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Michelle Biltz
Resiliency on the Home Front:
Addressing the Needs of Family
And Friends of Unmarried Military
Members During Deployment

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to explore the needs of family and close friends of unmarried military members. Unmarried military members depend on parents, relatives, siblings, significant others, and close friends for support during deployments, however there is limited research available on the needs of this population. The main research question was: What are the needs of family and close friends of unmarried military members during deployment?

A questionnaire was used to recruit participants through Facebook military communities and online military community forums. There were 33 total participants who were asked to identify an unmarried military member with whom they had a relationship with and who had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. They were also asked to answer questions about community and military resources used, barriers to accessing resources, and what they would want improved, expanded or created in terms of resources.

The findings of this research suggest four major findings: Participants are restricted in accessing military resources because they do not meet the military's definition of family, participants reported living too far away from resources to use them and that they often do not know how to find available resources, participants want more available resources that provide support and shared experiences, and lastly same-sex partners do not trust available resources and want a safe space to have their needs met. A gap exists in current research that does not look at the needs of the support system for unmarried military members.

**RESILIENCY ON THE HOME FRONT: ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FAMILY AND
FRIENDS OF UNMARRIED MILITARY MEMBERS DURING DEPLOYMENT**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many people whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

First, I wish to thank Irene Martin for her support and enthusiasm for research that motivated me to take on this study. I would also like to thank my thesis advisor, Kate Didden, for her motivation and encouragement throughout the writing process that was essential to the success of this study. Also, to Sarah Keyes I wish to thank you for providing me with a basis to begin my research and allowing me to build upon your work.

To my parents and fiancé who supported me throughout the entire process and never doubted me, I extend my deepest thanks.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation for those who participated in this study and shared their experiences.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Throughout history, families have had to adapt to deployments during times of war. Particularly, in the last decade there has been an increase in deployments because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Military Deployment Services (2007), 1.5 million military members have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq since September 11, 2001. At the time of the task force, 700,000 children had at least one of their parents deployed (American Psychological Association, 2007). However, the literature on effective programs and support for families facing deployment remains scarce.

Deployments have impacts on the resiliency and coping strategies of the family and friends of the military member. Military families face frequent separations, moves, reunions, and the possibility of the death or injury of the loved military member. Park (2011) writes that high school students in the military move three times more often than civilian children their age. The frequent moves and changes often leave children feeling ungrounded and without a strong social support system. Further, children's school performance and mental health are often negatively affected by deployment. This can have long-term effects on the relationships that these children develop including commitment issues (Park, 2011). Willerton, Wadsworth, and Riggs (2011) found that spouses of deployed military members also face several challenges such as coping with separation, reintegration, and most significantly they are vulnerable to marital

distress and vicarious traumatization. Park (2011) and Willerton et al. (2011) both point to the importance of the family support system in predicting the healthy recovery of the returning family member and the success rates in reintegration. Returning military members are vulnerable to drug abuse, suicidal ideation, and PTSD among other things, but having a strong family support system in place during all stages of deployment has proven to reduce these vulnerabilities.

Although there are several programs in place to assist military spouses and children through this significant adjustment, research remains inconsistent and incomplete (Park, 2011). Most significantly, the little research available has explored the effects of deployment on the military spouse and their children, while overlooking the impacts of deployment on the needs of the family members of unmarried military members during deployment. In the U.S. military, unmarried members currently make up slightly less than 50% of the armed forces (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008). Unmarried military members find their support from family members and their friends, in lieu of a spouse and children. Park (2011) mentions how a strong support system provides the military member with strength and resiliency in the field. Moreover, the support systems for the single military members are often called upon to care for the returning military member (Willerton et al., 2011). Willerton et al. (2011) writes how there is a gap in the research concerning the needs of the unmarried military member's support system that includes the parents, siblings, relatives, and intimate partners.

The study conducted for this thesis was an exploratory study. The study explored the needs of the family and friends of unmarried military members during the cycle of deployment. The cycle of deployment includes pre-deployment planning, adjusting to the absence of the military member during deployment, including the possibility of an extended deployment, and

reintegrating the returning military member into the family system and life without combat upon their return. The reference to family and friends of unmarried military members will include parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, fiancés, partners, and close friends of unmarried military members who are often the available support for these members. The goal of the findings was to assess the needs of this population in order to inform the development of this support system for military members and their families in the future. The primary research question is: What are the needs of family and close friends of unmarried military members during deployment? The next section of this paper will survey some of the prevalent theoretical and social work literature available on this topic. What follows is a chapter detailing the methodology used to conduct the study, a chapter on the findings, and a discussion chapter.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The following literature review consists of six sections related to the study's topic of support needs of family and friends of deployed, unmarried military members. The first two sections provide the conceptual context for this study. The first section provides the theoretical framework, Family Systems Theory that informs the study. The next section offers a theoretical model, the Social Support Model, that will be reflected in the literature review and will provide a basis for the study. From there, the implications of deployment on the family and the services available to them during the deployment cycle are presented to provide the current policy and programmatic context. Next the existing research on the support needs of military children and spouses, as well as unmarried military members during all stages of deployment, is explored and critiqued. Finally, the review ends with a consideration of some of the biases and limitations of the available studies.

Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory, introduced by Dr. Murry Bowen in the 1950s, is based on the concept that families are systems. These systems are made up of family members who are interconnected and interdependent (Martino, 2006). In other words, in order to understand an individual in the family it is important to understand the system to which the individual belongs as this system directly influences the individual's behavior and coping strategies. Family Systems Theory looks at how the individual relates to the other and how the other affects the

individual. Therefore, if one individual in the system struggles with an issue the whole system must find a way to adapt to the behaviors to find a balance. Changes occur to the systems throughout the family life cycle and can become intergenerational; it is the family's goal to find ways to adapt to these changes to keep the system intact (Martino, 2006).

Applying the family systems theory to military families, the military lifestyle of the military member impacts the dynamics of the family system. "Military members are often required to work long hours, be away from family often due to training and deployments...move around frequently, be disconnected from extended families... These factors do not just affect the military member, but also the well-being of the family members and family stability" (Rodriguez, 2007). The stress that the military lifestyle for the military member can directly affect the functioning of the family system and it is only recently that the military has taken a closer look at family dynamics. Rodriguez (2007) goes so far as to say that until the military completely recognizes the importance of the family and view it in systemic terms the organizational and military mission will suffer as the military members, their families, and communities are all interconnected.

The available literature on programs for military families tends to focus on the family system, particularly on the effects of deployment on the entire family unit. Gewirtz, Erbes, Polusny, Forgatch, and DeGarmo (2011); Lester, et al. (2011); and Webb and Terr (2007), explore the impacts of deployment on the family unit and adapt programs and treatments already in place for working with military families. "From a family systems perspective, the deployment cycle represents a change and a challenge to the structural integrity of a family system" (Webb & Terr, 2007). The authors explore the stressors that are unique to deployments including the added concern that the military member may not return from deployment. Other stressors on the

family unit include prolonged deployment, adjustment to trauma, PTSD exposure, and possibility of future deployment among others (Webb & Terr, 2007; Lester et al., 2011; Gewirtz et al., 2011). The literature suggests that families able to cope with the adjustment and utilize resiliency methods have less stress symptoms and provide a healthier environment for the family (no drinking, domestic violence, and less divorce etc.). The family systems approach underscores this literature, as the family unit provides the support and resilience of the members before, during, and after deployment. The articles maintain that a strong family unit provides strength and resiliency during the stages of deployment (Webb & Terr, 2007; Lester et al., 2011; Gewirtz et al., 2011).

The articles discussed above assume that family units consist primarily of a spouse and children and fail to include circumstances where the service member's family unit may be his/her parents, siblings, partners, and/or friends, thus limiting the applicability of the research in these cases. While the immediate family may have a more apparent reaction to the deployment, these models do not include the unmarried military member who would need support from parents and siblings in a similar way that a spouse and children would. Family systems theory would suggest that the partners, siblings and parents of young adults who have not started their own family do constitute a family system that will be impacted by stress and can be supported by the resiliency of the members.

Social Support Model

The Social Support Theory looks at the importance of social relationships and how those relationships influence health and well-being. According to Lakey and Cohen (2000), there are three dominant perspectives in the Social Support Theory: the stress and coping perspective, the social constructionist perspective, and the relationship perspective. The stress and coping

perspective posits that social support, such as friendship, can act as a buffer when stressful life events occur. The example of friendship as a social support can either be physically seen from the friend, such as through advice or reassurance and the social support can also be understood as a perception of knowing that the friendship is available that can help reduce the stress of a stressful situation. Social constructionist perspective suggests that support is a social construction and therefore means something different to everyone and that as a result the experience of support is often a reflection of how others view the individual. Lastly, the relationship perspective advocates that companionship, intimacy, and low conflict lead to healthy well-being and strong self-esteem (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the stress and coping perspective was used when looking at the support provided to military members by their families when they are deployed. In the case of the military members who have been deployed the support, both physical and perceived, greatly influence how they are able to cope with stressful situations while deployed and upon their return. For the unmarried military member, this support that is so vital to their coping strategies comes from their parents, siblings, relatives, and friends.

The support systems of the unmarried military members often need support during the deployment cycle. As previously mentioned not only do the family and friends of unmarried military member need support, but also if they feel supported and healthy they are more able to provide support for the unmarried military member. The social support model supports this reciprocal process and stresses the importance of support to an individual's well-being. As Willerton et al. (2011) points out the support system for the unmarried military members lies with the parents, siblings, grandparents, and close friendships. Therefore, it stands to follow that if these family members receive the support they need they will be able to provide support for

the military member. However, the majority of the programs in place to support military members only include the spouse and children of the married military member reflecting the majority of the research available on this topic.

Deployment and Current Policy Context

The deployment cycle consists of three stages: pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration. During each of these stages resources are available to family members of those deployed, however these resource are often only accessible to spouses and children of the deployed military member. For active-component personnel there is a wide availability of resources available to the family during all stages of deployment as they often live on or near the base. These resources include: mental health care, family support centers, and social clubs. On the other hand, reservists often live off of base in civilian communities. During deployment and times of need the family must depend on community resources such as churches, mental health centers, and friends to find the support they need (Knox & Price, 1995). For the unmarried military member, their family members, even if they live near the base unit, are often unable to access most of the resources provided through the military.

