Resilience and Vulnerability: Research on Military Families and Veterans

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Their Lives Through Their Own Eyes

- Accounts of resilience and vulnerability
  - Youth in military families, Summer 2004
  - Youth in military families, Summer 2008
  - Homeless Veterans (UK), Fall 2008
  - Veterans and their Spouses, Fall 2009
    - Preliminary to longitudinal study of 600 families and their deployment experiences and adaptations
    - Family support program influences
Deployment Through the Eyes of Youth
Interrupted Relationships

• “I didn’t think that...I just kind of blew it [the deployment] off and didn’t really know it was going to be that long. And then when it started happening, started sinking in, it was hard.”

• “…I just kind of kept away from my dad because, you know, I was kind of mad at him.”

• “...I know my dad understands how I feel because before he left, like I don’t know, a couple of days before it, he sat down with us an talked with us , you know....Just, you know, he loves us and he’ll try and get back as soon as he can...”

• “I was such a (expletive) to my mom before she left. So it’s like ‘I hate you,’ you know? And all summer I said that to her—I said that, “I hate, I hate you!” And the next thing you know she’s packing up her bags and going...”
Competing Feelings and Responses

• “I used to hate my dad. I used to despise him or I didn’t...he was the worst person to me. And then he was...and then like I find out that he’s leaving and I really didn’t care at first. But then when I see him packing up his bags and getting all his stuff ready, I felt, I felt like a (expletive) myself because I didn’t help him through anything and I wasn’t nice to him through like everything else.”
Getting Sorted Out Through the Eyes of Homeless Veterans
Disconnections Then and Now

• My mom and dad were big drinkers. That sort of put blocks on everything because if I wanted to do something, they'd always be too drunk to sort it out. If I wanted clothes or holiday, I don't remember any holidays with them, you know what I mean? They was always down at the pub, they was always in the pub.

• Concentrating on the future. Where I want to be in a week's time, in a month's time. Or maybe an hour's time. Because I got to a point I was starting thinking about the past and that made me depressed and sad. Because a lot of bad things have happened. Yeah, a lot of things. This is what’s got me now, this is my life, and I'm wandering the streets with no money, no prospects. No, no. I've got purpose. That's what it takes is just that bit in the day we can come in and lock the door and your own time and space to do what you want. Instead of people rushing by you, what’s he up to, what’s he up to? You know what I mean, that actually quite important [indiscernible] on the street corners everyone pushing by you and shoving. So, you can't get nothing done and that's why people just end up drinking all the time. That’s all they can do. It blots it out.
Relationships and Connections

• Yeah, that's it, yeah. And plus once you, once you clique with other people, you might see two or three in the park drinking. On the other end they see you with a can. What, it just starts with you [indiscernible]. And it just starts from there. Mates. You've got to be drinking though. If you're not drinking, they don't want to know you because they've been doing it for so long.

• Basically I can get on with anybody do you know what I mean? So as long as I've got somebody there to have a wee chat with now and again, which is good or somebody to play snooker with or walk out with then I'm, that sees me for the day and I go for walks and that. It's just basically I keep myself to myself most times, know what I mean. but when I interact I like to interact with certain people because they are true friends to me like with my mate [indiscernible] me and him are so close. I can talk to him about anything, do you know what I mean, and I know it's all right, but yeah, basically just knowing, getting through the day is for me in just knowing that I'm helping myself and I'm doing what I need to do and then that just keeps me going everyday.
Military Life through the Eyes of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans and Spouses
Managing Leaving

• The Army has come a long way about, we call it reintegration. And they do a real good job of talking, and we do briefs, and we talk to our guys constantly like the last forty five days about reintegration, and not going into the house and taking over and kind of fall into the role that’s there. But, you could talk about it, but it’s just something that each guy does on his own and you have to figure out how to do it. So, I mean, the hardest thing is just leaving. I think Jacob kind of said it was nice leaving at ten days’ notice because then there’s no anticipation. Because you really can’t relax once you know. Okay, I know I’m leaving now. And if I leave three months out, that last three months is just tough because it’s just that anticipation that’s continually boiling in the house. The day after you leave is nice because now you can start counting down. You can start getting into it being over. But that three months that you’re waiting, you can’t. You’re just waiting for it to start. So that’s kind of rough.
Who understands?

