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Women At War: A Qualitative Study Of U.S. Female Military Personnel, Their Journeys Home, Multiple Deployments, And The Effect Of War

Autumn Nicole Lowry

University of Tennessee - Knoxville, alowry3@vols.utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Autumn Nicole Lowry entitled "Women At War: A Qualitative Study Of U.S. Female Military Personnel, Their Journeys Home, Multiple Deployments, And The Effect Of War." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Social Work.

Matthew T. Theriot, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

John G. Orme, Joel F. Diambra, David R. Dupper

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Women At War: A Qualitative Study Of U.S. Female Military Personnel, Their Journeys Home,
Multiple Deployments, And The Effect Of War

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Autumn Nicole Lowry

May 2015

Dedication

I am so thankful for each and every soul who has served in the Armed Forces of this great nation. For those who have given the ultimate sacrifice for the liberties and freedoms we hold so dear in this great nation, for those never got to feel the soil of the nation they loved so much under their feet again, and for all of their families and friends who suffered such loss, I will never be able to thank you enough. It is my greatest hope that my work will, in some way, touch the lives of those still serving and those who have served. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

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Abstract

This dissertation is a multi-manuscript collection consisting of three papers written about female service members. The first manuscript is a literature review that explores research regarding this population and distinguishes gaps in the literature as well. This manuscript identifies theoretical frameworks as well as commonly used research methods when working with female service members. The second and third manuscripts were constructed using secondary data from a documentary film project that produced valuable data regarding the lived experiences of women experiencing deployment. These data were transcribed from filmed interviews and those transcripts were subsequently used for the purpose of this dissertation. The second manuscript is a qualitative study using inductive content analysis to explore the lived experiences of mothers experiencing their first deployment in Afghanistan in the winter of 2011. Two main categories emerged including womanhood and deployment-based affect. Several sub-categories also emerged through data analysis. These included camaraderie, motherhood, leaving family behind, and experiencing trauma. These subcategories are exemplified by using direct quotes from participants. The third manuscript is a qualitative study using content analysis to explore the lived experiences of married mothers who have been deployed previously and were experiencing another deployment in Afghanistan in the winter of 2011. Three main categories emerged from these data including womanhood, deployment-based affect, and family. The data also yielded many sub-categories including concern about lack of support returning home, affect of military service on children, and deployment struggles. Findings from the two studies shared sub-categories such as camaraderie, femininity, and motherhood. The two studies produced contrasting categories as well. For example, the second set of data had such a high concentration of family that I coded a third main category to encompass the emphasis participants put on the subject. These two studies pose implications for future inquiries such as the differences in experiences of women who have been deployed multiple times to those experiencing their first deployment. Other issues warranting investigation include motherhood and deployment, the experiences of non-married mothers while deployed, and the possible effects of concern about family while deployed on female service members' combat readiness.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Chapter II: A Review of the Literature.....	9
Chapter II References.....	39
Chapter III: A Qualitative Exploration of Mothers on their First Deployment to Afghanistan...	48
Chapter III References.....	67
Chapter IV: A Qualitative Analysis of Married Mothers and Multiple Deployments.....	69
Chapter IV References.....	96
Chapter V: Conclusion.....	99
Chapter V References.....	114
Vita.....	116

Chapter I

Introduction

Women at war

The United States has been engaged in two wars for the past thirteen years. While the U.S. has been involved in numerous wars and conflicts throughout its history, these current wars are unique in a number of ways including changes in family dynamics in the wake of deployment, the frequency and length of deployments, and the exposure to new types of injury and trauma. The commonly recognized demographic of the American soldier has also changed from previous wars. No longer can we think of our military personnel in the one-dimensional lens of young men and their older commanding counterparts. Women comprise 11% of the military personnel serving in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND). This shifting demographic raises a number of important issues about the differential effects of war on men versus women, the impact on the women's role as mothers, and the effect on these military families. Little is known regarding the lived experiences of military personnel in these wars, or the effects of these unique experiences on families and far less is known about female service members. Most of the research exploring service members of OEF/OIF/OND focuses on men.