Programs and services to support family members. Several formal and informal resources are available to military members and their families throughout the deployment cycle. Most of the available formal resources are on military bases and geared towards military spouses and their children. These resources consist of family readiness centers and counseling services that help the family through the deployment cycle. Despite the availability of several resources, barriers do exist. First, families are often hesitant to receive services. Children who are struggling with school or behavioral problems are often the initiator for a family to seek counseling, as parents are less likely to refer themselves to counseling (Webb & Terr, 2007).

Second, most formal services on bases are not available for family members of unmarried military personnel. Third, geographical access is also a barrier for reserve military members who are deployed and can live a ways away from their base, thereby limiting themselves and their family members access to the services (Willerton et al., 2011). In the absence of formal resources, the family members often use informal resources such as faith-based services, community mental health, support groups, and online forums and support groups. Facebook provides a strong networking tool as it allows girlfriends, fiancés, siblings, relatives, and others to come together to find support while their loved ones are deployed. Other web-based resources that provide informal support include militaryonesource.mil, military.com, goarmyparents.com, and many others.

Pre-deployment. For military families living on or near a base there are some resources available to them prior to deployment. Each branch has a different name for their family readiness program, for example in the Navy it is the Fleet and Family Readiness Center and in the Air Force it is the Airman and Family Readiness Center. These centers provide resources such as pre-deployment information, referral sources, counseling, and check lists for preparing for deployment. The main concerns for pre-deployment include updating important documents, reviewing finances, and exploring the cycle of deployment with family members (Commander Navy Installations Command, 2012). Another available resource is the Military Child Education Coalition that helps parents and educators plan out the education of the military children while a parent is deployed (Armed Forces Crossroads, 2011). While there are some resources available through the base and the readiness centers during the pre-deployment stage for family members of unmarried military members, the majority of the resources available are for military members

and their dependents (Armed Forces Crossroads, 2011; Commander Navy Installations Command, 2012; Military OneSource, 2012).

During deployment. During deployment families adjust to the absence of the military member while the military members adjust to being in a combat zone. The programs available to military members and their dependents during this stage center on staying in touch, finding ways to spend their time, doing well in school, and counseling when needed. For example, the Commander of Navy Installations Command lists these resources for this stage of deployment: getting to know your Ombudsman (the communication link between the military member and the family members), making friends, helping others, finding a new job, volunteering, managing finances, and seeking counseling. Lester et al. (2011), reports that strengths based approaches and family-centered approaches, such as the FOCUS model are best adapted to military families coping with the adjustments of deployment. The FOCUS model is available to all active duty members and their dependent families on 18 different bases. Assessments are utilized to understand the impacts of the deployment on the family unit such as parent's coping skills and improve education on the stresses of deployment and how it affects both the parents and the children. FOCUS was founded on the idea that these coping skills and education can improve the adjustment and decrease stressors associated with the deployment cycle. Webb and Terr (2007) explore the benefits of family play therapy with military families. They suggest that parents are more likely to seek counseling for their children than for themselves and thus by engaging in family play therapy they can explore the deployment issues the family is trying to cope with. Again these supports from the military appear to focus on the military members and their spouses and children and are located on bases (Armed Forces Crossroads, 2011; Commander Navy Installations Command, 2012; Military OneSource, 2012).

Return and reintegration: When a military member returns home from deployment more adjustment occurs as the family members and military members have both changed during the time apart. Available programs and information tools focus on adjusting to the military member's homecoming and what to expect. Other programs focus on the mental health of the returning military members and encourage family members to pay attention to the signs of trauma and combat stress. An example of this program is Operation Healthy Reunions (Armed Forces Crossroads, 2011). Another focus of concern is the impact of the return from deployment on children and their academics and behaviors that can change following the return.

Empirical Studies on Families of Deployed Military Members

Researchers on military families have carried out few empirical studies, as it is often difficult to reach this population. A quantitative study by Chandra, et al. (2010) examined how military children "manage across social emotional, and academic domains". This quantitative study is an example of a study that was able to reach the military community by working with an organization that already had access to this hard to reach population. The researchers recruited participants from a camp for children whose parents have been deployed and conducted a phone interview with those interested in participating. The study had 1507 participants who were contacted to do a phone interview. The study found that children who had parents who have been deployed had more emotional difficulties than the national averages. Girls were found to have more difficulties with relationships. Length of deployment and the mental health of the non-deployed caregiver were determined to be factors that predicted challenges faced by the families following the initial deployment. Also of importance in the findings was that the length (or undetermined length) of the deployment influenced the difficulties for families during deployment (Chandra et al., 2010). The recommendations of this study were to increase the

support systems for the families, particularly for the non-deployment caregiver, as their mental health is believed to impact the health of the children. Park (2011) encouraged similar research to be carried out and emphasized the need for family support to provide the strength and resiliency to the family unit and the deployed military member.

The majority of the research on deployment and the military family specifically explores the psychological impacts for family members when a parent or spouse deploys. Lincoln, Swift, and Shorteno-Fraser (2008) examined the available findings on children's reactions to their parents' deployment and the associated risk factors (such as domestic violence and neglect) that can accompany (or increase during) deployment and the impact of death or injury on the child. The authors argue that while children and families can be resilient to the deployment, there are risk factors that can decrease that ability to be resilient (Lincoln et al., 2008). The conclusions of this article point to the importance of having programs in place to not only to assist family members but also to evaluate families for the potential risk factors that would hinder family resiliency (especially for the child).

A descriptive and correlational study by Padden, Connors, and Agazio, (2011) assessed the well being of military spouses. The researchers had to go through several boards to get access to the military spouse population. The study not only had to get approval for the study from the review boards and the military installation commander, but further units had to be identified by deployment and the study had to be introduced during a family readiness group for the spouses to decide upon participation. There were 105 army spouses that participated in the study by completing a Perceived Stress Scale, the Jalowiec Coping Scale (measures coping behavior), the RAND 36 (measures well-being) and lastly a Personal Data Form that collected demographic data. The results of the study suggested that military wives were able to cope with

the stress of deployment easier if they had grown up in a military family. Also if there had been subsequent deployments the stress levels often went down during the later deployments (Padden et al., 2010). This research suggests that access to resources may be easier for those who have grown up in the military lifestyle, as they may be more available and more likely to utilize these resources. However, this literature reiterated the many hurdles to reaching the military population and suggests why very few studies have been done on this population, but also the importance of further research on the accessibility of support services.

Family of Unmarried Military Members

A study carried out by a 2011 Smith Graduate student entitled “The Invisible Home Front: Impact, Coping, and Needs Assessment of Family and Friends of Unmarried U.S. Military Service Members Deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan” piloted a study that sought to answer the question “among those who identify as impacted by the war-time military deployment of a valued friend or family member, what is the impact of this experience, how do they cope, and what are their resource needs?” (Keys, 2011). The study utilized a mixed methods exploratory design and utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. As this population is particularly hard to reach, the researcher carried out the study by utilizing Facebook and a few personal contacts that were able to send out emails to military databases. The research design was laid out in five sections consisting of both open-ended questions and questionnaires. Keys (2011) used the Coping Self-Efficacy Scale and the Perceived Stress Scale along with three other questionnaires developed by the researcher to explore needs for services and supports of the participants. Keys (2011) found that there appears to be a strong need amongst the family members of unmarried military members to have resources of support and communication with the deployed military member available to them. One of the main barriers the participants faced was the military’s

definition of the family (as only spouses and children). The research also found that participants were more likely to experience stress and have a harder time coping during deployment than a relative community sample. These findings recommended further research on the needs of this population in coping with the deployment of their son, daughter, fiancé, partner, sibling or friend. The researcher also suggested that future research should “apply this pilot methodology to larger samples in order to generate meaningful, generalizable findings” as this study only sampled 22 participants (Keys, 2011).

Biases and Limitations

The available literature on the topic of military families and deployments suggests several biases. The military’s definition of “family” is a problematic term that suggests families consist of a mother, father, and their children and thus excludes unmarried military members whose family is their own parents, siblings, partners, and friends. Most of the research on deployment focuses on mental health during deployment with significant gaps in the research on mental health and needs at the pre-deployment and reintegration stages. A significant limitation to the research on this population is the difficulties associated with accessing this population to carry out research. Military children are one of the most understudied populations due to red tape inherent in most military institutions. Despite this limitation most of the available studies on military families focus on the children or the family unit and pay little attention to the needs of the parents. Also, the research to a large extent has a bias of omission as very little (if any) research has been done on same-sex marriages in the military and how their families fall within (or outside) of the military definition of family. Lastly, while the studies have collected demographic data, little focus has been placed on the results of the race, culture, and ethnicity of

the participants in the study and how these factors contribute to the stress and needs of these military family members.

Summary

Deployments affect a large part of the population and the effects of the deployment can be felt in all members of the immediate and external family. Little research has been done on this population and even less research has been done on the needs of family members of unmarried military members. As family members are uniquely positioned to provide support and resiliency to the military members, it is important to explore the needs of these families so that they can provide the necessary support and coping skills for service members. Exploring the needs of the unmarried military member's family and friends can provide a foundation for implementing programs to support these families in the future and perhaps develop framework for expanding the military's definition of family.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study explored the needs of the family and friends of unmarried military members during all stages of deployment in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Many mental health services are available to spouses and children of military members, however the needs of family members and close friends impacted by an unmarried military members' deployment are seldom explored in the social work or helping professions literature. Many studies show the positive effects of a strong support system for the deployed military member, however the needs of these support systems must be met so that they can provide this support in return to the service members. The study's target population was individuals who have been affected by a unmarried service member's deployment, including parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, boyfriends/girlfriends, fiancés, and friends. These individuals are often not provided the same services as military spouses and children when a loved one deploys and it was the interest of this study to examine what their needs are. The research question the study sought to answer was: what are the needs of family and close friends of unmarried military members during deployment?