- And they might go on a business trip for a week, and they’ll say that. And that’s what makes it so apparent that their oblivious. Oh yeah, you know, Rick needed to leave one time for two weeks, and that was horrible. And it’s like, I hate to tell you this, but it’s, but you don’t want to get into that with them. No matter what you say, they’re not going to get it.
Identity and Connections

- The first ninety days I think is the hardest, because you’re torn out of that, specifically for me the second time because I had two kids. But you’re the father, you know, I was a father. I woke up the morning before I left and I was a dad and a husband. And then you find yourself on a plane the next day and you’re neither.

- Yeah, which I always thought, I don’t know. I kind of thought maybe the second time will be easier. But it’s not easier. It’s, each one’s I think different and unique, the way it will affect on your family, the age of your children obviously plays a huge role. That type of stuff. So, I don’t think family, you asked me about family and friends, I don’t think family and friends understands it, and that’s kind of a pain.
Today’s Conversation: Intent

- Contribute to an ongoing conversation about the well-being of military families and Veterans
- Sharpen an understanding of the pivotal situations, issues, and experiences
- Move toward answering “status quo” and “end of the day” questions as applied to military families and Veterans
  - Current situation (status quo okay or not?)
  - Desired results for military families and Veterans
Today’s Conversation: Strategy

• Present recent research experiences as illustrations of current issues, as well as future issues pivotal to military family and Veterans research
• Provide selected demographic and psychographic information as backdrop
• Offer a set of “over the horizon” research questions that family, social, and behavioral scientists are poised to answer
Critical Issues Concerning Military Families

- Plan and prepare for deployment
- Handle stress of separation, long deployments, and moves
- Take care of health and well-being
- Know of and access services when needed
- Possess effective family relationship skills
- Understand/navigate military culture and demands

- Cope with children’s reactions to deployments and relocations
- Manage family finances (including income changes)
- Carry out new family roles and responsibilities during deployments
- Adjust to return of deployed member
- Relocation planning and preparations
- Adjustment to new communities
Critical Issues Concerning Military Families

- Information on military lifestyle (deployment, relocation, mission-orientation), support services, and unit/member welfare
- Access to support services
- Communication with military member during deployments
- Employment support for spouses
- Connections with unit and support groups
- Employer support for pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment of Guard and Reserve
- School support for children
- Affordable, quality child care

* DoD provides an extensive, excellent array of support for families, however, greater involvement by civilian communities is necessary, especially in support of Guard and Reserve families.
Solutions: Building & Sustaining Networks of Connections

Military Sector:
- Volunteer & Nonprofit Organizations
- Support Groups
- Faith Communities
- Military Unit Leaders
- Installation Leaders

Civilian Sector:
- Civic & Nonprofit Organizations
- Support Groups
- Faith Communities
- Employers
- Local Government

Extended Family, Friends & Neighbors (Informal Networks)

Family Resilience

Military Community Agencies

Public and Private Community Agencies
Resilience, Resiliency, and Vulnerability

- **Individual and Family Resilience**
  - Process of successfully overcoming adversity (individual)
  - Family resilience is the process by which families are able to adapt and function competently following exposure to significant adversity or crises

- **Individual and Family Resiliency**
  - Trait (individual)
  - Family resiliency is capacity of family system to successfully navigate their life circumstances; equate with family strengths (see Patterson, 2002; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)

- **Vulnerability**
  - Experiences, situations, or characteristics that expose a person to additional negative experiences and results
    - Risk
    - Increase odds of poor results
    - Internal and external elements
    - Chronic and acute
Study 1: Adolescents and Deployment

- 2004 Focus Groups
  - 14 focus groups; 107 youth, all Services
  - Access via NMFA

- Participants:
  - 107 adolescents between ages of 12 and 18
  - ~61% Caucasian; 17% African-American
  - ~46% Females
  - ~56% Active Duty military parent (39% Army)
  - ~36% National Guard or Reserve military parent (23% Guard)
  - ~100% Experienced parental deployment

- Analyses: Atlas.ti software
Study 2: Adolescents and Multiple Deployments

- Focus groups conducted with National Guard and Reserve Teens at OMK camps summer 2008
  - Florida; Ohio, Maine, North Carolina
  - 11 focus groups

Participants:
- 85 adolescents between ages of 11 and 18
- ~73% Caucasian; ~11% African-American
- ~51% Females
- ~48% Active Duty military parent (26% Army)
- ~46% National Guard or Reserve military parent (23% Guard)
- ~79% Experienced parental deployment (24% multiple)

