

Military Wives Whose Husbands are Deployed During Operation Iraqi Freedom

Veneisha Johnson

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MILITARY WIVES WHOSE HUSBANDS ARE DEPLOYED DURING OPERATION
IRAQI FREEDOM

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of Argosy University, San Francisco Bay Area
In partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
In Counseling Psychology

By
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	iii
Copyright Page.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Purpose.....	3
Research Questions.....	4
Delimitation and Limitations.....	5
Definitions.....	6
Importance of the Study.....	7
Method Overview.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Military History.....	9
Military Rankings and Positions.....	10
What the Military Does in War.....	11
Role of a Wife.....	12
History of Army Wives Roles.....	14
Emotional State.....	15
Ethnicity.....	17
Feminist Movement.....	17
MARRIAGES.....	19
Deployment.....	19
Divorce.....	20
Resources to Support Marriages.....	22
BENEFITS.....	23
Spouse and Family Support Groups.....	24
Educational Benefits.....	25
Medical and Dental Benefits.....	26
Vacation Benefits.....	27
COMMUNICATION.....	28
Different Types of Communication.....	30
Keys to Good Communication.....	31
SELF ESTEEM.....	35
REINTEGRATION.....	37
DEPLOYMENT RESOURCES.....	43
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....	50
Design.....	50
Subjects.....	51
Data Collection.....	51

Procedure.....	52
Data Analysis.....	53
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	54
Description of Participants.....	54
Meaning Reported by Themes.....	56
Research Question One.....	57
Research Question Two.....	60
Research Question Three.....	69
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION...	75
Summary.....	75
Additional Findings.....	85
Implication and Conclusion.....	86
List of Reference.....	91
Appendixes.....	97
Appendix A.....	97
Appendix B.....	99
Appendix C.....	100
Appendix D.....	101
Appendix E.....	102

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The focus of this study was to gain an understanding of six military wives experiences while their husbands were deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom. There were three themes that were derived from the literature and they were explored with the six wives: communication, reintegration, and self-esteem.

The analysis of the research was qualitative, utilizing a phenomenological approach, consisting of structured interviews for the participants whose husbands were deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom. To analyze the data Giorgio's (1985) phenomenological approach was used. The structured interviews were used to explore and gain an understanding of how the three themes impacted the wives while their husbands were deployed.

The results showed that all three themes impacted the wives while their husbands were deployed. Self-esteem was not necessarily impacted by role reversal, but it was an integral part of the deployment process and how the wives felt about themselves. All of the participants experienced some type of difficulty communicating with their spouse during the time of war. The obscurity continued after the deployment and many had to learn how to initiate a different type of communication skill. The second theme dealing with reintegration proved to also be difficult on all of the wives. They all expressed their happiness with the husband being home safe, but struggled with the role reversal. The wives also struggled with giving up some of their independence. The third theme proved that for many of the wives body image was very important. Also important for them was their jobs and the role that they played as mother. This research is important to the field of psychology, those within the military culture, and those interested in knowing more about the military community. This is vital in helping others understand the plight of the wife during the time when her husband is deployed. It will also assist in providing and reevaluating the way wives are treated and the programs that are offered to support them.

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Dedication

To my dad who paved the way for me to be here. Dad, for all those long days that you went to work at 5 a.m. and came home at 7p.m. I appreciate the hard work that you put into my education and for never giving up on me. To my mom for her constant prayers and for taking the time to care and listen when things were not looking promising for me, and to my stepmother for her words of wisdom and her patience.

To my big sister who as always been by my side since birth. Thank you for your constant motivation, guidance, and laughs along the way. To my husband for listening to me complain, cry, but mostly for staying by my side. Thank you for your service in Operation Iraqi Freedom. To my son Jeremiah, I love you with all my heart. Throughout the majority of this process you were inside my womb, but I know that you were actively assisting me in the process. I thank you for sleeping so that I could write and complete this process.

I thank you all for just loving me, because that was the key to me completing this life long achievement.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

War is a hostile conflict or struggle between two states. It is an affliction that has plagued the United States since its birth. The most current war is the Iraq war, which is called Operation Iraqi Freedom. This war so far has affected and will continue to affect a wide range of people, such as soldiers and their families. Whenever there is a war, there are many civilians that believe that the only person(s) that is traumatically affected are the soldiers because they are placed on the frontlines. No one can refute that the soldier's struggle is very complex and dangerous, but there is an often forgotten side of war. That side is the wives' point of view, the women left behind to take care of the family, the finances, and all other household responsibilities. In addition, they must also deal with the anticipation that their husband may die or be injured in this war.