Research Design

The researcher utilized an online mixed-methods questionnaire. The study used a nonprobability, purposive sampling and specifically a snowball method to attain participants from the target population. This choice reflected the difficulties of reaching participants who

have connections to unmarried military members. An online questionnaire had the ability to reach this population and explore the needs of this largely unaddressed population. The mixed-methods research design was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain a quantitative assessment of the needs of the population based on existing knowledge of needs of married service members and thus draws connections to previous literature. The qualitative questions aim to gain a more in-depth understanding of the needs for this population and the uniqueness of their needs, which is limited by a purely quantitative survey.

Sample

In this section the inclusion and exclusion criteria will be described, along with the sample characteristics and a description of the recruitment process.

Inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for the study were: the participant must be 18 or older, read and write in English, and have a military connection to a member of the United States military. The identified service member had to have either been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan since the current war efforts began in 2001 or they may have been deployed at the time of participation. The study also screened to include those participants whose identified service member was not married and those who identified themselves as a parent, grandparent, sibling, relative, significant other, or close friend of the service member. Six screening questions were used to assess whether potential participants met the inclusion criteria (Appendix A).

Exclusion criteria. Those who did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study and were directed to a disqualification page (Appendix B). Specifically, those who did not meet criteria include military spouses, military children, and anyone who was in the military at the time of participation. Lastly, participants who did not complete more than 50% of the questions were not included in the results.

Sample characteristics. There were 33 participants in the survey. The majority of the participants were female, 87% or 29 participants. The participants ranged in age from 18-64 years old with the majority of the participants falling in the 18-30 age range. All participants identified as either Caucasian or White. The majority of the participants (16, 48.5%), stated that their relationship to the military member was as a significant other (boyfriend/girlfriend, fiancé, or spouse not recognized by the military). The remaining participants were either family members (13) or close friends to the military member (4). Nineteen participants reported that their military member was in the Army, 7 in the Marines, 4 in the Navy, and 3 in the Air Force. The overwhelming majority reported their military member was enlisted with only 3 identified military members as officers. Twenty-six participants reported living over 100 miles away from the base unit from which the military member was stationed with the remaining participants less than 100 miles away. There were 20 participants whose military member had been deployed once while 13 had been deployed two or more times to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Recruitment procedures. As previously stated the study used nonprobability, non-random, purposive sampling. The strategy behind this sampling method was to use the researcher's connections to the military community to reach out to the available population. The study was exploratory and using a snowball sampling method the researcher was able to use her contacts and find many participants. Rubin and Babbie (2010) speak of a purposive or judgmental sampling as a way of sampling data from a subset of the larger population, in which the subset is easily defined. In the case of this study, the researcher was able to draw on the military community subset to collect the data found in the study.

The recruitment process consisted of three advertising sources to recruit potential participants: (a) social networking tool (Facebook), (b) Online Military Community Forums

(goarmyparents.com, allmilitary.com, militaryonesource.com, and military.com), and (c) E-mail advertisement sent to personal contacts of the researcher. The Facebook advertisement (Appendix C) and the Military Community Forums advertisement (Appendix D) for the study provided a link to the questionnaire. The E-mail recruitment consisted of a brief synopsis of the questionnaire and the eligibility requirements (Appendix E) followed by a link to the questionnaire. The potential participant was directed to an online questionnaire, where the six screening questions were asked (Appendix A). Recruitment began on March 12, 2012 and continued for six weeks, concurrently with data collection. Recruitment posts were removed on April 23, 2012.

Data Collection

The study asked participants to partake in an online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts and it was estimated that it would take no longer than 30 minutes. Only if a participant agreed to the informed consent, by clicking on a box that says “I agree” at the bottom of the screen, did they continue on to the questionnaire. The questionnaire is based off of Military Family Needs Assessment survey utilized in a report by Huebner, Alidoosti, Brickel and Wade (2010) at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Appendix F). This study looked at needs of the military spouses and children while the service member was deployed. The questionnaire was reformatted to meet the needs of this study and target the selected population, family members, significant others, and close friends of unmarried military members. The questionnaire was reviewed by a few colleagues of the researcher prior to seeking approval from the Human Subjects Review Board.

The first part of the questionnaire collected demographic data from the participant while the following section collected qualitative and quantitative data on the needs, resource

utilization, and barriers to meeting needs related to the service member's deployment. The demographic data, collected in the first part of the questionnaire, was used to get a better sense of who the participants are. The information included age, gender, race/ethnicity, relationship to military member, branch of military, rank of military member, location of participant from their service member's base, number of deployments, and length of deployment(s) (Appendix G). The second part of the study consisted of a needs assessment made up of four parts of both multiple choice questions and qualitative questions (Appendix H). The first part, section A, asked questions about where individuals found information during the deployment(s) of the service member. The second part, section B, inquired about what community resource/service the participant used during deployment(s) and asked which services have been the most useful, what the barriers were to using these services, and what more communities could do to support military families. The third part, section C, explored what military resources/service were used by the participant during deployment(s). The questions ask which of the identified services have been the most useful, what the barriers were to reaching these services, and what was missing or needed changing among these military services. The last part, section D, asked the participant to consider what they would do to help military families, in terms of resources and services, if they were in charge for a day.

Approval from the Human Subjects Review Board was received on March 12, 2012 and recruiting commenced immediately following (Appendix I). The survey was open for a total of six weeks and was closed on April 23, 2012. There were 33 surveys collected completed at the end of this period.

Risks of participation. The study had minimal risks of participation although it may have caused distress for some participants as the questions may have brought up experiences and

memories of a loved one's deployment. Although the participants were not asked to discuss trauma, the questions may have brought up triggers that reminded the participants of trauma or distress associated with the military member's deployment. All participants received a referral list with the informed consent. Before agreeing to the informed consent the participant was asked to print a copy of the informed consent and referral list to keep for their records (Attachment J). The referral list consisted of three resources that the participant could contact if they wanted to talk to someone at any point while taking the survey, after taking the survey, or if they chose not to take it. The questionnaire was anonymous due to the nature of the survey software and if any identifying information was found in the narrative answers it was removed from the data by the researcher.

Benefits of participation. By participating in the research the participants had an opportunity to share what their experience, in regards to mental health and community support, had been during the deployment of a loved military member. Their experiences will contribute to the limited knowledge on the needs of this population. As most research is done with military spouses and children, the participants contributed to a better understanding of this underserved population and will hopefully inform policies and services to address the needs of this population. Lastly, by participating in this research and contributing more knowledge on the needs of this population, the participants are generating more interest in this population and helping other members of this population.

Informed consent procedure. Once a participant completed the screening questions and they were determined to be eligible for participation in the study, they were directed to the informed consent form. The informed consent (Appendix J) explained the nature of participation, the risks of participating in the study, and provided a list of referral sources. The

participant either agreed to the informed consent and they were directed to the questionnaire or they chose to not participate in the study in which case they were directed to a page that thanked them for their time. The participants were encouraged to print a copy of the informed consent to keep for their records, before continuing on to the questionnaire.

Precautions taken to safeguard confidentiality and identifiable information. The questionnaire was administered through SurveyMonkey and this survey software does not collect any names, e-mail addresses or IP addresses. In this way anonymity was guaranteed to those who participate, as the researcher was unaware of the identity of participants. Participants were also advised in the informed consent form to refrain from disclosing any identifying information in the open-ended questions. SurveyMonkey designated a code number automatically to all participants' responses. The researcher reviewed all open-ended responses and removed any names or place names that could have potentially compromised the participant's identity before allowing her research advisor to view any data. A participant could have left the questionnaire at anytime and although that data will be saved through the survey software, this researcher did not use partial survey responses (less than 50% completed) in the findings. A participant could have skipped any question, but once a survey is submitted, the data could not be withdrawn from the study because of the anonymous nature of the responses. The researcher would not have been able to identify an individual's data to remove it. The research advisor and a statistical consultant had access to the data following the coding done by SurveyMonkey and the removal of identifying information by the researcher. Published data is presented in a summarized group form to disguise participants' identities. Some illustrative qualitative quotes are presented, but will not be attached to any demographic data, thereby precluding recognition except for the author of the quote. The data was and will continue to be secured electronically and protected by

password and encryption. All data will be kept secure for three years as required by Federal regulations. After that time, the data will be destroyed or will continue to be kept secured as long as the researcher needs them for research purposes. When the data is no longer needed, it will be destroyed.

Human Subjects Review Board. Human Subjects Review Board approval was received on March 12, 2012 and recruit commenced immediately following. The approval is included in the appendixes (Appendix I). During data collection, a few inquires were made through emails, to the researcher pertaining with brief questions about the requirements for participating in the study.

Voluntary nature of participation. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants could have refused to answer any of the questions. Due to the anonymity and nature of the online questionnaire, once a participant had submitted their questionnaire it was impossible to withdraw their responses, as it was impossible to identify their responses. This was explained and included in the informed consent form, therefore participants were made aware of this fact prior to taking and submitting the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed to explore the needs of the family and friends of the unmarried service member during all stages of deployment. Following data collection, the data was examined and cleaned. Open-ended responses were checked for identifying information and any such information was removed. After a thorough review of the survey data, the researcher made a decision rule to exclude from analysis any surveys that were less than 50% complete. A total of 64 surveys were not included in the analysis. During the time period that the questionnaire was open, there were 64 participants who failed to meet the screening criteria. There were 23 of

these participants that did not know a military member who had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan and 24 others had failed to identify a unmarried military member and may have had identified a married military member for the questionnaire. Others were in the military themselves and a few others said they were not an extended family member, significant other, or close friend to a military member. There were 33 completed surveys used in the analysis. This year there was a new Human Subject Review process and this researcher was not able to start recruitment earlier as had been expected based on previous years. There was limited number of surveys collected for this study partly due to the delay on revisions and partly due to the difficulties in reaching the military population. As most of the participants were recruited through Facebook, there was a limited diversity in the findings, as only those who use social networking tools would have been recruited for participation. The participants were each given an identifier and the demographic, quantitative, and qualitative data were analyzed following the procedures listed below.

Demographic data. Demographic data was collected concerning both the participant and their identified service member. This data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and with the assistance of a statistical consultant. Data on gender, age, race/ethnicity, relationship to the service member, and military branch were analyzed using quantitative analysis, specifically frequency distributions and measures of central tendency. The demographic data was also analyzed in conjunction with the responses to the qualitative and quantitative sections that followed.