- Atlas.ti software accessed to develop themes
Organizational Framework: Double ABC-X Model of Adjustment (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983)

A → B → C → X

Stressor(s):
- Deployment
- Redeployment
- Normative stressors

Resources:
- Formal support
- Informal support
- Attachment

Cognitions:
- Perception of meaning

Adjustment
Themes and Study Results

- Adolescents demonstrated a great deal of resilience when it comes to dealing with changes in their daily lives. Though deployment was a negative event in their lives, adolescents exhibited numerous adaptive responses.
- Demonstrated great maturity as they willingly took on more responsibilities at home. Many referred to themselves as becoming another parent for younger siblings.
- Family support for the parent remaining at home is important to these adolescents as evidenced by their attempts to protect them (usually their mothers) and other siblings from negative emotions and stress.
- Adolescents exhibited a great deal of variability when it came to asking others for support when they felt stressed. Some confided in others, while others tended to isolate themselves.
- Adolescents who felt supported by others seemed to evidence enhanced resilience, that is, their personal coping skills were complemented by support.
- Many adolescents were wary of the type of support offered by others. They were quick to point out incidences of insincerity and feigned experience with deployment from others.
Themes and Study Results

• Adolescents are very aware of the dangers associated with deployment and the ways their lives are changed as a result of it.

• Adolescents’ daily routines usually changed as a result of deployment. Some reported having to miss extra-curricular activities or programs because of transportation or financial issues.

• Many adolescents reported behavior changes, including changes in school performance as well as symptoms consistent with depression.

• Adolescents have a great deal of access to their deployed parent. Most reported having contact via e-mail or phone at least once a week. In many cases, contact occurred multiple times a week.

• Although they report watching television and reading newspapers, adolescents were wary of media coverage of the war. They repeatedly stated that the media does not report events accurately. Many adolescents relied on their deployed parent to provide them with accurate information about the war.
New Pathways and Uncertainty

• “Well I was kind of happy that he was going away because then I wouldn’t have somebody who’s always getting mad about something that I would do wrong. But then I was sad because he might not come back. I might never see him again.”

• “When I was younger, I didn’t understand why he was leaving. I just didn’t understand the whole concept of the Army and, you know, your dad has to be deployed. I didn’t understand the process at all.”

• “When my father got deployed, I was the only kid in my neighborhood whose dad got sent to that. So no one really knew besides just me and my sisters how we were feeling.”

• “I just didn’t know how long they would be gone and when they would come back, because plans change a lot. And we just didn’t know like how long we would have to go without our parent”
Location in the Family

• “When my dad was deployed I felt the same as I always do. Once you...if you’re born into the military, you get used to it.”
• “Nobody cared what I thought.....my mom and my dad, because they, he just left. He just left without even asking anybody what they felt or whatever. And I know he has no choice, but it was still hard on everybody.”
• “...I feel like I can’t relax. I’m always stressed and worried about something—my brother and sister, my mom, my dad, my friends. When I finally get one thing right, something else always seems to go wrong. And I’m always trying to like help my mom and stuff and be helpful, but there’s only so much a 13-year-old can do. And it’s just hard without my dad there to kind of help and stuff. And I like it when he’s home because then I can just act normal and stuff and just have fun.”
Sad and Mad

• “Well, see I’m sad because I didn’t want him to go but he had to, so I am kind of mad. But then he’s done this a lot so it doesn’t really matter.”
• “I wouldn’t say I feel mad but it’s kind of confusing about why he would want to do and put himself in that position.”
• “I don’t like it. I mean, I just don’t like the military now.”
• “I try not to think about it.”
• “I was angry at everybody. I’m like a big daddy’s girl, so I was really sad he was going away. And I was scared something bad might happen to him.”
• “I didn’t think anything at first. I just kind of blew it off and didn’t really know it was going to be that long. And then when it started happening, started sinking in, it was hard.”
• “I feel enraged. Just means that he got taken away from me, they took my dad away from me.”
Managing Stress

• “When I normally get stressed out I ask if I can go to the gym or something, to lift weights....It’s like lifting up all that metal puts a lot of strength to your to be ...and makes you all tired so when you go home, you don’t have to worry about anything. You just go to sleep.”

• “Just not think about it, because if you think about it, sometimes you get sad and stuff. So you just like try not to forget it completely, just like not think about it as hard as some people do.”
What do I do with Him?