As of 2013, there were 214,098 women serving in the US military who are Active Duty, 118,781 in the Reserves, and 470,851 National Guard (NG) members. Over 100 women have lost their lives in these two wars and more than 600 have been wounded in action (IAVA.org, 2014). Many of these women are also returning with "invisible wounds", such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), experiences of military sexual trauma, depression, and anxiety. Although having been excluded from traditional "combat roles", these women have faced exposure to direct fire, seeing and caring for severely wounded service members, and many other potentially traumatic experiences (2014).

Despite the significant increase of women serving in these wars, most of the research pertaining to OEF/OIF/OND service members continues to focus on their male counterparts. It is crucial that researchers explore the experiences of female service members as well as challenges faced by these service members and their families. For example, the absence of a mother or female caregiver may differ greatly to a family system than that of a male caregiver. The few studies that have been conducted specifically pertaining to female service members have produced interesting findings. Beder, Coe, & Sommer (2011) found that females recorded higher negative personal and family reintegration experiences than males and that, for female soldiers, direct combat had a negative impact on family reintegration while it had a positive effect on reintegration personally and in work. For both male and female service members, Multiple deployments had a negative impact on both family and personal domains and deployments that were over twenty-four months showed the strongest adverse effect (2011). Kline, et al. (2013) found that female service members had a higher prevalence of probable PTSD post-deployment than their male counterparts and scored lower on military readiness and military cohesion than their male counterparts. Adler, Huffman, Bliese, and Castro (2005) conducted surveys of 3,339 service members deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina and found that prolonged deployment length was related to increases in depression and posttraumatic stress in males but not for females. Previous deployment experience was significantly associated with lower depression and posttraumatic stress scores for female service members as well as their male counterparts (2005). As evidenced in these few studies, there are differences in male and female service members and the ways in which they cope with war, reintegrate into society, and experience mental health outcomes following deployment(s). Female service members are a unique population that differs

from their male counterparts in many aspects. More research focused on female service members will expand our knowledge and understanding of this ever-growing population.

The Dissertation

This dissertation seeks to investigate lived experiences specific to female service members by investigating experiences of female service members while deployed in Afghanistan. The first paper in this three paper collection is a comprehensive literature review focused on U.S. female military personnel, their journeys home, multiple deployments, and the effect of war. This literature review also provides theoretical frameworks that have been utilized when studying this population as well as many methodological techniques used in studies focusing on female military personnel.

The two exploratory, qualitative studies included in this dissertation seek to explore the lived experiences of women while they are deployed. More specifically, one paper focuses specifically on first-time deployed female service members who are mothers. This research study is designed to contribute to the research surrounding female service members of OIF/OEF/OND and their experiences in war. This study aims to yield a better understanding of the experiences of the female service members themselves, while deployed in combat theatre. Similarly, the third paper explores the experiences of female service members who are mothers but who are married and have experienced two or more deployments. This study aims to yield a better understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of the female service members during deployment and explores support systems of female service members who are married and mothers. This study examines only married mother service members with multiple deployments to obtain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of women who have previously experienced deployment(s) and who have children and spouses.

Mothers

Among the women who serve in the Armed Forces, a subset emerges that creates more complex questions that have yet to be answered. Over forty percent of the women who have served in the current wars are mothers (Mulhall, 2009). At least 30,000 single mothers have been deployed over the last ten years (2009). Mothers and their roles in family structure are a vastly researched population but mothers who serve in the armed forces have yet to be explored enough to understand how the absence of mothers in the home affects the family dynamics, the effects of war on mothers, and what mothers experience in war in comparison to their non-mother counterparts and male counterparts. The absence of a mother or female caregiver may have a notably different effect on the family system than the absence of a father or male caregiver due to the various roles that males and females fill in the home.

In a study of 154 Navy mothers and non-mothers, researchers explored mothers and non-mothers who had faced deployment or had not, and their intentions to stay in or leave the military (Kelly, et. al., 2001). Researchers found that approximately one-fourth to one-third of women reported that the difficulty of balancing a military career with family responsibilities was a reason they intended to leave the Navy (2001). Women who were experiencing deployment were three times more likely than women not experiencing deployment to report that balancing motherhood and a military career as a reason for planning to leave the military (2001). These women were anticipating separation from their families that would prevent the mothers from fulfilling their roles as primary care givers.