Quantitative data. As part B and C both contain a few quantitative questions their responses were analyzed following similar methods as the demographic data. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics were used to explore the prevalence of resources used or

not used by the participants. As this is not a previously tested instrument, the analysis was primarily exploratory when looking at relationships between the data. Therefore, analysis focused on looking at relationships between age, gender, ethnicity, distance from base, military branch, length of deployment, number of deployments, relationship to military member with community and military resources used or not used. Similarly, further bivariate analysis was carried out to explore the relationship between age, geographic location, ethnicity, relationship to service member, number of deployments, military branch, and rank with the barriers to both community and military resources.

Qualitative data. The qualitative data from parts B, C, and D was analyzed through coding and looking for patterns amongst the responses. The data was analyzed by question with the researcher looking at all the responses for the individual question. Each response was read and then the responses were placed in predetermined categories following Loftland's suggested six categories: frequencies, magnitudes, structures, processes, causes, and consequences (as cited in Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Once the responses were placed in the predetermined categories the researcher looked for themes within the categories. The researcher used constant comparison to identify themes for each category to further analyze the data. When the coding was complete the researcher drew connections between the quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis.

This section explored the methodology of the study, how the participants were recruited, and looked briefly at the plan that was used for analyzing the data. The next section will detail the findings of the study based on demographic data, quantitative data, and qualitative. These findings will be summarized by the main findings of the study.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This was an exploratory study that used a mixed methods design and a non-random purposive sampling method. The purpose of the study was to expand upon the limited research that has been carried out on the family members of the unmarried military service members and their needs during deployment and address the research question: What are the needs of family and close friends of unmarried military members during deployment? This chapter contains a summary of the major findings, demographic data, qualitative data, and quantitative data, along with a discussion of inferential tests. As this exploratory study had a small sample size and was not randomly selected, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of family members and friends of unmarried service members. However, inferences are discussed in hopes of further exploration for future studies.

Demographic Findings

As previously stated, there were a total of 33 participants who met the screening criteria and completed at least 50% of the survey. There were 64 participants who did not complete the survey either because they did not meet the screening criteria or they did not complete more than 50% of the questionnaire. The demographic characteristics of the participants and their identified service member are shown in tables 1-5.

Table 1

Gender and Age of Participants

n=33		Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender			
	Female	29	87.9
	Male	4	12.1
		Frequency	Valid Percent
Age			
	Over 50	5	15.2
	30s and 40s	6	18.2
	Teens and 20s	21	63.6
	Blank	1	3.0

All 33 participants provided information on their gender with the majority of the participants (n= 29, 87.9%) identifying as women and 4 participants (12.1%) identifying as male. One of the participants did not submit their age, however the remaining 32 participants did provide their age. More than half of the participants were between the ages 18-29 (n=21, 63.6%). There were 6 participants (18.2%) who were in their 30s and 40s and the remaining 5 participants (15.2%) were over 50 years old. The mean age of the participants was 29.5 and the median age was 25. There were three modes for the age of participants: 18, 22, and 23. All of the participants identified their ethnicity as white or Caucasian, except for one participant who did not submit a response to this question.

Table 2

Relationship to Service Member

n=33	Frequency	Valid Percent
Relationship to Service Member		
Other	5	15.2
Close Friend	4	12.1
Father	3	9.1
Fiancé	2	6.1
Girlfriend/Boyfriend	10	30.3
Mother	4	12.1
Sister	4	12.1
Spouse whose marriage is not recognized by military	1	3.0

All participants (N=33) provided data on the nature of their relationship to the identified service member. There were 5 participants who responded to the “other” category and these responses included: “Recently ex-girlfriend,” “she is my sister's girlfriend,” “Spouse (Recognized by Military but weren't married at time of deployments),” “nephew,” “aunt.” To simplify the relationship status, the data was grouped into three categories: family and relatives (13, 39.4%), significant others (15, 45.5%), and close friends (5, 15.2%).

Table 3

Military Branch to Which the Service Member Belonged

n=33	Frequency	Valid Percent
Military Branch		
Air Force	3	9.1
Army	12	36.4
Army National Guard	3	9.1
Army Reserves	4	12.1
Marine Corps	4	12.1
Marine Corps Reserve	3	9.1
Navy	2	6.1
Navy Guard	2	6.1

The majority of the participants (n=19, 57.5%) reported that their identified military member was in the Army. The collected data showed that 3 (9.1%) of the identified military members were in the Air Force, 7 (21.2%) members were in the Marine Corps, and the remaining 4 (12.1%) members were in the Navy. None of the participants identified a military member that was in the Coast Guard. Further analysis of the data showed that 63.6% (n=21) of the identified military members were active duty, 27.3% (n=9) are reserve military members, and the remaining 9.1% (n=3) are in the National Guard. The data also presented that 90.9% (n=30) of the identified military members were enlisted while 9.1% (n=3) of the deployed military members were officers.

Table 4

Geographic Location of Participants

n=33	Frequency	Valid Percent
Geographic Location		
Less than 100 miles from base	7	21.2
100 miles or more from base	26	78.8

The collected data revealed that the majority of the participants (n=26, 78.8%) were located over 100 miles from the base unit from which the identified military member was a part of. One participant (3%) reported being 10 miles or less from base, another participant (3%) identified being 11-30 miles from base, 4 participants (12.1%) responded that they were 31-60 miles from base, and one participant (3%) answered that they were 61-99 miles from base. One participant commented that they lived over 400 miles away from base and three states away.

Table 5

Number of Deployments and Length of Deployments

n=33		Frequency	Valid Percent
Number of deployments			
	1	20	60.6
	2 or more	12	36.4
	Other	1	3.0
n=30		Frequency	Valid Percent
Length of deployment(s)			
	4 months or less	4	13.3
	5-9 months	11	36.7
	10 months or more	15	50.0

The majority of the identified military members have had one deployment (n=20, 60.6%), while 9 participants (27.2%) reported that their military member had 2 deployments, 1 (3%) had 3 deployments, and 2 (6.1%) had 4 deployments at the time of taking the questionnaire. The other comment wrote “Classified, do not know.” The length of deployment data is skewed, as several participants were unsure as to the length of the current deployments because their identified military member was deployed at the time of taking the questionnaire. The data was analyzed based on the estimated length of time provided by the participant. If there was more than one deployment then the military member was included in the “10 months or more” category for analysis. Three participants did not provide data on the length of deployment. The participants responded that 4 military members (13.3%) were deployed for 4 months or less, 11 (36.7%) were deployed for 5-9 months, and 15 (50%) were deployed for 10 months or more.

Quantitative Data

In the second section of the questionnaire participants were asked 7 questions to identify the resources, both community and military, that they used during deployment. The participants were also asked about which resource was the most useful for them. Lastly, they were asked to select the barriers they have encountered to receiving resources, if any. The findings for each

question and the statistical tests that were run are discussed below, followed by a discussion of inferential statistics.

Resources used during deployment. The participants were given the option to select as many resources that pertained to them and write in other resources they may have used if it was not provided amongst the options. One participant (3%) did not provide a response to this question and 32 (97%) provided one or more responses. The internet (n=14, 43.8%), military Facebook group (n=13, 40.6%), friends (n=13, 40.6%), and family (n=11, 34.4%), were selected the most frequently by the participants. The other resources that were not used as frequently were other military families (n=9, 28.1%), military family websites (n=4, 12.5%), place of worship (n=4, 12.5%), family readiness center (n=3, 9.4%), military family online forum (n=2, 6.3%), and magazines, newspapers, books, and support group off base were each reported to have been used by one participant (n=1, 3.1%). One participant (3.1%) filled out an other response stating “Most of the info I got was at the pre-deployment briefing at his base before he left. Also, a previous deployed friend.” Lastly, 21.9% or 7 participants identified that they did not get any information about available resources during deployment. None of the participants reported getting information about resources during deployment from a community resource center, mental health center, military family camp, military family club, military hotline, support group on base, a therapist, or a VA center/hospital. The data reflects the recruitment process of using the internet and Facebook specifically with the majority of the participants reporting that they used online resources during deployment. Table 6 illustrates the distribution of the resources used by the participants during deployment of the identified military member.

Table 6

Resources Used

n=32	Frequency	Valid Percent
Resource used During Deployment		
Internet	14	43.8
Friends	13	40.6
Military Facebook Group	13	40.6
Family	11	34.4
Other Military Families	9	28.1
I do not get Information	7	21.9
Place of Worship	4	12.5
Military Family Websites	4	12.5
Family Readiness Center	3	9.4
Military Family Online Forum	2	6.3
Support Group (off base)		
Magazines	1	3.1
Newspapers	1	3.1
Books	1	3.1
Other	1	3.1
	1	3.1

Community resources used. The next part of this section asked participants to identify all of the community resources they used, if any. There were 29 participants (87.9%) that gave a response to this question and 4 participants (12.1%) who did not provide a response. The majority of the participants, 23 (79.3%), that responded to this question reported that they did not/are not using any community resources. Out of the 12 possible community resources listed, the participants identified only 4 as a community resource that was used during deployment. The 4 selected were: place of worship (n=3, 10.3%), place of worship support group (n=1, 3.4%), family/individual therapist (n=1, 3.4%), and military support group off base (n=1, 3.4%). There were 2 other responses (6.9%) listed that stated “soldiers angels”, a volunteer-led nonprofit that provides aid and comfort to military members and their families (Soldiers’ Angels, 2012), and “support from family and friends, on a prayer list at church.” As discussed above, the majority of the participants found information about deployment online, rather than in their communities,

which may account for the limited use of community resources by the participants who may be more likely to be a part of an online community. Table 7 illustrates the community resources used by the participants during deployment, if any.