• “...Like when they come home is that like awkward bonding phase all over again, like you’re starting from scratch. And then like they’ve missed out on so much stuff and it’s like hard to catch them up with it. Like some of the stuff you just had to be there and they weren’t. And it’s not like you can be mad at them for it, like inside you’re going to be a little bit mad, but you know it’s not their fault.”

• “Well when my dad left, everything’s going one way when he come back, and he’s starting off right where he left so...There’s just a big clash and that starts a lot of problems...Like he forgets that he’s been gone for like a year or six months. So he still thinks we’re a lot younger and while he was gone we matured a lot over the year. And he’s still trying to treat us the way we were treated a year ago.”
Safety Net of Friends

• “Sometimes it would be like we’d have people that bring weird stuff and then sometimes it would be a good thing. Other times it felt like they were just doing it out of pity. You know, sometimes you have that neighbor who wouldn’t talk to you because someone’s gone, you know, they’re just doing it out of pity.”

• “And so I sort of feel like my best friends and their families become part of my family, and we treat each other like our extended family.”

• “I do confide in my friends a lot more than I did before.”

• “My friend and I lived together when her dad was deployed. Since I kind of helped her out when he was gone, and now even though we’re like a thousand miles apart, she still helps me like over email and stuff.”
Looking Inward and Moving On

• “I like dealing with it myself. But for other people that do like need the support and stuff, I think that it would be a lot better if it was someone who actually went though it and is like not their age but around there somewhere so they could relate to them more. Because I tried that before, tried to do the one-on-one thing, and it was some old dude that pretended to know how I felt but I knew he didn’t. So it really frustrated me that he thought he could do anything.”

• “...I’d rather have a, you know, like just bond and talk about it. But like honestly, I don’t want to just sit here and, oh, my dad’s gone. I don’t want to talk about that 24-7. I want to go out, have fun, get together, eat you know? I don’t want to just talk about deployment and stuff because there’s other things happening in our lives you know...like occasionally talk about it but no like every time—so how do you feel?’ because it just gets annoying and it’s like numbing..”
Study 3: Homeless Veterans (UK)

- 2008 inquiry
- Interviews (30 minutes to one hour) plus questionnaire on affect and social networks
- n=37 homeless Veterans residing in an East London hostel
- Average age=47; in past year lived “rough” 3 months; average time at East London Hostel=9 months
- Range of time in military service (6 weeks to 22 years)
- Atlas.ti software used to organize narratives
Themes and Study Results

• **Vulnerability** and **Resilience** are companions
• **Fragility** permeates early life and adult life
• **Living rough** begins years prior to experiencing life in the street or in a park
• **Relationships, Connections, and Networks** are primary elements in getting sorted out
• **Community** is a force for intervention and prevention
• East London Hostel is a **Staging Area** for getting sorted out and for staying sorted out
Resilience and Vulnerability

**Resilience Markers**
- Positive memories of childhood
- Positive family connections now; sense of legacy
- History of occupational success
- Independent living track
- Management of mental illness and alcohol use
- Active friendships
- Connections with formal support systems

**Vulnerability Markers**
- Family disruptions, past and present
- Alcoholism in family of origin and in own life
- Violence in family and community
- Unresolved interpersonal conflicts
- Social isolation/exclusion
- Vague sense of future
Understanding Living Rough

• “Rough sleeping” is a term used to describe living on the streets, in parks or in stairwells, or anyplace outside of a dwelling.

• For some men in our sample, rough sleeping and the disconnections it represents (from friends, relatives, employment, as examples) is but a present and visible example of other times in their lives when they have been in unstable, unpredictable situations
  – Examples: Dad in prison; watching Mom get beat up; both parents alcoholics; experiencing hunger; Father disappearing one night; repeated beatings both as a child and as an adult.
  – In effect, disrupted development (example of respondent who maintained he had a normal childhood and then described alcoholism, abuse, and abandonment in his family, as well as substantial neighborhood violence)
Understanding a Context of Getting Sorted Out

• Life in East London Hostel as unique
  – Not easy to be admitted and not easy to be retained
  – Promotes social inclusion
  – Both caring and confrontational
  – Immediately shows value for the person
  – Provides support and expects responsibility
  – Promotes informal support among Veterans
  – Provides training and educational opportunities
  – Individualized according to needs
  – Prepares individuals for next steps; resource development
  – Sustains involvement with former residents
Understanding Resilience

