Relationship Satisfaction and Resilience: Military Couples and Deployment

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Abstract
Throughout the past ten years, relational communication within the military has been affected by war zone deployments, creating a necessity to understand how couples communicate within this context. This study investigated the relationships, differences and comparisons between relationship satisfaction, agreement and resilience in military couples during three stages of deployment (pre-deployment, deployment and post deployment), when at least one partner had been deployed into an active war zone. 144 surveys-questionnaires were completed by (a) members of the United States armed forces ($n = 33$) and (b) their relational partners ($n = 111$). Resilience, relationship satisfaction and agreement all fluctuated throughout the stages of deployment. Relational partners were also more resilient and experienced greater relationship satisfaction than deployed soldiers, while soldiers showed higher levels of relationship agreement.

*Keywords:* Military, Relationship satisfaction, Resilience
It has been said that, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” but when that absence includes the threat of death and loss of support within the home, does it ring true? Today within the United States, encountering a male or female whose partner is currently deployed into an active war zone has become less rare. Since 2005, at least 3 million individuals were enrolled in the U.S. military, with approximately 1.4 million in active duty (Sahlstein, Maguire & Timmerman, 2009). To help counteract some of the difficulties those in the military may face, romantic couples and families have been provided with programs, assistance and resources to help prepare them for the cycles of deployment. Those Cycles of deployment are: pre-deployment (this would include the time from when a soldier is notified of his/her impending deployment, and up until the date of departure and location), deployment (the length of time spent away), sustainment (time a soldier is given to recuperate from the war zone and go through training to be reintegrated in civilian life), redeployment (the time a soldier spends on his/her subsequent deployment) and post-deployment (time after one has returned from deployment) (Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011). Throughout these cycles, military couples and families are confronted with the news of deployment, the stresses of maintaining the home front on their own, and the reintegration and adjustment of their partners back into the family after deployment (Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011).

This study examines the relationships, comparisons and differences between relationship satisfaction and resilience among military romantic couples during three stages of deployment: pre-deployment, deployment and post deployment, while one or both members are deployed in an active war zone. Further investigation will also determine whether the levels of relationship satisfaction and resilience change once the deployed partner returns. Considering the following factors, researching the topic of relationship satisfaction and resilience in military romantic relationships while one or both partners are deployed, will give greater insight into the struggles military couples face. It will also equip researchers and those involved in military operations to create and implement change in the necessary programs and departments, bettering the overall quality of romantic relationships within the military.

Military Culture

In order to understand how service men and women function within the military, it is important that one have an understanding of its culture. For those who enlist in the military, their jobs become their first priority (Hall, 2011). Throughout a soldier’s military career, their families are often confronted with news that requires swift adaptation. They may need to relocate sooner than anticipated or change familial plans to accommodate the military’s itinerary. Hall and Lynn (2011) reported that soldiers are seen as the “rock” to their families, they are considered the strong burden bearers, and are responsible for maintaining and/or fixing issues such as: physical ailments, mental health issues, marriage problems, etc. Hall (2011) also refers to the components of secrecy (the reluctance to share information outside of the military), stoicism (the failure to show vulnerability) and denial (failure to admit to truths) as primary characteristics many soldiers utilize within the military to show strength and a sense of belonging. Though these components may be effective for a soldier while he/she is in the company of other troops, they may pose problems in romantic relationships because secrecy, a lack of vulnerability and denial all demonstrate a lack of communication. They are also not typical characteristics described when considering the factors that cause romantic relationships to thrive. During the cycles of deployment, the choice to not share information or show vulnerability can leave a mate feeling disconnected without the means to bond intimately.
Relationship Satisfaction

(generate feelings of immediacy and closeness) with their partner. The result of this often manifests in lower relationship satisfaction (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2005). In addition to this, when these components are utilized by soldiers and coupled with negative communication strategies such as the silent treatment/stonewalling, close relationships become less beneficial to those involved (Williams, 2001). The consequences of this can end in strained verbal communication or a failed relationship.