There is extensive research that deals with war related issues

The majority of research talks about the wars of the past like World War I and II, the Vietnam War, and even Desert Storm, but there are few that deal with the present War occurring in Iraq (Caliber, 1992). Within that research the focus is primarily on the effects of the war on the soldier. Topics focused on include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), coping with transition back to civilian life, and how stress affects the family (Hunter, 1982).

There is some research that does discuss some of the issues that a wife may encounter while being married to a soldier, but it rarely talks about the time during deployment, when the husband is away fighting a war. Lynn Larson wrote about the navy wives adjustment to deployment. She discussed the impact that family plays while

the husband served in Operation Desert Storm (1995). Ickovics, Rosen, and Moghadam(1990) wrote about the military wife working and some of the satisfaction that she sometimes experiences. It was stated that many women find physical well being and satisfaction with some type of employment, whether being a full time mom or vice president of a corporate company. Some of the other research entails looking at different coping skills of the wives, marital disruption, and some aspects of how to provide support their husbands (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985).

Problem Statement

There is limited research that looks at a wife's experience while her husband is deployed. Some of the issues that arise that need to be addressed are the roles of the wives and marital concerns. There is insufficient research that has looked into factors that impact the military wife and the demands or stresses that she endures while there is an enforced separation (Milgram & Bar, 1993). There is a lot of information out there that deals with divorce rate, secondary PTSD, stress and coping skills yet little exists on the personal lifestyles of the wives (Larson, 1995). Rosen, Teitelbaum, & Westhuis studied wives patterns of adjustment during Operation Desert Storm and found that women were highly stressed during their husband's deployment (1995). There is limited research done on how some members of the military handle the pressures of separation. Reservists and their families are not researched enough. It is noted that the reason is because of their distant connection to military resources on the local bases. The majority of the research stems from higher-ranking military families. (Defense Manpower Data Center, 1985).

The majority of the research about the military separation and women stems from Caucasian middle class families and are usually on officers. The enlisted and reserves are rarely researched (McCubbin, 1995). A look into some specific facets of a wife's life during deployment will yield information that can help society understand her true time of separation. This separation affects the role she plays and the family's dynamic. It changes and impacts her ability to provide emotional support to herself, her family, and her ability to maintain a functional life. Understanding the above will help identify key elements of the wife's experience and educate society about her plight.

Purpose

There has been a lot of research done on the effects of war on a soldier, but there is very limited research on how a war affects a wife. Currently there is phenomenological research that deals with the effects of the war on marriages or the rate of divorce within the military. Other research seeks to understand coping skills of wives and the family (Foster, 1982). This study will instead be an open view of the wives' experiences, encompassing various areas of their lives. The purpose of this study is to focus on the experience of a wife while her husband is deployed. The areas that will be covered in this phenomenological approach to military wives whose husbands are deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom are the impact on marriages and role changes. There are many reasons why this is an excellent time for this research: the war is occurring presently, and there is a willingness to create change.

Research Questions

While a husband is away at war there will be a reduction in communication. The wife's communication with her husband is done through packages and letters. With today's technology there is also the internet, but that depends on the availability and the location of the husband. Due to this limited communication there will be some impact on the marriage, especially the wife who is at home taking care of all the family's responsibility. The limited communication will also censor the conversations that the wife will have with her husband (Watterdorf, 1992). Some of the questions that will be highlighted throughout this research:

Question I: Wives will have limited communication with their husbands while they are deployed and that will have a negative impact on their communication within the marriage. Due to the limited communication there will be a strain on the relationship. Decision making, conflict resolution will be more complicated within the marriage.

Question II: Reintegration of the husband to the family will be difficult for the wife. While the husband is away the wife becomes the primary caregiver in all aspects, she now takes care of all the domestic and physical things for the entire family. When the husband leaves from war and comes back to the family, it is very difficult for the wife. Her role in the family will shift again.

Question III: Role reversal will impact a wives' self esteem. Wives will be impacted due to the fact that she will now be torn between once being the primary caregiver and then upon the husband's return she will relinquish that role. When this role change occurs it can create ambivalence in her identity. This can make the woman feel

invaluable to the family. The change from caregiver back to dependent can impact her self image and self worth.

Delimitation and Limitations

The delimitation within this study are the six participants that were selected to be a part of the research. This will limit the findings. The recruiting efforts were done on an Air Force Base in one general location within the state of California. The Family Support Coordinator would introduce the proposal to spouses who attended the family support meetings or activities. There were also flyers handed out at meetings with the base commander's wife. All of those efforts resulted in phone calls stating interest in the research. There were many wives that were reluctant to be involved in the research based upon the fear that it will create negative publicity for the Air Force. Due to lack of involvement, there was a limit of how many wives were interviewed.