In another study conducted by Kelley, Doane, and Pearson (2011), researchers examined married mothers and non-married mothers who were military personnel and found that deploying non-married mothers sent their children to live with new caregivers in other cities and states

whereas married mothers were often able to leave their children with their partner/spouse during deployment. For these children, this means a new environment, new primary caregiver, new schools, and countless other changes. Due to having their children face all of these changes, concerns about leaving their children may be even more complex for single-mothers serving in the military. Research that explores the lived experiences of female military personnel who are mothers is needed to understand the effects military life can have on these women as well as their families. Furthermore, the differences between non-married military mothers and married military mothers should be explored to better understand military families with varying dynamics and norms and the individual experiences of the mothers themselves.

Multiple Deployments

Another concern for women in the military is that currently they are serving repeated and longer deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan than any other previous war. This puts them more at risk of mental health problems and physical health concerns than female veterans from previous wartime eras (Hoge, Clark, & Castro, 2007). Maguen et al. (2011) found that having had multiple deployments versus a single deployment was significantly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder in female veterans. Many deployment-related stressors for women have been documented in the literature, including the threat of gender-based violence during deployment (Mattoks, Haskell, & Krebs, 2012). Women also face more responsibilities for child care, housekeeping, and other tasks in the home than their male counterparts and when women must leave these responsibilities to deploy, they contribute greatly deployment-related stress (Vogt et al., 2005). Mattoks, et al (2012) discussed that recently returned female veterans identified post-deployment reintegration problems and stressful military experiences as two major stressors. When considering all of these stressors for female service members related to

deployment, it is reasonable to reason that with multiple and longer deployments, these stressors could worsen. Military families have also experienced negative impacts of multiple deployments including increased behavior problems in children of military families, high military divorce rates, and high risk for depression and anxiety in non-deployed military spouses (Duckworth, 2009; Barker & Berry, 2009; Baptist, et al., 2011). Other studies found that with longer and more frequent deployments, couples had greater risk of marriage dissolution, child maltreatment, and neglect (Gibbs, Martin, Kupper, & Johnson, 2007). Overall, we know bits and pieces about risk factors for both female and male service members that stem from multiple deployments, but specific outcomes still remain to be explored. What is known is that many returning service members from OEF/OIF have been diagnosed with mental health disorders. More specifically, in a study of 289,328 veterans utilizing VA health care following their service in OEF or OIF, one-third had received mental health diagnoses (Seal, et al., 2009). Other studies have reported other adverse effects of multiple deployments including substance abuse issues, numerous physical health problems, and development of psychological problems (Duckworth, 2009). Little research has been conducted to show specific gender differences pertaining to these risk factors. Furthermore, focus on post-deployment effects has been considered for service members, but research has not considered the experience of service members while they are experiencing deployment. This is especially crucial when considering female service members, as little is known about them and the population of deployed women is growing steadily. It is crucial to understand how female service members experience deployment, not just post-deployment issues so that preventative measures can be taken to reduce the adverse effects of these deployments for these women.

Summary

Female service members are an understudied, steadily growing, and complex population of these wars and in many ways are vastly different from their male counterparts. Although much is known about male service members, little research has been conducted to understand the experiences of female service members. Furthermore, even less research addresses the concerns surrounding military mothers and more specifically, differences in married mothers and non-married mothers when facing deployments. With steadily increasing numbers of females joining the armed forces, and many returning home from deployments, this population will continue to re-enter communities and many will struggle with adjustment, family problems, and mental health issues. Due to the complex differences in OEF/OIF/OND in comparison to past wars, these women will most likely face multiple deployments, longer deployments, and exposure to various stressors unique to these wars as well as other stressors common in all wars. These women and their experiences must be understood so that preventative measures can take place while they are serving and helpful, appropriate interventions can be available to them and their families when they return.

Chapter II

A Review of the Literature

Abstract

This paper provides an overview of military families' experiences with deployments, the effect of deployment on individual family members, individual service members, and more specifically, the impact on military women and their families. In addition, this paper reviews how multiple deployments impact military families. The information presented is based on a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to military families and the impact of deployment or multiple deployments on military families. Current literature suggests that although military families of the Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn conflicts are resilient, there are many adverse effects for which military families are at risk when a caregiver is deployed. Frequency of deployments as well as length of deployment has been identified as possible factors that influence coping among both military families and service members. Furthermore, there are gender differences in coping with the stages of deployment as well as in the way that service members' families cope with the stages of deployment.