Table 7

Community Resources Used

n=29	Frequency	Valid Percent
Community Resource Used		
I did not use Community Resources	23	79.3
Place of Worship Services	3	10.3
Other	2	6.9
Place of Worship Support Group	1	3.4
Family Individual Therapist	1	3.4
Military Family Support Group (off base)	1	3.4

Most useful community resource. When asked the follow up question about which of those selected resources has been the most useful, the responses were similar, however only 19 participants (57.9%) provided a response to this question. The majority of the respondents said they are not using/did not use community resources (n=14, 73.7%), while 3 participants (15.8%) selected place of worship services, 1 participant (5.3%) selected family/individual therapist, another participant (5.3%) selected military family support group off base, and 1 last participant selected other and wrote “Soldier’s Angels.” As many participants did not use community resources, this may explain the few responses for this question, as they did not find a most useful community resource. Table 8 depicts the participants’ selections of the most useful community resource.

Table 8

Most Useful Community Resource

n=19	Frequency	Valid Percent
Most Useful Community Resource		
I did not use Community Resources	14	73.7
Place of Worship Services	3	15.8
Other	1	5.3
Family Individual Therapist	1	5.3
Military Family Support Group (off base)	1	5.3
Other	1	5.3

Barriers to community resources. The second part of this section looked at the barriers that exist to accessing the community resources for the participants. The participant was encouraged to check all the responses that apply. Twenty-nine participants (87.9%) answered this question, while 4 participants (12.1%) skipped this question. Out of the 29 participants, 48.3% of the respondents (14) said they did not see any barriers to accessing community resources. The remaining respondents fell into five categories: those who did not have the financial means to pay (n= 2, 6.9%), those who did not know how to find resources (n=8, 27.6%), those who do not live near resources (n=4, 13.8%), a participant who does not trust the resources that are available (n=1, 3.4%), and other (n=3, 10.3%). The “other” responses fell into two categories: the first is the expression of the resources being unavailable to them if they are a part of same-sex couple or because there is nothing offered to them, and second there is a distrust of the military particularly if the military member is in a same sex relationship and therefore makes their family members and significant others hesitant to seek out services. None of the participants identified that lack of transportation was a barrier to receiving resources. Due to the nature of the online recruitment, many of the participants may not feel the need to access community resources, thus not seeing any barriers, as they may have access to online

communities and resources. Table 9 depicts the barriers that participants experienced to accessing community resources.

Table 9

Barriers to Community Resources

n=29	Frequency	Valid Percent
Barriers to Community Resources		
I do not see any Barriers	14	48.3
I do not know how to find resources	8	27.6
I do not live near resources	4	13.8
Other	3	10.3
I do not have the financial means to pay for resources	2	6.9
I do not trust the resources that are available	1	3.4

Military resources used. The next section looked at the military resources used by participants. The question received 29 (87.9%) responses with 4 (12.1%) participants choosing not to answer. Out of the 29 participants that responded to the question 86.2% (25) selected “I did/am not use/using any military services.” The 4 remaining responses consisted of 2 “other” responses (6.9%) where one participant wrote “I get info from the family readiness support person but not close enough to any centers for this to be a physical help” and the other participant wrote “These services are not offered to me.” The last two responses were one selection (3.4%) of Family Readiness Center Resources and the other selection was Marine Corps Community Service Center. The majority of the participants reported that they live over 100 miles from the nearest base and this may account for the significant number of participants that selected that they did not use military resources. Table 10 portrays the participants’ selections of military resources used.

Table 10

Military Resources Used

n=29	Frequency	Valid Percent
Military Resource Used		
I did not use Military Resources	25	86.2
Other	2	6.9
Family Readiness Center Resources	1	5.3
Marine Corps Community Service Center	1	5.3

Most useful military resource. When asked in the follow-up question about which military resource was more useful for the participant only 17 participants provided an answer. Out of the 17 participants, 94.1% or 16 participants responded that they did not use any military resources and the remaining one participant (5.9%) said the Family Readiness Center Resources was the most useful. The limited number of respondents to this question may have been the result of the previous question as many participants reported that they did not use military resources and thus would not have been able to identify the most useful resource. Table 11 reflects the participants’ responses to the most useful military resource used.

Table 11

Most Useful Military Resource

n=17	Frequency	Valid Percent
Most Useful Military Resource		
I did not use Military Resources	16	94.1
Family Readiness Center Resources	1	5.9

Barriers to military resources. The last quantitative question asked participants to choose what barriers exist for accessing military services; participants were encouraged to choose all the barriers that would apply for them. There were 28 participants (84.8%) that provided a response to this question while 5 participants (15.1%) did not leave a response. The

top two responses were “I cannot access the military resources I know about, because I am not a military spouse or child” and “I do not see any barriers.” The number of respondents to each barrier was 12 (42.9%) and 11 (39.3%) respectively. There were 5 participants (17.9%) who selected that they do not know how to find resources, 4 participants (14.3%) selected that they did not live near resources, and one participant each selected that they do not have the financial means to pay for resources and that they do not trust the resources that are available. Two respondents (7.1%) selected “other” and wrote “Haven’t really felt as though I needed them, I guess” and “There are no resources for family members of the significant others of gay service members that I’m aware of.” None of the participants selected the barrier of not having transportation. The data collected for this question supports the literature that reports that the support system for unmarried military members often cannot access the available military resources that spouses and children can. Table 12 depicts the participants’ selections of their barriers to accessing military resources.

Table 12

Barriers to Military Resources

n=28	Frequency	Valid Percent
Barriers to Military Resources		
I cannot access the resources I know about because I am not a military spouse or child	12	42.9
I do not see any barriers	11	39.3
I do not know how to find resources	5	17.9
I do not live near resources	4	14.3
Other	2	7.1
I do not have the financial means to pay for resources	1	3.6
I do not trust the resources that are available	4	12.5

Inferential analysis. As this was an exploratory study, it was important to look at some inferential statistics. At the heart of this study, the researcher wanted to explore who uses resources and were the same barriers experienced by all the participants or did it vary based on military branch, geographic location from base, gender, age, number of deployments, length of deployment, or relationship to military member? Crosstabulations were utilized to look at who uses/does not use community resources, who uses/does not use military resources, who has/doesn't have barriers to community resources, who has/doesn't have barriers to military resources. These four categories were crosstabulated by gender, age, relationship, branch of service, rank, geographic distance from base, and number of times deployed. Due to the limited responses to the questionnaire the analysis did not reveal any significant findings. Further, participants often did not use any resources, either community or military, thus making the tests inconclusive.

Qualitative Data

Participants were also asked 5 follow-up questions that asked the participant to write an open-ended response. While the 33 participants answered the majority of the quantitative questions there was a drop in responses for the qualitative questions. For each qualitative question the themes found in the responses will be discussed and some of the responses will be provided to demonstrate the theme. Some questions had a very limited number of respondents and their themes may also be limited. The major findings section that follows summarizes the various themes found in the qualitative responses. The responses are included as the participants wrote them; any identifying information has been removed.

Community resources. Participants were asked to identify the most useful community resource they utilized during deployment and then asked to explain why this identified resource was the most useful. There were 11 responses (33.3%) to this question with 4 of these participants writing in “N/A.” The remaining 7 responses (N=33, 21.2%) fell into three themes: support, shared experience, and independence. There were 5 participants out of the 7 (71.4%) that wrote about receiving support from the identified resource. The support mentioned by the participants was found individually, with others in a similar situation, and with religious groups who supported the family during the deployments. One participant wrote: “I attended the [Local Military Mom’s Support] group. (It was the only support offered close to where I lived.) They were great in supporting me and telling me things that "really" happen--how things actually go...They were very helpful!” Another participant wrote: “all those at my church know him we all can connect about how we feel going through deployments.” Lastly one participant wrote about finding support herself: “Being that we are a lesbian couple, there is zero

acknowledgement of my existence in her life. Therefore, what has been most helpful and useful has been the support I have forged for myself.”

The next theme, shared experience, was discussed in 3 out of the 7 respondents (42.9%). One participant, quoted above, spoke about a support group that told her about the things that “really” happen during deployments as the members shared their experience with the participant. Another participant wrote: “Other families are military families [where] individuals grew up in the military and were helpful.” While one last participant, quoted above, wrote about shared experience as a church community all experiencing the same military member’s deployment.

The last theme, independence, was seen in 2 out of the 7 respondents to this question. These participants did not identify a most useful resource and instead stated that they helped themselves during the deployment. One participant wrote: “I am very independent and just focus on taking it day by day... No resources above used.” The remaining participant was quoted above as not being able to receive services so she had to support herself. There was one participant whose response of “This is a private place where I can talk about my fears for her and for the rest of my family without being judged” did not fit into the three themes.

The second qualitative question about civilian communities asked what the civilian communities could do better to support military families and friends during all stages of deployment. There were 16 responses (48.5%) to this question that fell into 4 themes: advertise or communicate, safe space, awareness, and acceptance. Participants referred to advertising or communication in regards to getting information about available resources in the community. There were 7 out of the 16 respondents (43.8%) that fell into the advertising or communicating theme. “Advertise more!” “Advertise services or support groups more frequently/better” and

“More military discounts, clubs in schools for kids to get support emotionally...” were some of the responses that fit into this theme.

The theme of safe space was present in 4 out of the 16 respondents (25.0%) who spoke about the need to have a safe space to talk about issues such as same-sex relationships and the mental health stigma in the military. These participants wrote “Have services that are sensitive to same-sex couple’s needs as well as those that do not agree with the military efforts politically” and “Create a safe and anonymous space for people like me to find other people like me to talk to...Just because DADT has been lifted, doesn't make the environment any safer for service members to come out fully.” Another participant wrote about seeking mental health services within the community by creating a safe place without the stigma “If mental health services were done independent of the military, as to reduce the stigma, perhaps more veterans would seek help.” This theme relates closely to the next theme acceptance where there is overlap amongst the participants. Along with the participants mentioned above, 3 more participants spoke about acceptance (n=7, 43.8%). Within this theme there were several different kinds of acceptance the participants spoke of: same-sex partnership acceptance, mental health acceptance, and acceptance of the military members and the families themselves. One participant wrote: “Recognize that gay service members have not only family, but significant others with families who consider the service member part of “their” family. This probably won't happen until there is more widespread acceptance of gay people in the military.” Two participants wrote about the importance of accepting them and the military itself: “They could treat the family like they are normal...” and “They could actually support the military. There are a lot of people who are against it so they don't support soldiers.”