The Cycle of Pre-Deployment

After the terrorist attacks of September 11th, many soldiers have been deployed to fight the war on terror spanning over nine consecutive years. To compensate for the duration of the war, the military has emphasized the importance of readiness (a soldier’s and family’s preparedness to be ready for combat) to help reduce the trauma, stress and demands of combat (Brannan, 2011).

Combat readiness is the first priority of the military, which makes it essential to the cycle of pre-deployment (Knox & Price, 1995). Once the notice of deployment is given, the cycle of pre-deployment begins. Most soldiers, particularly those in the Army, receive a twelve month notice to accomplish a list of preparation activities before they are deployed in war (Brannan, 2011). During the cycle of pre-deployment, soldiers are monitored by commanders to ensure they resolve personal and familial matters such as: appointing a power of attorney, will completions and providing their families with the necessary deployment documents (2011). These transitions can be stressful for the soldier and his/her family because, both soldiers and their families are forced to deal with the possibilities of death, injury and the realization that deployment will take place. During this time, the family’s way of communicating may suffer. Couples may find themselves circumscribing information to avoid topics that cause conflict or refusing to discuss matters at all. As a result, additional negative issues (increased marital conflict, increased stress, lack of familial cohesion) can arise within the family and affect the couples’ relationship satisfaction, and the soldier’s process of readiness (Schneider & Martin, 1994).

As listed in the U.S. Army’s Operation READY Handbook, during the cycle of pre-deployment, verbal communication is a key component to ensure families will be prepared in the time of combat. Couples are encouraged to share necessary information and create lasting memories. From a communicative perspective, this can be extremely beneficial to couples, as self disclosure is seen as one way couples come together and connect interpersonally (Booth-Butterfield, 2002). Communicating openly and honestly is imperative during this time because couples may not have an opportunity to share information later. Expressing feelings such as, “I love you,” or “I appreciate you,” are also encouraged, and though experiencing anger about the deployment is normal, to ensure readiness, couples are instructed not to direct or project those feelings toward their loved ones as it could hinder readiness during this cycle.

By realizing readiness is more comprehensive than simply physical fitness, the military has implemented the Total Force Fitness Equation (Rounds, 2010). This equation incorporates several factors (behavioral, social, physical, environmental, medical, spiritual, nutritional and psychological) to maintaining a soldier’s preparedness for war, including attending to the needs of his/her family before departure. Fulfilling family needs are crucial to combat readiness and primarily the pre-deployment cycle (Rounds, 2010). This would include the need couples share to communicate because it helps them to create a shared meaning together, which as a result could create feelings of closeness and mutuality. It would be fair to suggest, if couples prepare
properly and communicate effectively during the cycle of pre-deployment, smooth transition can be made into the following cycles, reinforcing their current levels of relationship satisfaction and resilience.

The Cycle of Deployment

The cycle of deployment is the greatest stressor within the military (Knox & Price, 1995). Stress is seen to approximately double in the spouses of soldiers who have been deployed compared to those who have not experienced a partner in deployment (DeBurgh, White, Fear, & Iversen, 2011).

There are many ways the topic of military couples and deployment can be examined. Considering the similarities military couples face along with those in long distance relationships, the cycle of deployment will be investigated from this context.

Long distance relationships (LDRs) are defined as relationships where couples are not readily accessible to one another due to geographical distance (Aylor, 2003). They exhibit separate strategies couples use to keep communication open and intimacy active (Pistole, Roberts, & Mosko, 2010). Duck and Pittman (2004) stated that face to face interaction is linked to creating positive quality relationships. With this considered, military couples may experience conflict during the cycle of deployment because the corresponding partner is not present. By not having face to face interaction during deployment, military couples could, as a result, experience lower relationship satisfaction.

One facet those in LDRs use to maintain relationship satisfaction while separated is verbal communication. Accessibility to communication between couples has been identified as a component used to keep stress at bay during the cycle of deployment (Bowles & Bates, 2010). When partners are able to communicate with their partner who is away, it can assist couples in feeling a sense of intimacy although they are still separated physically (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). In addition to these factors, constant verbal communication helps to eliminate negative thoughts and worries related to injury, harm, infidelity, sickness etc., which may develop between couples when accurate information is not accessible (Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011). Those who experience greater satisfaction in relationships also talk more, which can present a problem for couples during the cycle of deployment, since the ability to speak to one another at will can be limited (Dunleavy, Banfield, Booth-Butterfield, Goodboy, & Sidelinger, 2009).