Keywords

Military families, multiple deployments, female service members, military children

Overview/Introduction

Since October 2001, the United States military has experienced a new kind of war, three wars that have called for an unprecedented number of deployments, increased reliance on Guard and Reserve members, and repeated deployment of thousands of service members. In 2010, the Department of Defense (Department of Defense) reported that 2.1 million American service members had been deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation

Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (Department of Defense, 2010). Operation New Dawn (OND) is the most current conflict and follows the same trend of rapid and multiple deployments for individual service members. These conflicts are unique from any other conflict the United States has been involved in because of the likelihood of service members being deployed multiple times (Zoroya, 2012). Military leaders attribute the multiple deployments of service members to this nation being engaged in such a long war with too small of a military. An estimated 107,000 of our service members have been deployed three or more times (Zoroya, 2012).

Due to the unique facets of the OIF, OEF, and OND conflicts, researchers have begun to look at the effect of these deployments on the spouses, partners and children of service members. The heavy reliance of our military on Reserve and Guard members, or “part-time” soldiers, is unique to OIF/OEF/OND. Before October of 2001, these “part-time” service members were not deployed near as frequently. Therefore, the majority of these families were not prepared for the deployment or multiple deployments of their loved ones. Of the 2.1 million service members that have been deployed, 44% of them are parents and of those deployed parents 48% have served at least two tours of duty in Afghanistan or Iraq (Department of Defense, 2010). The military families involved in OEF/OIF/OND are the largest number of military families affected by deployment-related family separation, combat injury, and death since the Vietnam War (Department of Defense, 2010).

This paper addresses service members and the effect of deployment on them as well as their families, discusses three specific theories applied to these concepts, and lastly, specifically addresses female service members and the effect of deployment on their families. As of 2013, there are 214,098 women in our U.S. military who are Active Duty, 118,781 in our U.S. Military reserves, and 470, 851 who are in the National Guard. Alvarez (2009) reported that more than

100,000 female soldiers who have served in the current wars are mothers, nearly half the number of women who have been deployed. Moreover, this paper will address gaps in the literature and discuss implications for further research in this area.

Methods

Search and Screen Methods

I accessed articles by searching the following bibliographic databases: Ovid Medline/Pubmed, PsycINFO (via ProQuest), Cochrane Health Sciences (SAGE), and the Wiley Online Library. Keywords utilized in these searches included: military, deployments, female service members, military family, combined with: multiple deployments, military females, military families, families in deployment, military children, female veterans, gender differences in deployment, and reintegration with family. I limited searches to studies written in the English language and articles published in the last 13 years, the years in which the U.S. has been engaged in the current conflicts. A total of 211 articles were retrieved from the bibliographic database searches. An initial screening of the abstract determined if the articles were relevant to the search criteria. Of these, 102 articles were deemed relevant. These articles were read in their entirety and judged against the inclusion criteria. A total of 57 articles that met the inclusion criteria are included in this review.

Inclusion Criteria

Articles included in the review explicitly addressed deployment and family hardships, multiple deployments and impact on military families, service member's perception of the impact on the family during deployment, and impact of deployment on individual service members.

Results

Review of Methods

Due to the current nature of this research, both conceptual and research peer-reviewed articles are included in this review. There is limited research on the topics included in this review and therefore, conceptual pieces were considered important to provide a better and more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Appendix A provides a list of each study included and what methodology was used.

Twenty-six of the articles included in this review are conceptual in nature. These articles provide an overview of their specific topic and support their ideology with research and theories from existing literature. Chandra and London (2010) aimed to accumulate a comprehensive understanding of military children's experiences, resilience, and needs. More specifically, their conceptual article focused on important subgroups of the military child population such as children of active duty mothers, children with parents serving in different branches of the military, and children with parents who have experienced combat. Clever and Segal (2013) identified several trends in their conceptual paper that help us better understand military families. Some of these trends include the transient lifestyle of military families, families are facing longer separations from service member than in the past, and that military families are a diverse population with diverse needs due to demographic and other differences. Davis (2010) provides an overview of usage of mental health services among military children while Duckworth (2009) provides a conceptual overview of the affect of multiple deployments on families. These conceptual articles are valuable in this review because they identify many of the current issues among military families and service members that have not been addressed through research.

