

Family Reintegration Following Guard Deployment

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Presenter Disclosures

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- (1) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

"No relationships to disclose"

Specific Aims

To describe veterans and families perceptions of:

- Their experience with family reintegration and the challenges reintegration presents;
- Resources and strategies that would assist them with the reintegration process.

Design

- Qualitative descriptive study that used an intensive in-depth individual, couples, and focus group interviews method of data collection.
- NVIVO 8 was used to analyze the interview data.
- Bazeley (2007) and Charmaz' (2006) approach to coding data was used to organize and categorize the findings.

Participants

- Participants included both National Guard members, and or family members of guardsmen deployed since 2001.
- A total of 45 participants, 26 Guard members, and 19 family members participated in focus group, couple, and individual interviews
- These deployed Guardsmen and the family members did not necessarily need to be related. A family member could participate even if the Guard member they were related to did not, and vice versa.

Participant's Characteristics

Characteristic	Guard Member	Family Member
Age	20s (3) 30s (6) 40s (12) 50s (5) 60s (0)	20s (0) 30s (2) 40s (10) 50s (6) 60s (1)
Marital Status	Married < 5 yrs (3) Married >5 yrs (15) Not Married (5)	Married < 5 yrs (1) Married >5 yrs (18) Not Married (0)
Children	Infant & or Pre-school (3) School Age (6) Teen Age (5) Grown (1) No Children (8)	Infant & or Pre-school (1) School Age (4) Teen Age (7) Grown (4) No Children (3)
Gender	Male (23) Female (3)	Male (5) Female (14)
Education	High School (5) Associate Degree (12) Bachelors or higher (7)	High School (3) Associate Degree (2) Bachelors or higher (14)

Participant's Characteristics

Characteristic	Guard Member	Family Member
Branch	21 Air Guard 5 Army Guard	12 Air Guard 7 Army Guard
Rank	E4 and below (2) E5 and above (17) O3 and below (3) O4 and above (2)	E4 and below (0) E5 and above (7) O3 and below (3) O4 and above (9)
Deployment Location	Iraq/Afghanistan (6) Other SW Asia country (Kuwait; Qatar, Turkey) (19) Germany; Spain (1)	Iraq/Afghanistan (6) Other SW Asia country (Kuwait; Qatar, Turkey) (11) Germany; Spain (2)
Multiple Deployments	Yes (2) No (24)	Yes (4) No (15)
Deployment Duration	< one year (21) > one year (5)	< one year (13) > one year (6)
Time Home	< one year (20) > one year (6)	< one year (4) > one year (15)

Finding the way back in

- Finding the way back in is the key process that the military member must complete in order to successfully reestablish a sense of belongingness with their family. An Army soldier said this:
 - Well, . . . when we first got back . . . first of all, the mind set of a soldier is "I'm gonna come back, and everything is going to be normal," it's gonna be right where I left off." And that's probably the biggest misconception that we could have as a soldier. Because when I came back, I was right where I left off, but my family had moved on for a year and a half. So now I'm playing catch-up. So not . . . not only did . . . I mean that was a big conflict right there, but they learned for a year and a half how to live without me. So they didn't need me anymore. And that was really tough to kinda get back in that element.*

Conditions that Shape the Experience of Finding the Way Back In

- Several conditions that occur during deployment and post deployment shape the degree of challenges with reintegration
 - During the deployment:
 - new roles assumed by family members
 - other stresses family members experience
 - as well as the Guard member's experience with the deployment later influence reintegration
 - Post deployment:
 - changes that occurred in both the family members and the Guard member must be reconciled – if this doesn't go well, reintegration difficulties emerge

Family Roles Assumed During Deployment

- Roles assumed during deployment and how easily these were absorbed
- Could be duties the person always did but were made more difficult because of the increased workload, or they might be new roles they had to assume
 - And I'd asked him before he left, can you make arrangements with someone to come and help me? And I guess you know he talked to some of his friends at the tavern, but I'm not really much of one to say 'okay, I need blah, blah, blah.' I'm not friends with his friends.*

Family stress during deployment

- Family stress during deployment includes a variety of added on factors that can increase the stress of deployment
- Includes an array of family stressors due to crises that occur while the member is deployed and can include:
 - problems with children,
 - emergency illnesses or injuries (either the veteran's or a family member's),
 - financial or legal problems,
 - marital distress,
 - or difficulties with giving or receiving mutual support.