Despite strategies used by those in LDRs to maintain intimacy, difficulties still arise due to geographical separation. Research has shown that long distance romantic couples (LDRCs) are more likely to idealize their relationship with their partners during times of separation (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Idealization is defined as one’s perception of what is proper or ideal, basing how couples idealize one another based on each partner’s interpretation. This strategy is found to be helpful in moderation, and is used to help couples alleviate stress associated with their partner’s absence. Stafford and Merolla (2007) suggested in their findings that LDRCs who idealize their mates at extreme levels may find it hard to adjust once their mates return, making termination more likely. This can be problematic for military couples based on the length and number of deployments they have experienced. Some couples may participate in increased idealization, causing a difference of expectations and conflict, because they fail to realize that their significant other has changed. If the partner on the home front does not take into account that their mate has experienced new things, whether negative or positive, making the transition into the cycle of post deployment once his/her mate has returned can be extremely
difficult. This can be the same for the deployed partner who may not consider that his/her partner has also encountered changes such as: relational roles, domestic responsibilities, and rediscovering a sense of independence.

In addition to this, protective factors such as circumscribing and topic avoidance are utilized in LDRs to maintain relationship satisfaction (Frisby, Byrnes, Mansson, Booth-Butterfield, & Birmingham, 2011). Circumscribing is noted to be a cycle in relationships that indicate when couples are falling apart, however, when used in LDRs this is seen as a form of maintenance and protection (Booth-Butterfield 2002). Couples, who use this strategy, do so in hopes of enjoying the limited time they have in each other’s presence and waiting for a more opportune time to discuss things that may cause conflict (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Soldiers may not want to disclose to their partners the things they are experiencing during the cycle of deployment, hoping not to incite further worry, while those who remain in the home may not want to trouble the soldier deployed about financial problems or issues with their children, etc.

Wright and Roloff (2009) indicated that couples who are committed to having positive romantic relationships are less likely to allow negative issues to remain unsolved, however; given the unique nature of the military and the stressors military couples face, this finding is not always supported. Instead, partners of military couples have been found to use intrapersonal communication (rehearsing conversations in their minds, talking to themselves or preparing what to say before speaking to their partner) as well as everyday talk (regularly discussed topics that include daily errands, activities, news about others, and likes/dislikes about situations) during times of separation as a way to manage their conversations and maintain relationship satisfaction (Frisby, et al., 2010). By utilizing everyday talk (EDT), soldiers feel a sense of normalcy amongst the issues they are experiencing overseas in active war zones, and harsher topics are reserved for a later time (Merolla, 2010). It can be suggested, during the cycle of deployment, the needs and rules of communication shift, leaving couples to adapt swiftly. Failure to do so could result in lower relationship satisfaction.

The Cycle of Post-Deployment and Readjustment

Listed as the final stage of the deployment cycle, post deployment sometimes can be the most challenging (Sahlstein, Maquire, & Timmerman, 2009). During this cycle, couples have to readjust to their military partner returning from war, and unfortunately, the military partner does not always return in the same physical or psychological condition they left in. When soldiers return home, often times they are not the only individuals that have been affected by their absence. Those on the home front have also experienced unique stressors that are not commonly found in civilian romantic relationships (Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011). This may have included the threat of death concerning their deployed partner, injury and loss of contact and transitioning from a two person structure in the home to maintaining their household alone. Both the soldier and his/her partner may have gotten used to the lives they have been living for the time during the stage of deployment, and at times, wives in particular, get used to working and living independently (2009).

Annoyance may also arise in families when the soldier returns attempting to implement changes (Hall, 2011). Without proper communication during this time, couples may find themselves in constant disagreement without resolution. Reestablishing communication in a healthy way may be the most vital aspect of romantic relationships during this time because during the stage of deployment, couples may have grown apart. Soldiers may find it hard to speak of their experiences overseas and their partner may also find it difficult to communicate
about their own experiences during their span of separation. Difficulty may insinuate based on the soldier’s experience and commitment to military culture, because he/she may feel that they can only talk to and be understood by fellow soldiers (Hall, 2011). As a result, soldiers feel justified in neglecting their family and the responsibilities of maintaining a stable home (2011).