The most common methodology among the articles included in this review is non-

experimental survey designs. Twenty of the articles included in this review are non-experimental and most of those used surveys as their method of collecting data or conducted secondary analyses on existing survey data. Sample sizes vary in these studies with larger sample sizes being analyses of secondary data. For example, Cohen et al. (2009) conducted a national descriptive study using non-probability sampling ($N = 249,440$) to compare various demographics to utilization of VA services among both male and female veterans returning from service. Aranda, Middleton, Flake, and Davis (2011) used non-probability sampling with survey data from a large military pediatric clinic that surveyed parents and youth ($N = 414$). Chandra et al. (2009) collected data from a computer-assisted telephone interview with military children and their caregivers ($N = 1,507$) who were randomly selected from a pool of applicants from a children's camp. Their purpose was to assess child well being while controlling for family and service member characteristics. Studies by Beder, Coe, and Sommer (2011) and Vanderploeg (2011) utilized online surveys of cross-sectional cohorts as their method of data collection.

Acion, Ramirez, Jorge, and Arndt (2013) conducted a secondary data analysis of Iowa Youth survey that contained a large sample size ($N = 78,240$) while Cedarbaum et al. (2013) conducted secondary data analysis with survey data from the 2011 California Health Kids survey. Engel, Gallagher, and Lyle (2008) used non-probability sampling secondary data to compare standardized test scores of children enrolled in Department of Defense schools with their service member parents' personnel data to evaluate the effect of deployment on the academic achievement on children of deployed service members. Seal, et al. (2009) utilized non-probability, purposive sampling with a national VA data to determine the prevalence and predictors of mental health diagnoses ($N = 289,328$). Similarly, Maguen et al. (2010) conducted a retrospective cross sectional study using secondary data from the VA ($N = 329, 049$). Kline, et

al. (2013) is the only study included that is longitudinal in design, collecting longitudinal data from 922 service members to identify predictors of posttraumatic stress symptoms.

Qualitative methodology was used in six of the studies included in this review. Huebner, et al. (2010) conducted eleven focus group sessions to examine the experiences of children in military families with deployment, attachment styles, and their informal and formal support networks. Baptist et al. (2011) and Davis, Ward, and Storm (2011) used qualitative methodology to obtain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of deployment. One study used qualitative analysis on 101 interviews to discuss categories such as ongoing renegotiation of roles and the transition of independence to interdependence (Karakurt et al., 2013). Mmari, et al. (2009) utilized eleven focus groups with adolescents and their military families to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and issues they face.

Uniqueness of Military Families and the Cycle of Deployment

Military families differ from their civilian counterparts in many ways. These families have significantly higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems than non-military families and face a number of other risk factors including increase risk of substance abuse and child maltreatment. They also experience extended periods of time apart from their service member(s) including time for trainings and deployments. Deployments amplify the risk to military families due to the various challenges posed by each stage in the process of deployment.

The process of deployment experienced by military families is known as the cycle of deployment and is divided into five distinct phases: predeployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment, and postdeployment (Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008). More specifically, predeployment is from notification of deployment to departure, and deployment is from departure to return. Each stage of the cycle of deployment is characterized by various

challenges to the individual and family system such as emotional destabilization and changes in roles and routine (2008). The predeployment stage includes mobilization, or preparation for deployment by the service member by organizing their resources, which begins the separation and associated stressors from family (Huebner et al., 2010). During this stage, there may be a great deal of family dissonance due to the family attempting to cope with the contradicting emotions of denial that their loved one is actually deploying and anticipation of loss of their service member from the family (Laser & Stephens, 2011).

The deployment stage lasts while the service member parent is away and while this occurs, the non-deployed parent, children, and deployed parent settle into new daily routines and roles (Ling & Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, the family financial situation may necessitate taking on a new job for the non-deployed spouse or partner (Huebner et al., 2010). The postdeployment stage involves the individual service member's reintegration and return as well as the family readjusting to having the service member involved in daily life again (2013). Although this cycle is representative of modern deployments, OEF/OIF/OND deployments have come at a much more accelerated and much more frequent tempo. Essentially, deployment lengths and frequencies that were once quite predictable are now more arbitrary and the likelihood of multiple deployments in a short period of time is greater. This means that military families can experience the cycle of deployment far more frequently and more rapidly than military families in past conflicts. Multiple deployments as well as deployments in rapid succession as are characteristic of OEF/OIF/OND have been shown to affect several aspects of the lives of military families, as discussed below. Furthermore, combat deployments bring added stress to individual experiences of the deployment cycle (Ling & Johnson, 2013).