Examples of family stress during deployment

- As one Guard member said:
 - I have six kids, and my youngest one is 14. It seems always the youngest always has trouble. All the other kids on all deployments that I was gone, it's like "hey, dad's gone. wait till he's back." But my youngest one seemed affected the most*
- Another Army Guard wife's mother had serious health problems:
 - And I remember during that period of time, there were a lot of other events occurring in my family that were kind of very difficult. First part of December, my mother fell while Christmas shopping and broke her hip.*

Guard Member's Deployment Experience

- Objective characteristics of the deployment that help to qualify how difficult it was for the veteran:
 - length of time for the deployment,
 - the location,
 - the stress in the environment at the location,
 - the perceived danger at the location,
 - and the history of how many deployments the individual has endured.

Guard Member's Deployment Experience

- Experiences that influenced the stress that the individual veteran member felt during deployment.
- Challenges members encountered in the setting:
 - having to break rules to get the job done,
 - problems caused by the constant pressure to perform with the stress and unpredictability of day to day life,
 - doing the impossible without resources,
 - as well as seeing difficult sights and suffering

Examples that illustrate these experiences

- Sometimes it was necessary to break the rules to get the job done right:
 - *Generally. I broke a lot of the rules. I was a leader, a platoon sergeant and broke a lot of rules. Stood on the carpet in*
- The pace and stress of daily operations put tremendous pressure on deployed members:
 - *It seemed constant. It seemed every day. In the year we were there, we didn't . . . we saw 376 patients, but not all of them are badly wounded.*

Communication While Deployed

- Communicating while deployed was both a positive and a negative.
- During separation, the ability to be able to talk about family problems as they come up can help to keep the deployed family member in the middle of family life.
- However, given that they might not be able to do anything about a problem at home, it actually can add more stress
 - *I think there was a lot more personal issues that were being dealt with via phone and email, and I witnessed and then had to deal with the fallout from very large family disagreements on phones. And . . . and when . . . after that would happen, that person would be completely useless to me for hours.*

Post Deployment - Veteran Issues

- Veteran - after initial homecoming
- Conditions that affect the Guard member's response to reintegration include:
 - the difficult symptoms that they may be experiencing post deployment and
 - their residual use of ways of coping that worked well in the deployed setting, but interfere with family life.

Veteran Post Deployment Difficult Symptoms

- These are symptoms or problems that the veterans have post deployment.
 - Too much adrenaline/short fuse
 - Drinking too much
 - Problems with anger and depression
 - Nightmares
 - As noted by one wife: *And that was hard for me, because when he came back, he was so depressed and down, that he wasn't able to handle it. And so I still had to keep doing it even after he was home . . . handling everything*

Veteran Deployed Ways of Coping

- Ways of coping in the deployed environment that don't work well at home
 - Insisting on predictability
 - Expecting unilateral decision making
 - Pushing mission urgency
 - Seeking safety
 - Stuffing emotions
- As one army soldier said: *...when I got back, little by little things were going wrong, and I think part of what we do as soldiers is block things out rather than deal with them. If . . . if we don't have an answer to overcome that objective right away, we kinda block it out*

Post Deployment - Family Issues

- For the family - after initial homecoming
- The Guard member is now having to act as a reintroduced member,
- There is the work of renegotiating roles and relationships, as well as residual family conflict issues that must be addressed

Family Roles After Deployment

- In some cases, family members who had assumed new roles did not want to relinquish them, and or they did not want to go back the way things were, as this Air Guard wife noted:
 - *Until probably just a couple months ago, I kept the family finances. I did it all. But um, I was paying all the bills and all that. but I paid all . . . 'cause I said it's really good for me to know where everything is and what bills we have and how to pay them and do all that. I would say that's the only thing that's changed . . . that changed. That is it. That is the only thing. Other than that, we went right back to the division of labor. I'll tell you what did change. My attitude. I'm not sure if it's good or bad either. But I figured out that I'm pretty darn independent, and I can make . . . I can do it on my own*