Mental illness also poses another obstacle for some military couples during the cycle of post-deployment. In 2004, study findings suggested, 18% of those enlisted in the Army returning from war, reported considerable symptoms related to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman, 2010). Studies show partners with Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are more likely to abuse psychologically, and men with PTSD were more likely to engage in domestic violence than civilians or those who had not have been diagnosed with PTSD (Teten et al., 2009). Martin, Gibbs, Johnson, Rentz, Clinton-Sherrod and Hardison (2007) reported an increase of maltreatment and domestic violence behaviors in families during the post deployment stage in comparison to the pre-deployment stage. Consequently, soldiers who returned from war and reported that they terminated a life or believed they had done so, positively correlated with being diagnosed with PTSD despite controlling for other factors (Maguen et al., 2010). Highfill-McRoy, Larson, Booth-Kewley and Garland (2010) also indicated that veterans with PTSD and other psychiatric diagnoses are known to have interpersonal problems, a factor, that could decrease relationship satisfaction.

Military Couples and Resilience

Unfortunately, the cost of war is a great price that is paid by military families. Some soldiers leave their loved ones behind paying the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. Others return home having suffered injury and mental illness. The road to recovery can be a long and trying one for those involved. Those who have chosen to be supportive in their partner’s absence can risk sacrificing their time, money, patience and familial normalcy to be there for their soldiers. They are expected to be committed to the military as a unit, and this takes great strength and resilience (Hall, 2011).

Resilience, also known as hardiness, has been defined as the ability to successfully adapt to or avoid a pathological outcome that comes after a stressful or potentially traumatic life event or circumstance (Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010). To assist families, the military has developed several avenues of support including: family support programs (Knox & Price, 1995), and The Warrior Resilience and Yellow Ribbon Programs. These programs are designed to offer support and resilience building for soldiers, their families and military personnel as they cope with new and ongoing struggles (Bowles & Bates, 2010).

Given the extreme nature of war, increased adversity and stress are factors many soldiers contend with in the military, and as a result can spill over into romantic relationships (Bowles & Bates, 2010). During this time, the willingness for couples to stay together may be challenged and overcome, causing the relationship to suffer or terminate. Couples in the military are aware that adversity is inevitable, but being able to effectively cope during these times have been shown to help build resilience (Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010).

Considered to be a form of protection, resilience when utilized, is a valuable source when stress is high and there are more resources (finances, social support, coping mechanisms, etc.) to overcome and adapt successfully (Cress & Lampman, 2007). It could be suggested that military couples who are high in resilience along with collaborating resources would be more likely to experience greater relationship satisfaction due their ability to manage the stress within their relationship.
Military couples who experience the stress and impact of deployments are affected in ways civilians may never know. The cost to serve has an impact on all involved within a military family. The importance of maintaining satisfaction in one’s relationship during the stages of deployment are invaluable and resilience can often times be the lifeline to enduring throughout each stage. Considering all factors, the following questions in reference to relationship satisfaction and resilience within the three stages of deployment (pre-deployment, deployment and post deployment) are as follows:

**RQ1:** Are military couples more resilient during the stages of deployment versus times when there is no threat of departure?

**RQ2:** Will one’s relationship satisfaction remain the same or fluctuate during the stages of deployment?

**RQ3:** Does the length of the relationship have any impact on how satisfied military couples are during the stages of deployment?

**RQ4:** Will relationship satisfaction that is low during the pre-deployment stage increase during the stage of deployment but decrease once the partner has returned in the stage of post deployment?

**Method**

**Procedures**

The sample was recruited using various networking tools such as Facebook pages, email, word of mouth, a Mid-Atlantic university’s human subject survey website and a written letter to the office of the National Guard. The advertisement of recruitment included detailed information about the study and a website link hosted by surveymonkey.com. Those who participated in the survey were required to be (a) at least 18 years of age (b) been an active member of the United States armed forces and had been deployed into an active war zone or (c) the romantic partner of the deployed soldier. Each participant was asked the same questions in reference to their status of being the deployed soldier or the romantic partner who stayed on the home front.