- Jason is an avid reader and intentionally focuses on improving his values and having positive beliefs; he considers himself very spiritual.
- Sean was thrown out of East London Hostel several years ago for being drunk, angry, and violent. He returned five months ago, has stopped drinking and says he is committed to making something of himself.
- Dave recently “graduated” from East London Hostel and has his own flat. In his own words, “I mean to see me now you wouldn’t have recognized me two years ago.”
- Chris was living in a park and was a heavy drinker. What pushed him to stop drinking was a return to the park while at the hostel: “I sat there and I thought I couldn’t go back to this. I couldn’t go back to being like this.” It took him seven weeks at the hostel before sleeping in his bed. “The floor felt safe to me.”
- James recognizes that his continued well-being starts with consistently taking his medication prescribed for mental illness. “Because if I don’t do that I find it very hard to get through the day.”
Understanding Resilience

• Christy claims that East London Hostel is a Godsend. “You know, all I want to do is get a job and get back into work because sitting around is, you know, just sitting like tearing things apart.”

• Michael has a history of getting into fights. He has a son he has not seen for eight months but is working with the East London Hostel social worker to prove his paternity and be a Father to his son.

• Adrian, now employed in the construction industry and in the process of transitioning from East London Hostel, is involved in a positive intimate relationship, and says of his life today, “Yeah, now it’s completely different. One, because I like myself, but you know, I do genuinely like myself, yeah.”
A Life of Being in “Care”

• I was done with my training and I was waiting to be posted up, but in the meantime I had family problems. I lost a few members of my family and then I lost a friend in the Army and at the time I didn't realize what depression was and how it affects people, and I thought I was okay. And I obviously wasn't okay, and I was spiraling out of control. And then they said to me, well, uhm, we're going to let you leave, keep yourself together and if you want, you can come back in. So they gave me the trust to go sort myself out so. No, what happened is I came out, and I decided that I wanted to try to make a go of life outside of the Army and see whether or not because and really it's just been an uphill struggle. I never had very good qualifications coming out of school. Uhm, I was fostered from a young age I got took away from family at four. Yeah, I've been in care all my life so.
A Life of Uncertainty

• So, I was a little kid growing up believing one day I'll be going home and come to the age of 10 they said to me it's not happening, your mom is not staying off the drink. So at ten I was getting told I was going to be adopted. So, then I went to an adopted family. They adopted me when I was 13, but fitting in for me was, it was very difficult. For me I didn't understand what family was so they tried to give me everything I wanted.

• I just remember seeing my dad walking down the road with a suitcase in his hand and then me too, calling him back, but he just walked away...after my father left my brother became like a father figure to me...then a year after he started abusing me...I didn't really understand...I didn't realize it was wrong or anything.

• A great day for me is going through the day...not having any worries...not being paranoid about anything...I get very paranoid and very uptight around people sometimes...if I can...be on an even keel...not too erratic...not too depressed
“Getting Sorted Out”

• “If it weren’t for them I wouldn’t be here and I wouldn’t be sorting myself out.”

• “And then they said to me, well, uhm, we’re going to let you leave, keep yourself together and if you want you can come back in. So they gave me the trust to go sort myself out so.”

• “My Gran has the same thing as me. It’s all sorted out for her by medication but then there’s me, my medication doesn’t sort me out.”

• “My Mom and Dad were big drinkers. That sort of put a blocks on everything because if I wanted to do something they’d always be too drunk to sort it out.”

• “They want to get you somewhere where you can rest and sort your head out, although some of the people here are quite difficult.”

• “She was just going to check up a little bit and said if you come back in an hour or so we’ll see if we can sort you out.”
Study 4: Veterans and their Spouses

• Focus groups (n=2)
  – Three spouses, two retired military (women)
  – Three military members (men)
• One to two hour discussions
• Preliminary to developing project on deployment cycle and effects on families
  – Companion piece on role of family support programs
Themes

• Phases of deployment
  – Pragmatic
  – Emotional
• Individual deployment trajectories
  – Embracing the “mission”
• Family/relationship deployment trajectories
  – Moving in and out of the family
Disruption and Surprise