Theory

Several theories emerged from the literature regarding service members and the ways their families are affected by deployment. These theories are attachment theory, family systems theory, and cognitive theories involving stress and coping. Each of these provides a framework for understanding service members, military families, and the ways in which deployment can affect them.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is an important framework for understanding service members' experiences with deployment and reintegration into their family post deployment (Karakurt, Christiansen, Wadsworth, & Weiss, 2012). This theory also provides a framework for understanding the ramifications of separation and deployment for young children of service members. Attachment theory proposed that the attachment relationship, or the emotional bond that children form with their caregivers or parents, should provide the child with a sense of security (Bowlby, 1997, 1980, 1969). Children should learn to depend on their parent for protection and comfort when distressed, afraid, or feeling threatened (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013). Attachment theory describes the sense of security developed by children from their earliest experiences with their caregiver or parent. According to Lester and Flake (2013), it is from these earliest interactions that children develop their capability for emotional and behavioral self-regulation. The parents' ability to act as an external source of emotional regulation for their young children is a primary predictor of attachment security (Lester and Flake, 2013; Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013). Furthermore, children's confidence that their parents or caregivers will provide emotional support enriches their capability to explore new environments and master challenging situations (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013). Attachment

theory remains the most prevalent theory in the literature pertaining to service members and the unique experiences of their families. Osofsky and Chartrand (2013) list three principles that can further shape our understanding of how separation in military families may affect young children: human relationships are essential to children's well-being and development, infants have a fundamental need for consistent caretaking, and young children and adults perceive the world very differently. Attachment theory suggests that children who lack supportive caregivers during times of significant change may be more vulnerable. Military children not only face the change of losing one caregiver to deployment, but they also are susceptible to experiencing other changes in their living situations as well as changes in their non-deployed caregiver (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013). Attachment theory certainly provides insight regarding the challenges that service members and their families face due to separation and deployment, but all is not known or understood about how the service members' deployment and return affect relationship processes (Karakurt, Christiansen, Wadsworth, & Weiss, 2012).

Family Systems Theory

According to Esposito-Smythers, et al. (2011), both attachment theory and family systems theory can be helpful in explaining why sufficient parental emotional health and support during stressful experiences is essential to the emotional well-being of youth. According to Riggs and Riggs (2011), family systems theory considers individuals and relationships as developing within the larger attachment network of the family. One fundamental facet of family systems theory is the idea that stresses on individuals or dyads within the family can affect the function of the family as a whole. For example, typical developmental milestones, as well as atypical or taxing life events can affect family equilibrium (Lester & Flake, 2013). Assumptions of family systems theory are that individual members of families have constant influence on one another, the

family as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the individual family members must always be understood in the context of the larger family system (Cox & Paley, 1997).

Military families are no exception. When considering military families in the context of family systems theory, it is important to remember that any time one family member is affected by certain stressors, it is probable that the other family members are affected as well (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013). For example, if a parent or caregiver has recently returned from deployment and is dealing with the stress of readjustment and reintegration, it is probable that the spouse and children will be affected as well (2013). Lester and Flake (2013) report that the deployment cycle and the transition to and from military to civilian life requires role and routine disruptions or changes, and these changes can adversely affect family stability. They provide the following example specific to military families:

“...When a parent is deployed, adolescents often take on greater responsibilities to help the family. As they contribute to the family’s shared mission, children may reap rewards, growing more competent and self-confident. However, when children take on more family responsibilities (for example, by caring for younger siblings), they may miss developmental opportunities because they don’t have the time and freedom to pursue age-appropriate activities. Furthermore, if boundaries change during deployment, the family may have trouble readjusting when the service member parent returns; for example, a child may not want to give up newfound autonomy,” (Lester & Flake, 2013, p. 126). Parenting quality for the non-deployed caregiver may be affected during deployment due

to the effect of stress experienced by their deployed partner or spouse. Conversely, the deployed service member’s performance may be affected by worry due to family stress or child problems (Masten, 2013).