**Participants**

A total of 171 surveys were attempted but only 144 were fully and correctly completed. Total participants (N = 144, 33 males, 111 females) ranged in age from 18 to over 30 years (M= 18-21 years old, SD= .847). Relationship length ranged from 6 months or less to 10+ years (M= 1-2 years, SD= 1.354). 66% of the participants reported experiencing one deployment, while 18% experienced two deployments and 16% experienced three or more.

The average length of each deployment ranged from 9 months to 18+ months (M= 9 months, SD= .752), and 16.7% of the participants reported being the deployed soldier, leaving 83.3% to be the romantic partner who remained on the home front. 28.5% of the participants reported to be dating during the time of deployment, 25% were in a committed relationship, 6.9% were engaged and 39.6% were married.

Participants were also asked to indicate which branch of the service he/she or his/her partner belonged to. The largest branch represented was the Army (32%), followed by the Marines (17%), Navy (15.8%), Air force (11.1%) and the National Guard (1.8%).

**Instrumentation**

Relationship Agreement via the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. To measure relationship agreement, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used (Spanier, 1976). This scale originally consisted of 32 questions. The questions were adjusted to 31, omitting one question (“Being too tired for sex”) because it was not relevant to the study. This was a likert-type scale, consisting of thirty-one
questions, based on a six degree continuum. The scale was designed to measure to what degree couples agree and disagree on a variety of relational topics (Spanier, 1976).

Within the 31 questions, participants were asked to evaluate their degree of assent (ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 6 – strongly agree) with their mates on various ideas and activities (i.e. “Religious matters”). The same emphasis was placed on the scale concerning frequency (ranging from 1 - never to 6 - always), dyadic relational interaction with their mates concerning the state of their relationship (i.e. “Do you ever regret being married or living together?”), the quality of time they spent with one another (i.e. “How often do you and your partner laugh together?”) and one question about an issue that may have caused problems within their relationships in the past week (Spanier, 1976).

One question was answered by a “yes” or “no” response, and last, participants were asked to rate their degree of happiness and project the future of their relationship (Spanier, 1976). The grand mean for this scale is $M= 88.22$

Relationship Assessment Scale. In addition to the Dyadic Adjustment scale, to assure proper reliability and validity, the Relationship Assessment scale was utilized. Created by Hendrick in 1988, the relationship assessment scale is a generalized 7 item likert-type scale, on a 5 point continuum (Cramer, 2004).

On this scale, participants were asked to rate how satisfied (i.e. “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?”) they were with their relationships during the stages of deployment/s. They were asked to answer the set of questions each time pertaining to each stage of Pre-deployment, Deployment and Post Deployment. The questions in this section were revised to reflect past tense, because those who participated in this study would have had to have returned from deployment. The grand mean for this scale was $M= 25.326$

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale. To measure resilience, the Connor-Davidson resilience scale was used. The Connor- Davidson resilience scale is a likert-type scale, consisting of 25 items (Connor & Davidson, 2003). All statements were answered on a 5 point scale, ranging from 0 - meaning not true at all, to 4 – meaning nearly true all the time (i.e. able to adapt to change; can deal with whatever comes; not easily discouraged by failure) (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The scores were summed and ranged from 0 – 100. Those who scored higher were believed to show greater measures of resilience (2003).

Considering this scale was being used to measure resilience during three stages of deployment, the scope of time used for couples to recall how they felt for this survey was different than the month time span used in the original study (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Couples were asked to recall how they felt during the times of deployment in reference to the items on the scale to rate how true or untrue each statement was in reference to their experience. The grand mean for this scale was $M= 74.056$

Demographic Survey. The researcher collected demographic data such as: The participants’ age, gender, gender of the partner, relationship status (such as dating or married) during the time of deployment, the length of deployment (to be answered by the service member), length of time separated (to be answered by the partner who stayed at home), number of deployments experienced by the service member, the length of relationship at the time of deployment and the location of the partner completing the survey during the stages of deployment (deployed or remained on the home front).
Results

Primary Analyses

The first research question focused on if military couples were more resilient during the stage of deployment versus the pre-deployment and post deployment stage when the threat of departure was low. Descriptive statistics indicated that couples were less resilient during the stage of deployment ($M = 71.74, SD = 11.718$), being most resilient in the pre-deployment stage ($M = 76.83, SD = 12.507$).