And, you know, I had a great job at Walter-Reed, and my husband worked at Walter-Reed, and um, so, we packed up and moved to Germany. And then literally, like 10 days after we got there, I remember my husband calling and saying, “Uh, honey, can you look at my uniform hanging on the back of the door and tell me what size it is?” And I’m like, oh, crap crap crap! So, that’s how I found out he was deployed. So we didn’t get a lot of notice. I mean, I could have kept my good job, and you know, our place in DC, and they up and moved us to a new country, and then my husband goes. We still had like the piles of boxes up in our house and it was awful. Unfortunately, I didn’t really get contacted by an Army family services type group and I was kind of on my own struggling, and he was gone for six months and there was a lot of crying and a lot of alone. Luckily, I knew one person there. And actually, she was involved in the FRG (Family Readiness Group). So I guess I mean, I had her to count on. She was really great, she helped me get through.
What Do Others Think?

• You can tell. They’re nodding their head, but they’re not, they’re looking at me like, she must not love him, or something’s wrong with him. Why is he leaving? Like, he must not love his kids and his wife if he can just leave and come back and leave and come back. Something’s wrong with his heart. He’s messed up.
The Limits of Personal Experience

- Well, I mean, I, you got to look at deployments kind of differently. Because, some are purely peace keeping missions where no one’s getting shot at. And others are war time deployments. And, when I first joined the army, the majority of the deployments were peace-keeping missions. So actually, I was the one that always left before my husband, and deployed. And came back after him. So I was never the spouse at home. It wasn’t until I got out of the army and we had children, where I was finally the spouse at home. And not only was he deploying, but he was deploying now to a war zone and not a peace keeping mission. Although I found out years later that his experience in the peace keeping mission was very different than mine, in that they were doing mine lifting operations. So, the possibility of him dying was actually pretty strong, but he never told me. And which I should have known, because of my job in the army, but I guess I just tried to ignore what he was doing, to be honest with you.
Resilience Strategies

So, the experiences that I had as a veteran, having deployed, prepared me somewhat for Brian’s deployment to Iraq from 2005-2006, but the difference being, is that we had a two year old and a three and a half year old who were trying to figure out, you know, who’s this dad guy? You know, they were starting to talk and everything like that. So, in that sense, that experience was challenging too. But because of my military experience, and growing up as a dependent in the military, now they call it family member, I knew the right resources to go to, to keep myself busy and I realized that if I were helping other people I wouldn’t be as focused on myself and how depressed I was by not having my partner with me.
Uncertainty

- So that kind of sums up the first one, is that I didn’t think about really our marriage or anything else. It was simply like, I need some sleep, I need some food, I’ve got to get to the grocery store. That was it. That really sums up the first deployment.
- And I was thinking about it (spouse deployment extended from 12 to 15 months) a lot lately because we’ve just reached the half way point this time around and right after the half way point that they kind of leaked out the information and you convince yourself because the Army tells you it’s just a rumor, it has to come through this person. Don’t believe it. And so you convince yourself not to believe what you hear on the news. And then they say, oh yeah, and by the way, that’s true. So scary. Frustrating to hear about. And I don’t know what else they could have done to make it easier. I mean, it’s tough no matter how you hear about it. But to convince yourself it’s not true and then to hear it is true, was bothersome.
Creating Family Relationships

• So our family has become the other service members’ in the area. So my mom and dad, well, we did have my grandmother live with us for a little while. She actually traveled around the world with us. But generally speaking, whoever was your neighbor or lived in your stairwell, over seas, where it’s like three apartments or two apartments on top of each other in rows of three, they became your extended family. So, my experiences when I move, I think are a lot different than someone who has not grown up in that experience. I immediately reach out to the other army spouse in the area.
Resistance to Military Lifestyle

• You know, didn’t know anything about the military when my husband got into the military. I’ve been admittedly very resistant to being involved in anything in the military just because it’s not what I’ve known. I was always like, please, no, you’re going to get out of the army. And he was only supposed to be in for like three years after he got out of the ROTC, and he ended up staying. That’s another story. But, he’s in now for, he’s going to stay. So I’m accepting it. But yeah, I never really got involved. And probably it was a self-inflicted isolation when my husband deployed just because I hadn’t really been, we had never lived on a post.
Barriers to Family Support

• I think a lot of times it feels very nebulous, and I think the amount of maybe information is really overwhelming, and sometimes I don’t know where to start. Like, yeah, you know, there’s probably something, and somebody I could call, but I don’t know how to find that information, and I don’t know where to start,

