they can inform the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs of what some military families have experienced through the various stages of deployment. Not enough research on military families or deployment has been conducted. Assuming that these departments desire the best for those they serve, it is logical to conclude that they will conduct further research in order to improve their services. These sections of our government that work with and for service members and veterans should consider the effects of deployment on military families and what resources can be put in place to allow support for members of these communities and their families. The military families themselves can also seriously assess the effects that deployment will have on their family dynamics as a unit, as well as individual roles while preparing for it.

Another minor implication recognized by the findings in this study is that families who experienced two or more deployments expressed more comfort due to practice. This is not to say that the family members found deployment to be enjoyable or pleasant necessarily, but that they had a certain familiarity with the process.

Future Research

There are still many questions left unanswered by this research study. The direction for future research could be to understand attributes of families who have particularly smooth or difficult times navigating deployment. Another future study might be to understand to what extent outside support benefits military family members are overseas, and if the merits are significant, then what could be done to facilitate more families having access to them? On a larger scale it could be useful for researchers to study and evaluate existing federal or state programs, if there are any in place, for effectiveness at preparing and supporting military families through the stages of deployment. Further research could also be conducted regarding role theory as it relates to military families and the benefits or detriments caused by such dramatic transitions and role changes. Research in the future should include larger populations with pre and post deployment measures so that more generalizable data can be captured..

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Appendix A: Subject Recruitment Email

Subject Line: OSU Military Family Deployment Research

Hello, my name is Bethany Hill. I am an undergraduate at the College of Social Work, Ohio State University. I am doing a research project called " with Dr. Linda Helm, and I heard that you were interested in participating.

This goal of this study is to better understand the ways that family life, specifically the roles that various family members play, changes as they undergo periods of separation due to deployment.

Participation in this study involves a group interview - as a family unit. Should you wish to participate, your interview will take place in person at The Ohio State University, in either Stillman Hall or Thompson Library or from a distance using video conferencing software. The interview will be 1-2 hours in length and include yourself, your partner or spouse, and at least one child who was age 10 or older during the time of deployment.

The interview itself will include ten questions, asked to each participant, related to your deployment and the ways that it affected your family roles.

The interview questions include:
1. What were your roles in your family before deployment? / while you were preparing for deployment?
2. What were your roles in your family while the service member (you/your spouse/your parent) was deployed?
3. What were your roles in your family when the service member (you/your spouse/your parent) came home from deployment?
4. Was it difficult for you to get used to new role(s)/changes in role(s)?
5. How did the changes in roles affect you?
6. Are there any roles you wish you had maintained after deployment ended?
7. What is a role you wanted to relinquish once deployment ended?
8. Were there any roles that created conflict within the family?
9. What is a role you enjoy having in your family?
10. How do you think deployment affected your role(s) in your family?

The information you share in the interview will remain confidential. The content derived from your participation will be included in the final thesis paper however it will not be associated with your name.

Any participant may choose to end involvement in the study at any time for any reason. A full consent form will be included in the email if you decide to participate and schedule an interview.

If you choose to complete the study in person you will receive a $25 gift card to Amazon, Kroger, or a Family restaurant (to be determined) that you will receive at the time of the interview. If you participate using video conferencing software you will receive a $25 Amazon gift card electronically by email.

Regardless of full participation in the study, those who come to campus in person will receive vouchers to cover parking garage fees.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Bethany Hill

The following consent form is to be signed electronically at this address. https://osu.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bx7O59MrRMFfPs9

<center>**Appendix B: Parent Permission & Assent & Consent Form**</center>

Title of Research: The Effects of Deployment on Military Family Roles

Investigators: Linda Helm and Bethany Hill

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. This is a research study. Please feel free to ask questions at any time. The purpose of this research is to gain understanding of the changes in the roles that members of military families view themselves as having during the different stages of deployment (pre-deployment, active deployment, and reintegration).

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a group interview where each member will be asked specific questions relating to the roles that he or she had in the family during different periods of the deployment process.

Purpose of Research: The purpose of this research is to gain understanding of the changes in the roles that members of military families view themselves as having during the different stages of deployment (pre-deployment, active deployment, and reintegration).

Study tasks or procedures: Military family members will participate in a group interview where each member will be asked specific questions relating to the roles that he or she had in the family during different periods of the deployment process. Interviews will be audio and/or video recorded for later analysis.

Duration of participation: The interview will take 1-2 hour(s) and any participant may choose not to answer any question and may withdraw from the study at any time.

Description of risks and benefits:
      Risks: Some questions may cause discomfort in causing participants to recall difficulties associated with the deployment process. As mentioned previously any participant may choose not to answer any question.
      Benefits: Participants will have a chance to share their experiences and stories for the pursuit of knowledge and better understanding of military families.

Confidentiality:
      Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be

disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups: Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies; The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices. Interviews will be audio and/or video recorded so that the data may be analyzed at a later date. These records will be kept digitally on a password protected computer and/or external hard drive. The recordings will be transcribed and printed for analysis. Names will not be used to identify participants.

Incentives provided

Each family unit that participates in this study will receive a $25 gift card to the restaurant or activity of their choosing as predetermined by the family. The gift card will still be awarded if you withdraw from the study.

Participants' Rights

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status. If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.
An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subject's research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate or leave the study at any time without penalty. You can skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. Participants have the right not to answer any question that they do not wish to. Any participant may choose not to answer any question at any time.

Any participant may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

Contacts and Questions:

For further information about the study or if you believed you have been harmed by participation in this study, please contact Bethany Hill at hill.1433@osu.edu or 614-745-7671 and Dr. Helm at helm.28@osu.eduor 614-618-3290. For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251 or meadows.8@osu.edu.

Giving Consent.

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form

Partner Participant 1_____

Do you agree to participate in this study?

      Yes

      No

Partner Participant 2_____

Do you agree to participate in this study?

      Yes

      No

Child Participant 3_____

Do you agree to give permission for your child to participate in this study?

      Yes

      No

Child Participant 4_____

Do you agree to give permission for your child to participate in this study?

      Yes

      No

Child Participant 5_____

Do you agree to give permission for your child to participate in this study?

      Yes

      No

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Initial Approval

11/29/2016

Study Number: 2016B0234

Study Title: The Effects of Deployment on Military Family Roles

Type of Review: Initial Submission

Review Method: Expedited

Date of IRB Approval: 11/29/2016

Date of IRB Approval Expiration: 11/29/2017

Expedited category: #6, #7

Dear Linda Helm,

The Ohio State Behavioral IRB **APPROVED** the above referenced research.

In addition, the following were also approved for this study:

- Children (permission of one parent sufficient)

- Waiver of Parental Permission Documentation

- Waiver of Consent Documentation

As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring that all individuals assisting in the conduct of the study are informed of their obligations for following the IRB-approved protocol and applicable regulations, laws, and policies, including the obligation to report any problems or potential noncompliance with the requirements or determinations of the IRB. Changes to the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before implemented, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University's OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378 and is valid until the expiration date listed above. ***Without further review, IRB approval will no longer be in effect on the expiration date.*** To continue the study, a continuing review application must be approved before the expiration date to avoid a lapse in IRB approval and the need to stop all research activities. A final study report must be provided to the IRB once all research activities involving human subjects have ended.

Records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 5 years after the study is closed. For more information, see university policies, Institutional Data and Research Data.

Human research protection program policies, procedures, and guidance can be found on the ORRP website.

Daniel Strunk, PhD, Chair

Ohio State Behavioral IRB