Another Delimitation of this research project was the technique used to conduct the interviews. There are a few key points that were necessary for the research to be equipped with during the interview process:

- Developing rapport with the participant
- Creating trust between the interviewer and the interviewee
- Having the ability to recognize the verbal and nonverbal language

According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), if any of these components were overlooked or misunderstood it would create false data (p.317).

The third delimitation of this research is that the researcher is the wife of an Army soldier, who served one year in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. With the personal

component to this research, the researcher had some personal feelings about this topic. Some of the areas of this research that impacted the researcher were communication and finding resources during the time that her husband was deployed in Iraq. It is difficult to be objective when dealing with similar scenarios as other wives. However, researcher was very aware of her own biases and documented them throughout the process, to reduce biases.

Definitions

There are many words that are used in the military that civilians are not familiar with, so here are a few that will be used throughout this research.

According to the website (www.answers.com, 2005):

Deployment

- 1) a movement of forces within operational areas
- 2) the positioning of forces into a formation for battle
- 3) the relocation of forces and materiel to desired operational areas.

Deployment encompasses all activities from origin or home station through destination, specifically including intra-continental United States.

Enlisted

Enlisted members are the "core" of the military. They perform the primary jobs that keep the military functioning daily. They specialize in the different areas of the military.

Warranted Officers

Warrant Officers are very highly-trained and they specialize in certain areas. They remain in their primary specialty to provide specialized knowledge, instruction, and leadership to enlisted members and commissioned officers alike.

Commissioned Officers

Commissioned Officers are the "head". Their goal is to provide guidance and leadership in their area of specialty or the area that they are designated to facilitate

Importance of the Study

This researcher anticipates that this specialize focus will open doors for more research to be facilitated in this area. It will look at marital difficulties and role changes. It will assist the military in knowing how to better support wives. Wives are sometimes overlooked and overshadowed because society assumes that the person impacted are the soldiers that are away and not the wives left behind. It is also a time to provide more resources to them and to assess the one that are being utilized, ones that are effective or not, and to develop new resources. Some of the resources that can be beneficial are psychotherapy, financial management, and career building. From this educational component, the military can then develop or adjust programs that will assist wives with the transitions that occur while their husbands are away at war.

Method Overview

This is a qualitative study using the phenomenology approach. Phenomenology is a social approach that assists in gaining information from the participants about a particular situation or event. There will be six wives selected for this study. Each of the participants will be interviewed individually. The interview will be organized in a semi-structured manner consisting of open-ended questions that focus on the factors of interest. The goal of the interview for this researcher is to obtain information about these wife's experiences. Then to gain themes based on the interview process. (Trochim, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter covers some of the different areas that are affected when a husband is deployed into war. These areas include marriages and the wife's role. The literature pinpoints areas that are poignant to the experiences of a wife whose husband is deployed. It is also taken from the perspective of the women who are married to soldiers who were deployed throughout different wars in American history. The focus is on their overall experiences, their strengths, weakness, and the changes that were made pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment.

Military History

The history and development of the military is important to understand before going forward. The United States military is broken down into four different branches, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. Under those branches are the National Guard and the U.S. Reservist. (Paananen, 1993). The role of the military is to protect the freedoms of the United States of America and they do so by fighting.

According to Paananen (1993), the military continues to change through time depending on the situations that the country is faced with. Before the military was broken down into four branches, the American people depended on militias to protect them. However, the militias that were created in 1637 would fight against Native Americans, not entire countries, like the battles of today. In 1775 Great Britain wanted to charge the colonies to have British soldiers on their soil and later passed the Stamp Act which meant

that Great Britain was going to add some taxes to items that were imported to the colonies. After the British imposed those laws on the colonies, they decided to fight back. They formed the Army led by George Washington. Within John Adams presidency, there were a number of attacks on American ships by the France; it was there that the Navy and Marines were created to protect the shores. During World War II, the Air force was finally developed, even though all the branches had some type of air support.

Military Rankings and Positions

The Commander and Chief of the military is the President of the United States, who is currently George W. Bush. Within the three branches the ranks are broken down very similarly. The four branches of the military have a chief of Staff. These chiefs of staff work with the secretary of state in assisting the president with military decisions. The rank of the officers within the Army, Air Force, and Marines begin with second lieutenant, first lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant colonel, colonel, brigadier general, major general, lieutenant general, and general (Paanen, 1993, p. 26). The enlisted member's ranks are from E-1 thru E-9 that is from a Private in basic training to a Sergeant Major of the Army (Soldier's Handbook, 2001, 1-10). Throughout the military there are a variety of jobs that do not consist of being on the front lines. There are those who are cooks, electricians, engineers, mechanics, and historians. However, there are those that are apart of Special Forces and are trained intensely to be on the frontlines along with the Army Rangers and Navy Seals.