• I was just so dang tired out. I was like, I don’t know. It was probably some other things too, I don’t know. I had so much stuff in my head I just didn’t really know what to do. So I didn’t really access anything. And I guess, too, I had a lot of supports. I mean, I had a job, I was working, I was doing things.
Respite for Those who Support

• You’re in trying to help somebody and they’re sitting there trying to color, and they’re like, hey mommy, I want this. I want this one. So I think that this respite thing is so important for sanity. I literally had to call my neighbor across the street one day because I was going to kill my children. I was.
• Yeah, we’ve been there.
• I think sometimes the community gets worn out and they stop volunteering to help. Because one thing that I signed up for, was that they would come do lawn care, which was huge for me. And they didn’t have, they never had enough volunteers. They couldn’t recruit enough companies to do it because everybody was just always deployed, and the community got tired.
Transitions and Needed Information

- I would be fascinated, I have a really hard time with transitions. And you know, after he goes, and I think probably because I try to ignore it, and it ends up biting me in the butt later on. How to make the transition, and when he comes back, the reintegration. And a lot of what I have, the resources I have are a stack of books sitting on my nightstand that I have yet to read. And the most of them are by a spouse. They’re not written based on any research that’s been done. And it’s just somebody’s experience that they’d like to share. So I’d like to see some research on that. What to expect and what you can do to help.
Deployment Cycles and Relationships

- Yeah, because I hate being the disciplinarian. And I ended up being the disciplinarian a year after Brian came home. Not that he’s in that role because he’s dad, and by all means I am not sexist, not at all. But there are certain roles that I think we play, that don’t follow through because of that person being gone. And then once you get used to them being around again, and after a year when they’re starting to feel comfortable maybe with you know, being involved in the discipline or the punishment or whatever, um, they take off again.
Transitory Transition

- I can recall talking to friends and family about leaving and they’re just, you can tell that they’re completely oblivious to what’s going on in your life.

- Because you’re just, and it’s hard because you’re just, you know, you’ll walk, I remember my wife saying, you know, walking to the bathroom, and you know, she’ll, twenty, thirty days later, find something that I left. And we, through the whatever, it just re, it just starts it all over again. So that kind of stuff takes awhile. So her first ninety days are tough like mine, but in a different way.

- But I think that the more time, the more you know, and the more predictable things are, it just, you know, it makes it easier because then you know, there’s no chance that I’m not coming home. Like, when we first, he and I left, we didn’t know when we were coming home. And that’s just like ridiculous.
Marking Time

• Because when we redeployed, you know, I landed, I said good bye to all my buddies that I just hung out with in the last year, and I kind of went back to my job in the hospital. So, I mean, I still keep in contact with really my room mates that I lived with over there. But again, I just kind of compartmentalize that time of my life and kind of showed back up in Germany and my wife was like, Hey, have I got some cool stuff to show you. I mean, that’s kind of how I dealt with it, like anything. Kind of compartmentalize stuff.

• Yeah, those first ninety days and the last ninety days are the most dangerous for the unit just because, well, the first ninety days you don’t know what you’re doing. The last ninety days you’re not paying attention because you’re going home already.
Summary: Contributions from Four Studies

- Rich narrative accounts
- Experiences of the ups and downs of military family life
- Focus group discussions that can inform broad-based future studies
- Sensitization to the nuances of the experiences, their twists and turns
- Speak to theorizing in family, social, and behavioral sciences
- Adds to understanding these significant issues within the context of relationships, networks, and connections
Over the Horizon Research
Military Family Youth: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• There is a need to differentiate between normative/developmental adolescent-related stressors from those related to being in a military family. Currently there may be a tendency to over-attribute outcomes to military family membership and experiences.
• Where exactly should the deployment event be positioned in relation to youth outcomes? Which of its effects are direct, and which are indirect?
• Moreover as the deployment cycle plays out, how do youth adjustments vary?
• Though there are data suggesting the importance of social networks, there is a bias toward positive elements to the exclusion of negative elements.
• There are very little data on how participation in formal networks helps to build informal youth networks.
Military Family Youth: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• In our studies a certain number of youth respond to their fears about deployment by turning within rather than reaching out. We wonder at what point youth are at greater risk for poor outcomes as they turn inward.

• The role of institutions in helping youth is not understood very well. For example, school is a major influence yet relatively few are intentional about youth with a deployed parent. The school palette is often where youth act out many elements of their lives, and therefore is an intervention venue.
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Military Family Youth: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• Violence and substance use/abuse in military families are receiving greater attention by the military. A significant research question is where youth are located in this attention. What is the involvement of youth in these family system problems, and what consequences are there for youth?