The last theme, awareness, also overlaps with acceptance as many participants who wrote about acceptance also wrote about awareness. What separates awareness from advertise is the participants interest in awareness for others to know about military families in hopes of creating more acceptance (see quotes above). There were 6 participants (37.5%) whose response fell into the theme of awareness, some of whom have been quoted above. One participant wrote: “Recognize that there are people deployed, make more awareness. It seems people only hold events or pay attention when a military member gets wounded or falls. More DEPLOYMENT AWARENESS of Marines, Soldiers, and their families.” The majority of the respondents felt that there was more that the civilian community could do for them, while 1 respondent (6.3%) wrote: “I felt that the community I was in supported military families and friends well.”

Military resources. The third qualitative question asked participants to identify why the selected military resource has been most useful to them. The majority of the participants selected that they did not use any military resources during deployment and they were therefore unable to answer this question. There was one answer (3.0%) to this question wrote: “They provided information to me and my spouse's family during the deployment.” Due to the one available response no themes could be drawn or analyzed for this question.

The fourth qualitative question had 14 responses (42.4%) to the question that asked participants to write about what is missing and/or could be improved by the military during deployment. This question had 3 prevalent themes, with one theme, military definition of family in regards to lack of available information and resources, the most noticeable response from 8 out of the 14 responses (57.1%). Several of the respondents spoke about military culture, the military’s definition of family, and lack of resources for non-dependents by those impacted by a military member’s deployment. Here are some of these responses: “they need to do more to

recognize family is more than those that are married to a member of the military,” “It would of been helpful if the Army had more involvement or support in overall family, regardless if I was a [h]alf sister. Most info went to his mother but we weren't included with resources,” “There should be specific services to support those not included as dependents of a military service member. Information about things such as OPSEC, details on mailing letters/care packages, communication, and updates on the units, as well as general support,” “It is hard as a friend and a girlfriend. you are not included you honestly don't matter to the military. Although understandable it would be nice to feel included.” One quote appears to summarize this theme particularly well:

My sister, as the long-time cohabitating partner of a service-member, and my niece, who considers this service member her step-parent, have no official role and do not exist as far as the military is concerned. This is excruciating and exceedingly unfair. We are all a family as much as any heterosexual "traditional" family and while we can do whatever our service member needs while she is deployed, no one is helping my sister and my niece. Until the military culture changes enough that more gay service members are willing to come out, it will be incredibly difficult to change this dynamic. They don't tell anyone about their partners, and in turn the military has no way to recognize or assist them. I don't know how to change that, but I hope someone figures it out.

The themes within this theme point to the importance of looking at the military's definition of family and how this impacts siblings, extended family members, and same sex partners.

The next theme identified in the responses to this question was access to more resources. Many of the participants mentioned in the previous category spoke about more availability of resources for the unmarried military member's support system and a few others spoke about

more resources in general. A total of 8 participants (57.1%) spoke about resources and a desire for more resources. Here are some examples of some specific resources that were requested: “Summer camps that are inexpensive for the temporarily single parent,” and “I have always said they need to have programs for siblings. They have all kinds of things for spouses, parents, and children of military but nothing for siblings. It's just as hard on us, especially when you're very close.” Other participants wrote about the need for resources in general: “Have non-military affiliated referrals available,” and “more resources for friends/non-family members.”

The last theme spoke to issues of communication with the families about the service members and the communication of service members with their families. There were 3 participants (21.4%) that spoke to the theme of communication. One participant wrote: “Communication again. Myself and a sister is the soldiers only relatives and being POA I would think I would have heard something prior to deployment regarding in case of emergencies or sending packages etc,” while another participant wrote “posts on facebook.”

The last question of the survey asked participants to respond to the question about what they would do if they were in charge of creating or expanding military resources for a day. There were 21 participants (63.6%) who gave responses to this question. There were three major themes that were prevalent in the responses and the first one was a desire for more information and awareness about the military members and available resources for families. Here are what some of the participants said about this theme: “Make it more widely known. A lot of girls, especially my age, don't know what's out there in terms of help. They can feel like they're in this alone,” “It would be helpful to have an online "crash course" in relevant, general information about the army, terminology, programs offered, OPSEC, deployments, etc... This would help friends/family/significant others when a military member first joins,” “Include significant others

in FRG communications. Do more to inform significant others on ways to find support,” and “Send a letter, email at least stating that they are there and in place if needed. Resources cannot be used if no one knows they exist.”

The next theme of creating support or expanding upon the existing support was mentioned in 9 participants’ (42.9%) responses. This theme continued on the theme from the previous question that looked at the military’s definition of family and many of the respondents that fell into this theme spoke about expanding resources to include more members of the family and significant others. Some of the participants categorized into this theme wrote: “I’d get the word out [to] form support groups and show people that they have support activities and being able to talk to those who know what your going through is the most important thing when facing a deployment,” “I would start a sibling program. A program/service for brothers and sisters to be involved in. Siblings that have been through deployment help counsel newly deployed siblings, give them advice, help answer questions, help them get involved in military functions,” “I would create get togethers once per quarter for military families. Maybe one for a girls night, a guys night, a family night, bowling, because that way you have the ability to stay connected to your other military families without the pressure of reaching out to people who may be strangers,” “Perhaps I would start something like Alcoholics Anonymous but for friends and family of gay service members, where they could go for support and empathy but not fear retaliation against the service member they are supporting,” “Expand programs so that people like myself, who are not married or offspring of a service member, can access these services as well,” and “I would find a way to make it safe for the service members to ask about services for gay/lesbian non-married or married people in their lives...” The responses for this particular theme support several of the themes that have already been mentioned in the responses to previous qualitative

questions, therefore a number of responses were listed to demonstrate the significance of this theme to the study.

The last theme had 4 respondents who wrote about helping other military families by volunteering and sharing their experiences with others who are in the same situation. One participant wrote: “I wish I knew of a USO nearby that I could volunteer at for yellow ribbon events or putting together care packages.” Similarly another participant responded to the question with “I would help families who are new to the area. I find that families who PCS to a new base and are very soon after deployed have a very hard time because they don’t know what available to them.” There was one participant’s response that did not fit into the three themes, this participant wrote: “Don't send them.”

While there were many themes that were covered by the participants in the five qualitative questions, there were several prevalent issues and themes that were found across the study. In both the qualitative and quantitative data participants are not using resources, the biggest barriers to resources is distance from services and the lack of available resources, participants want information about deployment and support services available to them during deployment, and lastly there is not wide understanding or awareness about where they could find available resources. The next section summarizes the major findings of the data.

Major Findings

This study looked at the resource needs and the barriers to resources for the family and friends of unmarried military members. The qualitative data revealed several major findings that were reflected in the quantitative data. The major findings were:

- Many participants report being unable to access available services because of the military’s definition of family (spouses and children) that is the dominant narrative in

both the military and local communities, leaving participants feeling neglected, alone, and without the support they need.

- Participants do not often use military or community resources during deployment, often because they are geographically located too far from the base, they do not know how to find the available resources, and because they did not feel the need to access resources.
- Participants are interested in more resources that will connect them to others who are going through the same situations, connect them to their military members, and give them the space to participate in a support groups.
- Same-sex partners and significant others do not feel comfortable accessing resources from the military, they have a hard time finding resources in the community to get the support they need, and they would like to have more resources available to them in a safe space.

Summary

In the last chapter, the major findings will be discussed relative to the available literature. Limitations of the study, such as a limited number of participants that impacted the ability of this study to utilize inferential statistics and a short recruitment period, will be discussed and explored. Other limitations of the study include the use of Facebook as a recruiting tool and a lack of diversity amongst the participants. Implications for the social work field and future questions to guide future research on this topic will also be discussed, followed by a conclusion to summarize the study.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This exploratory study was carried out to look at the family and close friends of the unmarried military member. The research sought to answer the question: What are the needs of family and close friends of unmarried military members during deployment? The study looked at who used community and military resources during deployment, which resources were the most useful and what barriers they faced in trying to access these resources. Most of the participants answered all of the quantitative questions while fewer answered the qualitative questions. The findings support the literature available on this population. Military families are defined by the military as spouses and children of the military member with very little focus on the family members of unmarried military members and what their needs may be. Most notably in the findings it appears that family and close friends of the unmarried military members do not access military or community resources for many reasons including being unaware of available resources, living far from the base unit of the service member, and a lack of resources to meet their specific needs (e.g. safe places for same-sex partners). The findings of this study support the need to expand and further research on the family and close friends of unmarried military member as more could be done to reach and support this population.

This chapter will discuss the major findings relative to the literature reviewed earlier in this report. The weaknesses of the study and implications for future research will be addressed. Finally, implications for the field of social work field and for policy will be discussed.

Major Findings Relative to the Literature Review

There were four major findings from the study in the demographic data, qualitative data, and quantitative data. These four findings are discussed and explored at length below in reference to the literature at the beginning of this report. The discussion hopes to look at the outcomes of this study and then discuss future implications for the field of social work and policy making.

Military's definition of family. One of the major findings of this study was that participants are unable to use military resources, because they are not included in the military's definition of family. This finding echo the findings of the study carried out by Keyes (2011) where the definition of the military family presented itself as a barrier for many participants to receive services. The findings from this study showed that 42.9% (n=12) of the participants that responded to the barriers to accessing military resources question said they could not access the available resources because they were not military spouses or children. The follow-up qualitative question that asked participants to identify what the military could do to improve or expand their resources, showed that many participants struggled with the military's definition of family and wanted the definition to change to include non-dependents such as siblings, parents, extended family, same-sex partners, and close friends. In the literature review, several military resources were discussed for each stage of deployment, however these services were more often than not only available to military dependents, with the expectation being that communities would provide the needed resources for those who are unable to access the military resources on base. Further, the literature cited above spoke to research that is being done on spouses and children but attests to the fact that there is little being done to look at the support system of the unmarried military member (Chandra et al., 2008; Lincoln et al., 2008; Padden et al., 2011; Park,

2011). The purpose of this study was to target these family members that are not included in the military's definition of family and understand where they can access resources during deployment. As the findings showed, non-dependents, often those that met the criteria for this study, cannot access military resources and this was depicted in both in the literature and in the findings of this study.