Cognitive Theory of Stress and Coping

Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) theory of stress and coping has also been applied to military families. This theory asserts that available resources determine the way in which an individual copes with stressors. In addition, prior experiences, positive beliefs about oneself, physical well

being, and problem solving skills are resources that may be used for effective coping (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2010). Cognitive appraisals of the stressor(s) mediate the effects of stress and guide the choice of coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In the context of military families, deployment and separation can be an immense stressor. Using this theoretical framework, families must appraise the stressor, the threat that it poses, and their available resources to then form a coping effort to maintain the well being and functioning of their family system. Lazarus (1993) reports adaptation in social functioning; morale, and somatic health are the outcomes of effective coping. Ineffective coping, particularly among military spouses, can result in the spouse having psychosocial, behavioral, or physical symptoms (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2010). Furthermore, if youth perceive parental support to be insufficient and doubt their own ability to cope with stress, stressors such as deployment may be appraised as detrimental to their well being. Consequently, the youth may develop behavioral and emotional health problems (Esposito-Smythers, 2011).

Deployment and Family Hardships

For the purpose of this study, Milburn and Lightfoot's (2013) following description of a military family is used:

“A military family can be comprised of the service member, his/her spouse/partner, his/her child (ren), and/or other relatives (e.g., grandparents, etc.). Consequently, our definition of US military families is broad in order to adequately reflect the expansiveness of who can be included within the family of a service member parent in current times. This broad definition takes into account diverse family configurations, such as a single parent, children, and a grandparent, that are increasing in number in the US military (Park, 2011). The definition also includes all branches of the military...” (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013, p. 267).

It is commonly said that when one person joins the military, the whole family serves (Park, 2011). Extensive research has been conducted regarding the impact of deployment on military families. Spouses or partners of the deployed service members have been focal points of

some of this research. Since 2001, the U.S. has deployed two million service members and over half of U.S. service members are married (Lara-Cinisomo, et al., 2012). This suggests that many service members and their spouses or partners have experienced deployment. According to Karakurt et al. (2013), there is robust evidence that deployments are challenging for military families. Spouses of service members serving in OEF and OIF have reported loneliness, stress, anxiety, fear for their partner's safety, role overload, and poor family adjustments (2013). Davis, Ward, and Storm (2011) report that these military families have experienced greater instability and uncertainty due to more frequent and lengthy deployments. Deployment of a parent to a combat zone can be a "catastrophic" stressor for military families, particularly in these current conflicts because of facing longer and more frequent deployments to combat zones (Gewirtz et al., 2011; Guzman, 2014). Emerging evidence suggests that military families also struggle with the postdeployment phase of the cycle of deployment, or reintegration (Aronson & Perkins, 2013). More specifically, 75% of recently returned OEF/OIF veterans reported some type of family problem including feeling disconnected from family, confusion regarding their role in the family, and children being afraid of them (2013).

Some families are dual-military, meaning both parents are service members. Of all Active Duty members, 39,647 members are married to another Reserve or Guard member (Department of Defense, 2010). Female service members have disproportionately higher percentages of dual-military marriages. According to the Active Duty Marital Status report of 2009, almost half (48 percent) of married military women are in dual-military marriages, whereas only seven percent of married military men are in dual-military marriages (Department of Defense, 2010). Dual-military marriages could be at higher risk of the aforementioned stressors due to both parents being service members.

Drummet, Coleman, and Cable (2003) call attention to the structured environment that many military families belong to while coping with the previously discussed stressors. More specifically, military families feel pressure to behave a certain way, as if the family carries the rank of their spouse or parent (2003). This includes guidelines for behavior and pressure to conform, as it is widely believed that service members' careers can be negatively affected by the behavior of their family members (2003).

Multiple Deployments and Impact on Military Families

Military families are known for the years of self-sacrifice that they endure in support of their service member. However, the multiple deployments characteristic of the OEF/OIF/OND conflicts are beginning to take their tolls on these families (Duckworth, 2009). A significant impact of multiple deployments is the constant separation of family members from the service members.

