

The Effects of Multiple Deployments on Servicemembers and Their Families

Presented by the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel

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Purpose of Presentation

- Highlight relevant research on multiple deployments' effects on military families
- Discuss possible measures to assist military families struggling with the deployment cycle, especially multiple deployments
- Provide a roadmap for future discussion

Key Findings

- As expected, studies show that servicemembers and their families struggle under the weight of the deployment cycle in various ways:
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Detachment
 - Social maladjustment
 - Problems in school
- Some studies show the effects increase as the number of deployments increase
- However, results are more nuanced: the effects are different for spouses vs. children, toddlers vs. adolescents, etc.
- The effects often depend on study design

Problem: Multiple Deployments place stress on Military Families

- Children appear to experience more negative problems than the at-home parent
- As the servicemember and at-home parent experience more stress, so do the children
- Effects get worse as the number of deployments rise, though some families develop resiliency
- The psychological and social problems are numerous and unique to the military family experience
- The trend of multiple deployments will continue, even as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down
 - Multiple deployments increasing among special forces as well as support personnel deployed to the Asia-Pacific region

Evidence from Studies

- Lester et. al.: Anxiety significantly higher among children of servicemembers both during deployment and after recent return of the servicemember
 - Level of stress experienced by children predicted by psychological distress of both the deployed parent and the at-home parent
- Barker et. al.: Children experience more behavior problems from pre-deployment to post-deployment, and the number of deployments had a strong effect on child behavior
- Wheeler: Multiple deployments associated with a higher level of depressive and PTSD symptoms in spouses and behavioral problems in children of deployed Army National Guardsmen

Evidence from Studies (cont.)

- McGuire et. al.: Study among Australian Defense Force members shows little to no association between numbers of deployments and the health or well-being of the at-home parent, but increasing behavioral problems among children as the number of deployments increase
- Card et. al.: Meta-review showed a small association between deployment and poorer adjustment among children
 - However, the association was only evident when compared to civilian controls, whereas comparisons to nondeployed military and prepost families did not.
 - Study design is important: more negative child development is reported in studies when evidence is gathered from reports by the at-home parent
- Rodriguez et. al.: Youth depression linked to the number of important family events missed by the deployed servicemember, rather than the number and length of deployments
 - Symptoms experienced by the at-home parent were associated with the cumulative duration of the servicemembers' time away, rather than important family events missed

Study Caveats

- Many studies rely on self-reporting by the at-home parent, which may overestimate the problems experienced by the children
- Many studies may compare families with a deployed servicemember to civilian control groups rather than to nondeployed military families, which may result in overstating the effects of deployments
- The sample sizes are small and often the risk of selection bias is high
- Many studies measure effects at a point in time, rather than the effects over time and from pre-deployment to post-deployment

Possible Solutions

- Develop clinician best practices to screen for those with highest need
 - Need to include children in assessments
- Offer resources to increase contact between servicemembers and their families during deployment
- Increase treatment of parents with depressive and PTSD issues
- Offer supports not only during deployment but throughout the deployment cycle
- Enhance marital counseling resources
- Develop community supports

Commission roadmap for future discussion



Takeaways

- The effects of multiple deployments on families are generally known, but depend on numerous factors
- Many studies show negative effects on parents and children, but may suffer from design flaws and must be placed in context with nondeploying families
- Family and community supports may mitigate the ill-effects of single and multiple deployments, but must be properly targeted and used throughout the deployment cycle
- The commission may study potential gaps in family and community supports and discuss ways to address them

Questions?