In the stage of post deployment, participants scored higher in resilience ($M = 73.60, SD = 14.35$) than in the stage of deployment, but neither stages of deployment were higher than the pre-deployment stage.

Those between the ages of 18-21 seemed to have the most difficulty adjusting. Descriptive statistics report scores $M = 75.45, SD = 13.248$ during the pre-deployment stage, $M = 69.88, 899, SD = 10.899$ during the stage of deployment and $M = 71.89, SD = 14.415$ in the stage of post deployment.

Participants in the 21-25 age range, recovered well during the stages of deployment scoring $M = 79.03, SD = 11.948$ during the pre-deployment stage, $M = 72.40, SD = 12.08$ in the deployment stage and $M = 75.088, SD = 14.818$ during the post deployment stage.

Respondents in the 25-30 age classification showed the most consistency throughout all the stages of deployment. They reported scores of $M = 76.45, SD = 11.80$ during the pre-deployment stage, $M = 75.00, SD = 13.987$ for the stage of deployment and $M = 75.27, SD = 15.278$ during the stage of post deployment.

Those who were over the age of 30 scored respectively higher than all other age groups. In the stage of pre-deployment the score of $M = 83.00, SD = 0.00$ was reported, along with $M = 92.00, SD = 3.605$ for the stage of deployment and $M = 91.07, SD = 7.07$ during the stage of post deployment.

Research questions 2 and 3 pertained to relationship satisfaction and how the items within the demographic survey had an impact on couple’s relationship satisfaction during the stages of deployment.

Research question 2 asked, will one’s relationship satisfaction remain the same or fluctuate between military couples during the stages of deployment? Descriptive statistics indicate regardless of any demographic, relationship satisfaction fluctuated during the stages of deployment.

Those in committed relationships and those who were married showed the most consistent numbers when examining the stages. Individuals in committed relationships showed a satisfaction score of $M = 26.3, SD = 5.27$ during the stage of pre-deployment, $M = 24.14, SD = 4.136$ throughout the deployment stage and $M = 25.4, SD = 4.83$ in the post deployment stage. Those who were married, scored slightly higher during the pre-deployment stage ($M = 28.13, SD = 4.43$), lower in the deployment stage ($M = 24.21, SD = 7.306$) and higher in the post deployment stage ($M = 26.489, SD = 7.00$).

In reference to the branch of service, the individuals affiliated with the National Guard experienced the steepest decline of relationship satisfaction, reporting scores of $M = 31.33, SD = 2.08$ for pre-deployment, $M = 11.66, SD = 4.61$ during deployment and $M = 24.66, SD = 4.509$ post deployment. Respondents affiliated with the Army reported $M = 26.08, SD = 4.25$ during the stage of pre-deployment, $M = 25.166, SD = 4.04$ for the stage of deployment and $M = 26.75, SD = 4.158$ concerning the stage of post deployment.
Those affiliated with the Navy had similar scores for the stage of pre-deployment ($M= 26.148, SD= 5.82$), but scored slightly lower than the Army respondents during the stage of deployment ($M= 23.538, SD= 6.469$), and post deployment ($M= 24.769, SD= 7.50$). Participants affiliated with the Marine Corps reported scores of $M= 26.965, SD= 4.45$ during the stage of pre-deployment, $M= 22.655, SD= 6.54$ for the stage of deployment and $M= 24.10, SD= 6.47$ in reference to the stage of post deployment. Last, those who were affiliated with the Air Force scored $M= 26.21, SD= 5.39$ in pre-deployment, $M= 24.5, SD= 6.47$ during deployment and $M= 16.84, SD= 5.81$ in the stage of post deployment.

