

# Deployment Communication and its Relationship to Adjustment and Relationship Satisfaction

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## ABSTRACT

- Models of family resiliency suggest that communication mode, content, and frequency may influence how military families are affected by deployment. Research has not fully clarified the aspects of communication that are most impacting on family adjustment and relationship satisfaction during the deployment cycle. This study examined the relationship of frequency, mode, and content of deployment communication and measures of marital satisfaction and family adjustment. The moderating effect of perceived stress and support were included in the analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

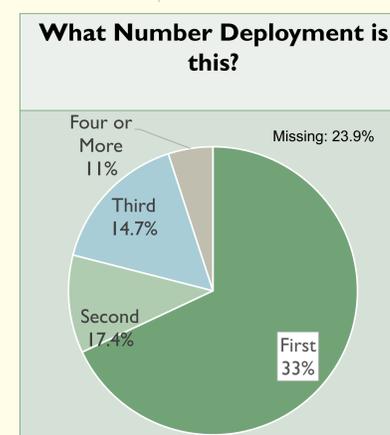
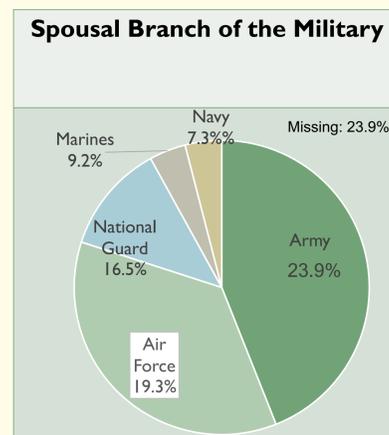
- Technological advances in communication technology over the last 10 years have led to unprecedented increases in communication between deployed service members and their spouses. Today's service members have the most current forms of communication available to them to communicate with their loved ones. However, the speed of these technological advancements have outpaced researchers' ability to gain an understanding of the impact of these changes in communication patterns on home-front relationships and behavioral health.
- Literature has studied deployment communication with a focus on four primary areas of importance: frequency of communication between partners, the content/tone of communication, the communication medium used, and additional stressors couples are facing. These areas tap into the interdependence and reflexivity of communication during deployment; content, tone, and medium all have impacts on the overall interdependence of communication, whereas stressors can influence the partners' reflexivity. Frequency has been a primary focus of measurement in recent research, however, it is also important to better understand the role of other factors facing families of deployed SMs.

## METHOD

- Criteria for participation included the following:
  - Women who were married to a currently deployed (for any length of time) service member with a return date within 6 months.
  - Women who are 18 years of age or older.
  - Mean age of participants was 30.23 and 69.6% were White.
- Participants were excluded from participation if they had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital within the past 6 months or in a relationship involving intimate partner violence.
- Participants were 120 female military spouses solicited through military related social media sites to complete the 15 minute survey.

## METHOD

- Participants completed the following measures: Deployment Communication Inventory (DCI), Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16); McMaster Family Assessment Device – General Functioning Index (MFAD), Berlin Social Supports Scales (BSSS)– Actual Received Support Scale, Protective Buffering (PBS), Perceived Emotional and Instrumental Support (Military Community, Family, and Friends), Need for Support and Support Seeking, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14), and Demographic information questions.



## RESULTS

- Couples who were satisfied with their relationship pre-deployment were likely to be satisfied with their relationship during deployment.
- Open communication between couples significantly decreased from pre-deployment to during deployment.
- There was no significant change from communication skills prior to deployment to during deployment, indicating that deployment might not cause a negative change in communication skills between couples.
- Length of deployment was significantly negatively correlated to relationship satisfaction and adjustment, but not how many times a service member has been deployed. Results indicate that it is not the quantity of deployments, but rather the individual length of each deployment that impacts spousal communication and adjustment.
- Communication that was conflict filled was significantly negatively related to pre- and during deployment relationship satisfaction, open communication, and adjustment.
- Communication themes that included support, love, and problem-solving were significantly positively related to adjustment and relationship satisfaction during deployment.

## RESULTS

### Wives were asked to rank their frequency of communication and type with their spouse during deployment:

Sending/receiving packages once a month - few times over deployment	71.4%
Post/reading social media	21.4%
Daily telephone communication	21.4%
At least once a day online video chat	17.9%
Never sent/received a letter through Post Office	26.0%
Never sent/received E-mails	20.0%
Never talking on the phone	16.1%
Never posting/reading social media	13.4%

- During deployment, relationship satisfaction and adjustment were significantly positively correlated with actual received support (emotional, instrumental, informational) from the deployed spouse.
- Spousal perceived stress was significantly negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction during deployment.

### How Long Spouses Have Been Deployed for (at time of survey):

Less than 1 month	3	2%
1 – 3 Months	17	15%
4 – 6 Months	26	24%
7 – 9 Months	24	22%
10 – 12 Months	13	12%
Did not answer	29	25%

## CONCLUSION

### Clinical implications:

- A couple's relationship satisfaction and communication skills prior to deployment are important in determining how couples will respond during deployment. Therefore, programs that build and strengthen communication skills between service members and their partners pre-deployment are quintessential.
- Stress and support influence how couples communicate and adjust during a deployment. Spouses should focus on building a support network within the military community, online support spaces, friends, and with family prior to deployment to rely on throughout the deployment cycle.

**Future Research:** Further attention to the complex variable of communication within military couples through the deployment cycle.

**Broad reaching importance of this research:** The United States military is an all volunteer fighting force. Research on retention rates show that service members are more likely to reenlist if their spouses are satisfied.