Non-utilization and the impediments of available resources. The second major finding in this study was that majority of the participants did not use community or military resources (79.3% and 86.2% respectively). The findings suggest that there are multiple reasons for this. As mentioned previously many participants could not access available resources because they do not fit the military's definition of family, but many other participants reported that they lived too far from the military resources and that they do not know how to find available resources (27.6% for community resources, 17.9% for military resources). There were also a large number of respondents who did not see any barriers to resources, but also did not use the available resources (48.3% community, 39.3% military). This finding suggests that for many a lack of resources means there is also a lack of barriers. This was reflected amongst many of the qualitative response themes that requested more resources and information/advertisements about available resources from both the community and the military.

Indeed, participants appear to not use resources for a variety of reasons, many of which have not been studied or documented in the available literature. Willerton et al. (2011), encouragingly writes that this population needs to be further explored to understand what their needs are so that they can provide the unmarried military member with the support that they need. Keyes (2011) found similar findings in her study and expressed a strong need to research the needs of this largely overlooked population. The lack of available literature on this

population also attests to the fact that little is known of what this population utilizes for resources and what resources would most benefit this population. The lack of resource utilization was surprising and points to a number of different factors that may contribute to the under utilization of existing resources, such as a lack of a available resources that address the specific needs of this population or poor awareness of the limited resources that may be available.

Support and connection. The third major finding of this study was a recurrent theme of having resources available where participants could find support and be around others who share their experiences as a family member or friend of an unmarried deployed military member. This theme appeared in several of the qualitative responses, specifically in the last question where participants were given the option to explore what they would do if they were in charge for a day. Family systems theory, discussed in the literature review, emphasizes the importance of having support for the family members of deployed military members so that they can thus provide support for the military members at all stages of deployment (Rodriguez, 2007; Park, 2011; Willerton, 2011). Many of the participants wrote about creating a support group that was tailored to the needs of a particular population of family members of those deployed (such as siblings, mothers, relatives, and same-sex partners) because they were unable to find these groups for themselves and want to make this available to others. Looking at the specific needs suggested by the participants, such as a support group for siblings or a camp for military families, supports the importance of utilizing family systems theory when creating programs to address the needs of military families.

Safe space for same-sex partners and significant others. The last major finding of the study was the prevalent theme of wanting a safe space for same-sex partners and significant others of the deployed military members to go to talk about their experiences. Given the

military's definition of family, it is important to note that many same-sex partners, fiancés, and girlfriends/boyfriends do not fall into this definition. These participants made up 45.5% of the participants and many expressed being excluded from military resources, communications with the partners, and having a safe place to go if they desired services. Lack of trust was also a prevalent theme in the qualitative responses of same-sex partners. As Don't Ask Don't Tell has only recently been repealed, it appears that same-sex partners are struggling with finding resources that they can access and feel safe in. As limited as the literature was on family and close friends of unmarried military members, there is next to no literature available on the experiences and needs of same-sex partners of a deployed military member. Keyes (2011) wrote briefly about her findings on same-sex partners, however, she realized that the data was also significantly limited in this area of research. This is a big gap in the literature; and, as Don't Ask Don't Tell has been repealed, researchers can expect this to be an important area of research for the future.

Summary of major findings. This study sought to explore the answer to this question: What are the needs of family and close friends of unmarried military members during deployment? The major findings and the literature suggest that the needs for this population are a closer look at how the military's definition of family impacts non-dependents, more advertisement and awareness about available resources, more resources directed at support for this population, and safe spaces for same-sex partners to have their needs met. This study had some weaknesses, but it is a good starting point for bridging the large gap in the literature about family and close friends of the unmarried military member.

Weaknesses and Limitations

The nature of an exploratory study does not lend itself to generalizability to the larger population. Therefore one of the inherent weaknesses of this study was the inability to apply the findings of this study to the population; instead the study hopes to encourage future studies on this topic and increase validity. One of the major limitations of this study was recruiting from this hard to reach population. Recruiting through Facebook was a limitation in and of itself, because while it helped the researcher reach this population, the participants could only be recruited from an online community. Therefore, those who utilize Facebook groups and forums during deployment were more likely to be recruited than others who do not use Facebook or other online military communities. As this is a hard to reach population and there was a limited time available to leave the study open, the number of participants was small and limited the amount of analysis that could be carried out with the data. Further, with a small sample size it is hard to draw findings and support the findings with the limited amount of data available. The majority of the participants fell in the 18-30 year old category, which may be because this age group is more likely to use the Internet and Facebook than the older participants. Also, many participants responded that they use online resources during deployment, which may be a result of the recruitment process and may not represent this population. This study did not reach a racially diverse population, therefore limiting the findings and pointing to an area that needs further study. Finally, the informal resources that are available from community to community vary greatly and could not be easily quantified or assessed. Likewise, different branches of the service and units may also provide other community specific resources that were not easy to assess.

Biases. Some of the biases that may be inherent to this research study are the researcher's connection and values with the military. This may impact the way the themes were prioritized and categorized by the researcher. The researcher could have been influenced by the hope of confirming the hypothesis, for example this researcher could prioritize responses that favored the idea that military family and friends need resources from both the military and their communities. Another bias that may have existed in this study was recruitment bias. This researcher recruited through Facebook and may have unintentionally prioritized recruitment to particular participants, such as a younger population and more girlfriends and significant others that reflect the status of the researcher. This researcher tried to be aware of individual bias and explored places where possible areas of bias could exist with colleagues in hopes of limiting bias.

Implications for Social Work

This study, while exploratory, has many implications for the field of social work and social work practitioners. First, there is a gap in current research and knowledge; we still know little about the needs of the support system for the unmarried military member. More research needs to be done to look at what resources this population needs, especially if they are located 100 miles or more from the nearest base unit. It is important to understand what the needs of this population are so that social work practitioners can meet them. As they are an underserved population social workers could look at what resources would most benefit this population such as support groups or places where they could go to share their experiences with other in similar situations. Another emerging implication is the lack of research and resources available to same-sex partners in the military. This part of the population appears to have many unmet needs and, further, available literature on this population is scarce. The military's definition of family

shapes this populations' experiences of the services that are available to them or not and they are working within the confines of this definition.

Policy and Program Implications

It is clear from this study, that supporting and meeting the needs of the family and friends of unmarried military members should be a policy priority, because family systems theory and the findings in this study suggest that the unmarried military member depends on their family and close friends for support. If this population is not having their needs met, how can they support their military member? More specifically, the major findings detailed above have practice and policy implications as they underscore the need to find supports for this population, specifically about increasing awareness of resources for unmarried military family and friends. Policy and program implications should support the creation of more resources for family and friends of unmarried military members specifically the creation of support groups and avenues to create shared spaces. Programs should strive to be more open and accepting of same-sex partners who desire a safe space to meet their needs when the military member is deployed.

Future questions. This study elicits many questions for future research. Here are some questions that still need exploration: What community resources and military resources are effective at meeting the needs of this population? How is this population constrained by the military's definition of family? Who does the unmarried military member turn to for support in the absence of a spouse? Would the military benefit from using a family systems approach to understanding the military family and placing a stronger emphasis on the extended family and close friends that support the unmarried military member? Why are existing resources for family members and friends of unmarried military members not being used? What are the emerging

needs of the same-sex partners of military members and how can communities and the military meet these needs?

Research implications. In order to answer these questions, online research efforts may continue to prove one of the most viable ways to reach this population, especially same-sex partners who expressed their concerns finding safe places. Another avenue to continue this research is to conduct qualitative interviews or a focus group with members of this population, however recruiting from this population may prove difficult. While on-line efforts have proven useful to reaching this population there can be an inherent bias in the population the Internet reaches and limits the generalizability of the findings. Other research options include collecting information from within specific communities and also through the military who may be able to create guides to resources or best practices for supporting family and friends of unmarried military members.

Conclusion

Exploring the needs of family and friends of the unmarried military member is still a relatively new field of research with many areas still left to explore and study. The military's definition of family does not often leave enough room for meeting the needs of this population. Many people do not know how to find resources, are located too far from available resources, or choose not to access the available resources. Many participants wanted more available resources and awareness about resources that is lacking from both the military and community. "Social support for single service members can be wide ranging, from friends, to intimate partners, to parents, to members of their unit. It is important to understand more about how is a part of the social support structure of single soldiers and how they function so that prevention and intervention programming can be targeted appropriately. Research should look at the social

support needs of single service members and how the presence or absence of social support affects single service members” (Willerton et al., 2011). This quote summarized nicely the purpose of this research and what research would benefit this population in the future.

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Appendix A

Six Screening Questions

Needs Assessment of Family and Friends of Single Service Members

[Exit this survey](#)

Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in this survey. Before beginning please answer these questions to verify your eligibility for this study.

Are you 18 or older?

- Yes
 No

Are you able to read and write in English?

- Yes
 No

Are you currently a member of the U.S. Armed Services?

- Yes
 No

Are you a family member, significant other, or close friend of a military service member?

- Yes
 No

Is this service member currently deployed or have they deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan since the war efforts began in 2001?

- Yes
 No

During all deployments was the service member's marital status single (includes divorced, widowed, engaged, and those service members whose marriage may not be recognized by the military under Don't Ask, Don't Tell)?

- Yes
 No

[Next](#)

Powered by **SurveyMonkey**
Create your own [free online survey](#) now!

Appendix B

Screen Shot of Disqualification Page

Needs Assessment of Family and Friends of Single Service Members Exit this survey

Thank You!



Thank you for your time and interest in this study. Unfortunately, your answers to one or more of the previous questions indicate you are not eligible to participate.

Please share this survey with others on Facebook or by forwarding the survey link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/9BKNDPD> via email or through Facebook.

To exit, simply close the browser window.

Powered by **SurveyMonkey**
Create your own free online survey now!

Appendix C

Facebook Recruitment



Facebook Friends!

Are you a family member, significant other, or close friend of an unmarried military member that has been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan? If so, you could help me out with my Master's Thesis. It is a brief survey that looks at the needs of those left on the Home Front when a loved one deploys. Speak up and share your valuable knowledge. The survey should take no more than 30 minutes. Your feedback is important!