Research question 3 asked if the length of the relationship had any impact on how satisfied couples were during the stages of deployment. Using a Spearman’s rho correlation, results showed a positive correlation between the length of the relationship and relationship satisfaction during all stages of deployment, however during the stages of pre-deployment and deployment, the correlation was significant at the .05 level with a correlation coefficient at .171 during pre-deployment, and a .01 significance during deployment at .219. This finding supports, the longer the relationship, the higher satisfaction couples experienced.

Research question 4 examined if relationship satisfaction that was low during the pre-deployment stage, would increase during the stage of deployment but decrease once again during the stage of deployment. The results for this question was found to be inconclusive, as the participants of this study never scored lower during the stage of pre-deployment than in the stage of deployment. Interestingly, only one demographic, those who were over the age of 30, showed an increase in relationship satisfaction during all three stages of deployment. These individuals scored $M=29.6, SD= 3.507$ during pre-deployment, $M= 28.0, SD= 2.16$ during deployment and $M= 30.4, SD= 4.277$ post deployment.

Post-Hoc Analyses

The purpose of this study was to determine how satisfied and resilient military couples are during the stages of deployment. One factor showed that women’s resilience during the stages of deployment grew in post deployment ($M= 74. 986, SD= 12.90$) from the stage of deployment ($M= 71.125, SD= 11.99$), while men’s ability to show resiliency was higher than females initially during the pre-deployment stage ($M= 82.667, SD= 9.149$) and sharply declined during the stage of deployment ($M= 74.20, SD= 10.45$) and continued to decrease during the stage of post deployment ($M= 71.25, SD= 17.068$).

A Pearson’s correlation was also used to examine correlations between relationship satisfaction and agreement. There was no significant relationship shown between relationship satisfaction and agreement in the pre-deployment stage, but negative correlations were found during the stages of deployment and post deployment. Both negative correlations were significant at the .01 level, with the correlation of -.266 during the stage of deployment and -.330 for the stage of post deployment. Men also reported higher levels of agreement than women during all stages of deployment. $M= 81.88, SD= 7.65$ was reported for the pre-deployment stage in comparison with women’s score of $M= 80.95, SD= 7.71$. For the stage of deployment, men scored $M= 94.00, SD= 12.28$ compared to women’s $M= 90.73, SD= 10.09$, and post deployment scores reflected men at $M= 97.458, SD= 14.86$ and women reporting $M= 90.64, SD= 10.309$.

Relationship satisfaction also varied between men and women, depicting women’s relationship satisfaction to be higher than men only during the post deployment stage ($M= 25.89, SD= 6.049$). Men reported a score of $M= 23.037, SD= 6.577$ during this stage, and showed a pattern of decline from the stages of pre-deployment ($M= 27.39, SD= 5.18$), deployment ($M=$
23.75, \(SD= 6.75\)) and through post deployment. Women showed similar scores during pre-deployment (\(M= 26.587, SD= 4.937\)) and deployment (\(M= 23.635, SD= 5.69\)).

These numbers were also consistent with those who were deployed and those who stayed on the home front. Those who were deployed, reported high levels of agreement during the pre-deployment stage (\(M= 80.555, SD= 8.939\)), deployment stage (\(M= 97.47, SD= 16.179\)) and the post deployment stage (\(M= 98.47, SD= 16.42\)). Their scores then declined in relationship satisfaction during all the stages of deployment (Pre-deployment stage – \(M= 28.00, SD= 6.34\), deployment stage – \(M= 23.05, SD= 8.338\), and the post deployment stage – \(M= 22.35, SD= 7.768\)) and resilience (Pre-deployment stage – \(M= 80.42, SD= 11.91\), the deployment stage – \(M= 76.857, SD= 8.94\) and the post deployment stage – \(M= 67.875, SD= 16.572\)), in comparison with those who remained on the home front.

Relational partners reported lower scores in agreement (Pre-deployment stage – \(M= 81.23, SD= 7.49\), deployment stage – \(M= 90.33, SD= 8.73\), and post deployment stage – \(M= 90.968, SD= 10.35\)), higher scores in relationship satisfaction (Pre-deployment stage – \(M= 26.558, SD= 4.707\), deployment stage – \(M= 23.765, SD= 5.408\), post deployment stage – \(M= 25.83, SD= 5.408\)) with an exception to the pre-deployment stage and higher scores in resilience (Pre-deployment stage – \(M= 75.987, SD= 12.56\), deployment stage – \(M= 70.97, SD= 11.945\), post deployment stage – \(M= 74.715, SD= 13.825\)). A graph has been included to show the fluctuations among deployed soldiers and relational partner’s relationship satisfaction throughout these three stages.