What the Military Does in War

It's important to understand how the military operates, because then one can begin to fully understand the psychological aspects that it has on the entire military community. Even though the military can be very active during peacetime (garrison), its primary goal is to prepare for possible conflict or combat with other foreign adversaries. Preparing for war is an important process; it involves a lot of training and planning. Leaders meet to develop and discuss contingency plans, strategies on defeating the enemy, and discuss possible threats to the units during combat operations. Once war is declared everyone within the country is aware. Yet often war is not officially declared before troops decide to train for possible engagements and deployment to different theaters of operations. The military's purpose for war is to protect the freedoms and liberties of American people; the goal is to knock out the existing regime or power and install free and Democratic societies.

Role of a Wife

Throughout history it is noted that the separation between a husband and his family creates much stress and discomfort. Some of these stress factors can be minimized depending on how well prepared the family is. It can also impact the psychological health of the family (Hunter, 1982). Research shows that some concerns that arise for a wife while her husband is away are: loss of emotional support, increase in care taking, and household activities, threat of the husband being killed or injured, developing new support units, and then to readjust once husband returns (Kelley, 1994a).

Since the beginning of time the role of the woman was defined by domestic situations in the home. The cave men braved the elements to bring home the bacon while his wife waited at home to cook it (Forisha, 1978). The role of a wife in the 50's was to take care of the family; now women are taking care of their families and having successful careers, so there has been a shift. There was once a time that a wife was only known as the person that fulfilled all of the domestic needs of the family. Forisha states that, "in marriage the role of a wife is divided, in a marriage a man is given, "the power to think to decide..., while a wife's role is to manage the domestic and interpersonal life of the inner world that is, the home (p. 212)". Those roles are assumed by both parties when they enter a marriage. However, within the 21st Century, there are wives that are career and family oriented. It used to be that women that went to work in the 50's and 60's were looked down upon by people within society; now there is a shift and wives that stay home are looked down upon.

A wife's role has grown to be more than domestic; she is also seen as a provider for her family. Forisha quoted Scanzoni (1975) stating that in a marriage the traditional

wife does the following: put her husband and children first, she also has the belief that her purpose is to take care of her husband and children and she finds the most fulfillment in her family. There are some wives in the military that are stay at home moms or housewives and there are others that are more career oriented. However, during a time of war these women regardless of their roles in the family will experience a change. When the husbands are away at war, in a family where the husbands were the head the wives must now take on that role. These wives will be left to handle the domestic, physical, and they must remain emotionally strong for her family. Women are usually not prepared to have their husbands go off to war (Bey and Lange, 1974). Even though she may not be prepared she will be put in the position sometimes to make life-changing decisions for her family. She must also manage the children, the strict culture of the military, and maintain her marriage.

During the time of war a wife is left behind to handle all of the stresses of taking care of a family, financial concerns, and deal with the feelings of hopelessness that can sometimes develop into depression and frustration. These women are left to take care of all of these responsibilities as if they were single. Besides the children other women wonder how they will take care of some non-domestic tasks such as dealing with the car if anything goes wrong. The *Hilltop Times* did an article in which a woman was interviewed whose husband was recently deployed to Iraq. She stated in the article that, “The trouble I am finding now is how to juggle four kids and five schedules (Ferguson, 2005)”. With all those different areas to maneuver through, it becomes the expectation of those who depend on her and it also becomes her true expectation of herself (Wood,

Scarville, & Gravino, 1995). The changes of not having a husband around during wartime can be extremely stressful for some women. These women during that time sometimes suffer from different medical conditions for example weight loss, insomnia, and anxiety (Bey and Lange, 1974). A key ingredient to whether a soldier's deployment is successful comes from the wife's ability to adjust and accept all of the responsibilities of the family (Campbell, Campbell, Ramberger, Schultz, Stawarski, & Styles, 1991).

History of Army's Wives Roles

Houppert's (2005) illustrates how the Army wife's role was viewed in the 1960's. She writes that an army wife must become familiar with the entire task of a housewife. She then goes on to discuss that a wife should not worry her husband with the small problems of the home and family. The central goal of the wife is 'keeping up her man's morale'. There are three basic responsibilities of an army wife: She must create a congenial home, rear a family that your husband will be proud to be a part of, and strengthen her husband's morale. According to these principals, she must put herself in the position to take care of everyone except herself. If she is unable to do this then she is looked at as a failure (Houppert, p. 63). During that time, 1960's there were also concerns about whether an army wife should work. It was looked down upon and if she did work, then it should have been under these circumstances according to Houppert:

Homemaking is a fulltime job, and a wife should not work unless there is a real need for the money she earns. Of course, there are extenuating circumstances, where an aged or ill parent must be supported, but simply to improve one's standard of living or to buy a piano, silver, or a car is not a very worthwhile reason, if such work in any way jeopardizes your home responsibilities. If you do