Appendix D

Military Community Forum Recruitment

Are you a family member, significant other, or close friend of an unmarried military member that has been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan? If so, you could help me out with my Master's Thesis. It is a brief survey that looks at the needs of those left on the Home Front when a loved one deploys. Speak up and share your valuable knowledge. The survey should take no more than 30 minutes. Your feedback is important!

Appendix E

E-Mail Recruitment

Dear _____,

Will you please help me find participants to complete a survey for my thesis? I am exploring the needs of family members, significant others, and close friends of unmarried military members. I am looking for participants who are 18 or older, can read and write in English, are not in the military, but have been impacted by the deployment of a service member. The survey consists of several multiple choice questions and five open-ended questions and should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

Would you please forward this email to anyone you know who might be interested in completing my survey?

Thanks you for your time and help!

Please click on the link to complete the survey:

Michelle Biltz

MSW Student

biltzmic@gmail.com

Smith College School for Social Work

Appendix F

Needs Assessment by Huebner et al. (2010)

Military Family Needs Assessment

Topic Areas

A. Where do you get information about resources available to support you and your family?

1. When you need information or help outside your friends/family where do you go?

B. What programs/services are you (your spouse; children) currently using? Are they provided by the military? By your community? Online?

1. How are these programs/services useful to you and/or your family?

2. Which of these programs are most valuable to you and/or your family?

C. What is missing and/or could be improved about these programs/services? From the military? By your community? What barriers exist to accessing resources?

1. What needs do you have that are not being met by the military? By your community?

2. What, if any, limits your ability to access resources in your community? In the military?

3. What could civilian communities do better to support military families?

D. What has been your experience with Military OneSource?

E. If you were in charge for a day, what would you do to help military families like yours in terms of programs and services?

F. What are the challenges that your children face? Are you aware of resources that can help, either in your community or in the military?

Appendix G

Screen Shots of Demographic Questions

Needs Assessment of Family and Friends of Single Service Members

Exit this survey

Demographics

The following questions will ask you about yourself and the service member you support.

Please identify one service member and answer the questions in response to this identified military member. If you have been impacted by the military service of more than one person, please choose the person whose service has impacted you the MOST.

You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Prefer not to answer
- Other (please specify)

In what year were you born? (enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1976)

What would you identify as your race/ethnicity?

I am the service member's...

- Brother
- Close Friend
- Father
- Fiance
- Girlfriend/Boyfriend
- Grandmother
- Grandfather
- Mother
- Neighbor
- Sister
- Spouse (whose marriage is not recognized by the Military)
- Other Relative

Prev

Next

Please select the branch to which the identified service member belonged/belongs to at the time of deployment(s).

- Air Force
- Air Force Reserve
- Air National Guard
- Army
- Army National Guard
- Army Reserve
- Coast Guard
- Coast Guard Reserve
- Marine Corps
- Marine Corps Reserve
- Navy
- Navy Reserve
- Do not know

During the most recent deployment the identified service member was or currently is:

- Enlisted
- A officer

Other (please specify)

Which answer best describes your geographical location during the identified service member's deployment?

- 10 miles or less from the service member's base unit
- 11-30 miles from the service member's base unit
- 31-60 miles from the service member's base unit
- 61-99 miles from the service member's base unit
- Over 100 miles from the service member's base unit
- Other (please specify)

How many times has this service member been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan? (If currently deployed, please include this time in the total)

How long was this service member deployed? (Please round to the nearest month) If your service member has been deployed more than once please use the comment box to specify the number of months for each deployment.

Prev Next

Appendix H

Screen Shots of Quantitative and Qualitative Questions

Needs Assessment of Family and Friends of Single Service Members

Exit this survey

Finding Resources and Information

This next question will ask you about finding information about available resources during the service member's deployment.

Where do you get information about resources available to support you during every stage of the deployment(s)? Please check all that apply.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Books | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Facebook Group | <input type="checkbox"/> Place of Worship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Resource Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Family Camp | <input type="checkbox"/> Support Group off Base |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Family Club | <input type="checkbox"/> Support Group on Base |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Readiness Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Family Online Forum | <input type="checkbox"/> Therapist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Family Websites | <input type="checkbox"/> VA Center/Hospital |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Hotlines | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not get information about available resources during deployment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Magazines | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Military Families | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | | |

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Community Resources



The next few questions ask you about access and use of community services and resources. If you have not used any community resources during the service member's deployment please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Please select any of the community resources you used while the military member was/is deployed. Please check all that apply.

- Community Mental Health
- Community Services
- Community Support Group
- Family/Individual Therapist
- Give an Hour Counseling
- Military Family Camp/Retreat
- Military Family Support Group (off-base)
- Military OneSource Counseling
- Place of Worship Services
- Place of Worship Support Group
- Red Cross
- YMCA Military Outreach
- I did/am not use/using any community services
- Other (please specify)

Which of these services have been the most useful to you?

Other (please specify)

Please explain why this service has been the most useful for you.

What barriers exist to accessing community resources? Please check all that apply.

I do not have the financial means to pay for resources

I do not have transportation

I do not know how to find resources

I do not live near resources

I do not trust the resources that are available

I do not see any barriers

Other (please specify)

What could civilian communities, including online communities, do better to support military families and friends during all stages of deployment? Please explain.

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Military Resources



The next few questions ask you about access and use of military services and resources. If you have not used any military resources during the service member's deployment please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Please select any of the military services you used while the military member was/is deployed. Please check all that apply.

- Air Force Family Service Center
- Army Community Service Center
- Family Assistance Center Resources
- Family Readiness Center Counseling
- Family Readiness Center Resources
- Family Readiness Center Support Group
- Marine Corps Community Service Center
- Navy Fleet and Family Support Center
- VA Support Group
- VA Support Services/Counseling
- I did/am not use/using any military services
- Other (please specify)

Which of these services have been the most useful to you? Please explain.

Other (please specify)

Please explain why this service has been the most useful for you.

What barriers exist to accessing military services. Please check all that apply.

- I do not have the financial means to pay for resources
- I do not have transportation
- I do not know how to find resources
- I do not live near resources
- I do not trust the resources that are available
- I cannot access the military resources I know about, because I am not a military spouse or child
- I do not see any barriers
- Other (please specify)

What is missing and/or could be improved about these programs/services by the military during deployment? Please explain.

What Would You Do



This question asks you to be both creative and helpful. Please feel free to add any comments you may have not made elsewhere in the survey and remember that your feedback is helpful for guiding future research and creating programs that are helpful to both you and your loved ones.

If you were in charge of creating or expanding military resources for a day, what would you do to help military families and friends like you in terms of programs and services?

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Thank You!



Thank you for taking the time and consideration to complete the survey! Your time and interest is much appreciated!

Please feel free to share the survey with others who are eligible to participate by forwarding this link:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/9BKNDPD> via email or through Facebook.

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Done

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Appendix I

Human Subjects Review Board Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

March 12, 2012

Michelle Biltz

Dear Michelle,

You did a very nice job on the revisions. You are approved and ready to go. Thank you very much.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'David L. Burton'. The signature is written in black ink and includes a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David L. Burton, M.S.W., Ph.D.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix J

Screen Shot of Informed Consent and Referral List

Needs Assessment of Family and Friends of Single Service Members Exit this survey

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Michelle Biltz, I am a fiancé of a military service member and a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting research to learn more about the needs of family members and close friends of unmarried service members during deployments to Afghanistan or Iraq. This study will be presented as a thesis and may be used in possible future presentations, publications or dissertations.

Your participation in my study is voluntary. I am asking you to participate in an on-line questionnaire. You may refuse to answer any or all of the questions. The questionnaire will first ask you some general questions about you and the service member. You will then be asked several multiple choice questions and five open-ended questions about your experiences finding support and resources at any time during the service member's deployment. The questionnaire will take about 30 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study may bring up difficult feelings in regards to your experience of having a loved one deployed. If you feel that you would like additional support at any point during your involvement in the questionnaire or following your participation, I have provided a list of mental health resources at the end of this letter that you may use at your convenience.

Although there is no financial benefit for participating in this study, your responses to the questionnaire will allow you to share your personal and unique perspective on your experience with a loved one's deployment. It is my hope that your responses will provide insight on the impacts of deployment for mental health workers, social service providers, and researchers. In turn, I hope that further understanding of your needs and the needs of people like you, will lead to increased access to services, and development of programs to address these needs, and further research.

Your anonymity and confidentiality are protected. The survey software does not collect names, e-mail addresses, IP addresses, or any other identifying information. Your responses will be available only to me through the use of password protection. My research advisor will have access to the data after any identifying information has been removed from the write-in responses. Please do not include any identifying information about you or your service member, this way your anonymity and confidentiality can be assured and protected. In any publications or presentations the data will be presented as a whole, in brief illustrative quotes or vignettes, no identifying data will be presented. All data will be kept in a secure, password protected, location for a period of three years as required by Federal guidelines. After that time, if the data is no longer needed for research purposes it will be destroyed. If it is needed for research purposes the data will continue to be kept secured for as long as it is needed and when it is no longer needed it will be destroyed.

If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the questionnaire at any point and you may choose not to answer any or all of the questions, by skipping them. Once you have submitted your data it will be impossible to withdraw from the study as your data is anonymous and I will be unable to identify your survey responses from the others that have participated in my study.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or about any aspect of the study, you can contact me at (303) 245-4435 or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Thank you for your interest in the study.

Sincerely,

Michelle Biltz

Referral Sources

1) Give An Hour – a non-profit organization offering free mental health services to anyone who is or has been affected (indirectly or directly) by the conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan
Website (under providers): <http://www.giveanhour.org>

2) Military OneSource – A organization providing resources for military members and their families including information pertaining to deployment. Military OneSource also provides face-to-face counseling, telephone consultations, and online consultations
Contact a consultant: 1-800-342-9647
Website: <http://www.militaryonesource.mil>

3) Mental Health America – a advocacy organization that provides access to behavioral health services for all Americans addressing the full spectrum of mental and substance use conditions
Phone (in crisis): 1-800-273-TALK
Phone: 1-800- 969-6642
Website: http://www.nmha.org/go/find_therapy

BY CHECKING “I AGREE” BELOW, YOU ARE INDICATING THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION ABOVE AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION. AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Please print a copy and save it for your records.

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