• Greater attention to youth mental health is also needed, especially among those who have witnessed more severe family problems that have occurred around deployment.
Homeless Veterans: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• To what extent do non-normative (“rough”) developmental experiences produce both vulnerabilities and resilience?

• How do nested and overlapping networks of family, school, neighborhood, and religious community interact in the early lives of people who are homeless?

• What place does loss have in the lives of the men in our sample? From a loss perspective, many have experienced multiple losses (cumulative loss) over their lives?

• For some homeless men transiency is a way of life, and something experienced for decades. What then are the barriers to change? What are elements that can further change?

• Family of origin disconnections seem common, yet they may not be dramatically different from those who never become homeless. It cautions against misattributing homelessness as cause or effect, or, for that matter, as a mediator or moderator of other issues.
Homeless Veterans: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

- We have observed mainly positive network development at East London Hostel. But since we know that networks have their downsides, the question of those in the hostel environment is unanswered.

- In a number of cases there is evidence of being related but having no relationship. It is a sort of ambiguity that may contribute to uncertainty in family relationships. It also raises the question of the necessity of resolving family relationship issues as part of moving on to a more productive life.

- We will begin to examine the confluence of elements potentially contributing to homelessness in our sample. Lack of employment and having few resources is always lurking. However, personality and learned behaviors also come into play.
Family Deployment: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• When deployment occurs, it is a family experience. Yet researchers tend to focus on individual experiences rather than relationships experiences. Often individual resilience experiences are placed side by side, rather than examining their intersections and interactions.

• Most approaches to deployment preparation are passive, that is, providing information only rather than skills to access information at critical points. Moreover, there is very little attention paid to strengthening informal networks except when a crisis occurs (low focus on capacity-building).

• For those involved in developing evidence-based prevention and intervention programs, very often programs now in place are based on good intentions rather than on good research.
Family Deployment: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• Very often the finer points of family dynamics and processes are overlooked. For example, we know little about how families actually prepare for a military member’s return from war. Very likely preparation activities actually occur after his/her return, consequently may be off-time to the phase. Specifically, how is family life re-created and co-created in the deployment reunion phase? And what family outcomes are affected?

• Uncertainty permeates the deployment experience, thus suggesting important research on how individuals and families handle uncertainty, how they attempt to move toward certainty, and what is helpful to them.
Family Deployment: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• Because the preponderance of those in Iraq and Afghanistan are drawn from Guard and Reserve units, research must focus on military members and families that are dispersed, rather than clustered around military installations.

• A related query is how civilian communities can be mobilized to support military families in their midst, and exactly which community elements facilitate positive family outcomes.
Family Deployment: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• An under-researched area of family life pertains to extended family relationships. What role do extended family members have in supporting military families?

• In particular, how do parents intervene in the lives of younger military members (for example, Marines, an on-average younger and less-married force)?
Family Deployment: Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

• The reunion phase of deployment remains under-researched, especially six or more months post-reunion. There appears to be an assumption that the critical time is soon after reunion, where it is probably more likely there are a set of critical times, but perhaps qualitatively different. Clinicians are well aware of how individual adjustment issues emerge and stretch over time, and there is no reason to believe it is any different for family adjustment.
In Conclusion

• Resilience and vulnerability provide conceptual and pragmatic handles for parsing the experiences of military families and Veterans.
• Nuances of resilience and vulnerability provide a roadmap for supporting families and Veterans in educational, clinical, and programmatic ways.
• This view of military families and Veterans, “through their own eyes” weaves a tapestry of their wrestling with normative and extraordinary challenges, and with riding the waves of concern and hope. Throughout their accounts is a theme of the significance of relationships, networks, and connections.
Resources


Resources


Jay A. Mancini

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Addendum: Practical Considerations for Research Program Development

- Value-added of your work to military families and Veterans
  - Beyond mere interest
- Expected results
  - Differences?
  - Maintenance or enhancement?
- Translational merits
  - Close or remote correspondence?
  - *A priori* focus a must
- Connection with military goals/missions
  - Recruitment
  - Retention
  - Readiness
  - Agency mission and action plan
    - Army example
- Partnerships
  - Researchers and practitioners
  - Military itself
    - Incremental and trust-building
    - Insiders