![Graph showing relationship satisfaction among deployed soldiers and relational partners during the stages of deployment.](image)
Discussion

Since 2001, the United States has been at war, and as it approaches its 11th year in combat, those in the social science fields are preparing to deal with an influx of soldiers returning home in large numbers.

Those enlisted in active duty, particularly men, who have been deployed into an active war zone, are shown to have difficulty adjusting when it comes to resiliency. Perhaps this may be due to the stress they experience deployed, followed by more stress learning how to readjust back into civilian life. One could also speculate that changes have taken place in the home. Due to women’s growth in resiliency during the stage of deployment, perhaps there has been a new found independence, and upon the soldier returning, women are not willing to resort back to the type of dependence they recently had within the relationship.

There are also the factors of age and relationship status. Those who were simply dating during the stages of deployment were less likely to be as resilient. There is a possibility that these individuals were not as invested in the relationship and therefore did not work as hard. Those who were between the ages of 18-21, also struggled with resilience. This could simply be a maturity factor, as individuals at this age are usually learning how to live on their own for the first time, and transitioning with the stresses of military life could impact them negatively.

The factors in relationship satisfaction also seem to be similar. During the stage of deployment satisfaction dropped regardless of age, gender or any other demographic surveyed in this study. It would be fair to suggest that the stage of deployment is not satisfying for anyone involved. A more important factor to consider is if relationship satisfaction increased back to it's original level during the pre-deployment cycle.

Relationship satisfaction also seemed to suffer the most between those who had been in a relationship between 2 – 5 years and had experienced 2 deployments. It is possible that at this stage of the relationship couples have become so accustomed to having one another around. When the stage of deployment takes place, adjusting is extremely hard, perhaps because of the dependence of the couple on one another. Readjusting once the soldier returns also becomes problematic because somewhere between the stages of pre-deployment and deployment, those on the home front learn to cope with the partner being gone. This in turn makes for a difficult transition back to what the couple once knew as normalcy.

Overall, military couples who experience deployment are a complex group of individuals. They are couples who live under stress on a regular basis, always adapting and evolving. By studying the factors that impact their relationship satisfaction and resilience, preparation can be made to assist soldiers before, during and upon their return from war, as well as, their families while their partners are away. Relationship satisfaction is important to both maintaining the relationship itself, and soldier re-enlistment. Those who are happy within their romantic relationships are more likely to re-enlist in the military when given the chance, thus there are implications for public policy and relational health. Resilience is also an important factor as it maintains the relationship and provides a sense of protection for those who utilize it. It could be said that resilience is required in a romantic military relationship if one would expect it to survive.

Limitations and Future Directions

While conducting research, the following limitations were recognized: (1) our sample included a large number of women and very few men. This is a limitation because it does not allow the study to give a well balanced view of both sexes. (2) Though we obtained a sample of
those deployed into active war zones and were able to make various conclusions, our study may have been grossly different if we had a larger sample of deployed soldiers. This is a limitation because; the study reflects the views of those who remained on the home front more so than those who were deployed.

In the future, by utilizing a larger sample with more soldiers, identifying why soldiers have difficulty maintaining resilience throughout the deployment and post deployment stage would be grossly beneficial. Also, examining the number of deployments as well as the length of the relationship in depth may provide additional insight into why relationship satisfaction declines the way it does among military couples.

Conclusion
The purpose of this study was to investigate relationship satisfaction and resilience among military couples when one or both romantic partners had been deployed into an active war zone. By obtaining data and examining previous research, findings suggest that relationship satisfaction resilience are affected while couples are separated by the demands of war.

Further examination of this topic can be devoted to investigating the differences between men and women as well as the deployed soldier and his/her romantic partner who remained on the home front.
References


56  Relationship Satisfaction