Family Conflict After Deployment

- Family conflict was created by changes in the family members that occurred during the deployment that had to be reconciled with reunion.
- As one Army wife related:
 - *We're totally different people when [they] come back. I mean my children were . . . they grew so much in that . . . in that year plus that he was gone, that . . . you know, and it's so hard for them to come back and feel like "well, you know, the kids are not talking to him the same way, not . . . you know, they're teenagers now. They don't . . . they don't want to hang out with you, you know. They . . . they want to be kids, and they want to have fun, and you know, you're dad, and . . . you know. And so they grew out of that, you know, that fun kid stage to the, you know, let-me-have-my-space, you know . . . you know, kind of thing. And we all changed*

Helping Seeking Wont Happen

- In situations where the work of reintegration has become too much for the Guard member or their family
 - Sometimes the veteran doesn't recognize that they need help
 - Or, if it is pointed out by the family they may refuse to seek help
 - it can lead to a pernicious feedback loop where the veteran cannot manage the task of finding their way back in to the family.

Veteran Help Seeking Won't Happen

- Help seeking won't happen because either the veteran doesn't recognize the need for help, and or because of their beliefs, they are programmed to not seek assistance.
- As one Air Guard wife put it:
 - *You know, but, of course any . . . any man, especially [my] husband [a former] Marine, and has it altogether and has the pride up to here, and . . . you know, there's never anything wrong with them. "No, no, I don't have that problem." . . . "Guess what, honey. I've got news for you*
 - Another Army wife also echoed this notion that talking about one's problems is not something you learn to do in the military:
 - *These soldiers, they have been taught . . . you know, I think my husband has been in the military since '82. They are taught from Day 1 "suck it up and move on. You don't tell people your problems. Aye?"*

Veteran alienation from family

- An Army Guard member described in detail the distress caused by not fitting back in:
 - *But that is unlike knowing that it's going to be traumatic, it's gonna be awful when you go away. You think every thing is gonna be great when you come home. And so for it not to be great is even more confusing and more traumatic than leaving, because it's a predictable set of emotions when you leave. It's gonna be awful, you're gonna be sad, it's gonna be a crisis. Well, you think you're gonna come home, it's gonna . . . everything is gonna be great, you'll be one big happy family. And then you're excited to be home and nothing goes right and you can't figure out why it's not going right 'cause nobody is prepared for this part.*

Implications

- We need a means to identify veterans at risk of developing a sense of failed belongingness because they are having difficulty finding their way back in to the family.
- In other research (Brenner, 2009), failed belongingness has been connected to members expressed thoughts about potentially doing harm to themselves.
- One possibility would be to develop a short set of screening questions that could be administered by a health professional

Brenner, L.A., Gutierrez, P.M., Cornette, M.M., Betthausen, L.M., Bahraini, N., Staves, P.J. (2008). A Qualitative Study of Potential Suicide Risk Factors in Returning Combat Veterans. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 30(3): 211 – 225.

Possible Post Deployment Family Screening Questions

- Sayers et al. measured role reintegration concerns with the following yes/no questions:
 - 1) being 'unsure of the division of responsibilities in your family'
 - 2) disagreements about the division of responsibilities in the family
 - 3) children 'not acting warmly toward you' or acting 'afraid of you' (skipped for those without children)
 - 4) feeling like a guest or outsider in your own home'
 - 5) and if the marital relationship was in trouble or successful overall.
- Sayers, S. L., Farrow, V. A., Ross, J., & Oslin, D. W. (2009). Family problems among recently returned military veterans referred for a mental health evaluation. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 70(2), 163-170.

Indications for family screening

- Currently DDForm 2900 the Post Deployment Health Re-assessment (PDHRA) data collection tool asks one question pertaining to family reintegration.
 - The item is: "Since return from your deployment, have you had serious conflicts with your spouse, family members, close friends, or at work that continue to cause you worry or concern?"
 - This item if answered in the affirmative should prompt further questioning from the provider conducting the interview.

Resources and strategies that would assist them with the reintegration process

- Family Readiness Group support was praised for the pre and during deployment, but needs refocus to assist more post deployment
- Several strategies were mentioned by families that they thought did not exist but would help, prime among these being more reintegration education
- Some of the services families thought would help did exist but families weren't aware of them nor had they used them.