One of the most significant impacts of any deployment is separation of the service member and their family members and this impact is magnified through multiple deployments (2009). In Duckworth's (2009) conceptual study, the author reported that multiple long-term deployments were a major contributing factor in high military divorce rate. The impact that multiple deployments have on children is one of more visible hardships military family members face (Duckworth, 2009). Barker and Berry (2009) reported that as the number of deployments parents experienced increased, their children showed an increase in behavior problems from predeployment to postdeployment. Numerous deployments may result in parents being separated from their child for a significant part of the child's lifespan or at crucial stages of the child's development (Lester, et al., 2011).

Impact on the Deployed Service Member and the Marital Relationship

In a qualitative study with fifty military couples, Baptist, et al., found that experiencing these stresses not only impact the non-deployed spouse but can also affect the deployed spouse and the relationship as a whole (Baptist, et al., 2011). For example, the homecoming of a spouse can actually be more stressful than the separation itself (2011). Returning service members sometimes expect their family dynamic to remain unchanged in their absence. However, as discussed previously, the spouse or partner who was not deployed has typically shifted roles to manage the responsibilities while the service member was away (2011). Many times, the returning service member comes home to a more independent and assertive spouse or partner who may be reluctant to return to their previous roles (2011). Oftentimes, this results in service members feeling frustrated over pressure to assume their once established roles or feelings that their families do not understand what they experienced (2011).

Pregnancy or being parents can complicate the feelings of the non-deployed spouse during their partner's deployment. Pregnancy and giving birth were identified by military spouses as extremely stressful due to the absence of their spouse (Padden, Connors, & Agazio 2011). Risk factors identified in a review by de Burgh et al. (2011) were length of deployments of service members, and the circumstances of the spouses or partners themselves during their partners' deployment(s) including being a caregiver to children and pregnancy. These circumstances increase the risk of depression and stress (2011). Davis, Ward, and Storm (2011) conducted a qualitative exploratory study in which they found that although mothers report their children as both a comfort and added burden during times of deployment of their spouses, the presence of children increases the risk of poor coping. Devoe and Ross (2012) conceptually discuss several effects due to parenting while a partner is deployed including feelings of upset

and physiological reactions, feeling overwhelmed with the financial, household, and parenting responsibilities, and distress regarding the loss of their partner. Some of the most commonly reported stressors are increased parenting responsibilities and supporting a child in coping with the separation from the deployed parent (2012).

Impact on the Non-Deployed Spouse and the Marital Relationship

More specifically, research has revealed these families face additional hardships including higher divorce rates, numerous mental issues following deployment, and higher incidents of spousal and child abuse (Davis, et al., 2011). In a study of 566,895 military members, Karney and Crown (2011) found that among Air Force families, the longer a service member was deployed while married, the greater the risk of marital dissolution. Another study of 1,771 military families found that among military families with substantiated cases of child maltreatment, rates of maltreatment are greater when service members are on combat-related deployments (Gibbs, Martin, Kupper, & Johnson, 2007). Moreover, the rates of child maltreatment and child neglect among civilian spouses were far greater during their partners' deployments versus times of non-deployment (Gibbs, et al., 2007). De Burgh, White, Fear, and Iversen (2011) discuss the challenges that military spouses face and the potential for the development of mental health problems. In the qualitative inquiry with fifty military couples, military spouses reported that they face fears regarding the safety of their deployed spouse as well as other risk factors including managing the household responsibilities, confusion over military entitlements, and other general life events (Baptist et al., 2011). In a recent study of 250,000 Army wives' medical records, spouse deployment to OEF/OIF was associated with elevated levels of treatment and diagnoses of adjustment disorders, stress reactions, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and acute stress reactions (Mansfield et al., 2010). Padden, Connors, and

Agazio (2011) listed other stressors for spouses during deployments identified in the literature such as lack of control, communication problems, fear, uncertainty, rumors, and lack of knowledge regarding length of deployment. Some research has noted factors that can affect coping abilities such as age, family of origin, and socioeconomic status. For example, Davis, et al. (2011) reported that young wives are at greater risk for poor coping than more mature wives. Similarly, Padden, Connors, & Agazio (2011) found that, wives of field grade officers had lower perceived stress and used less evasive coping. This was the same for wives who had grown up in military families (2011). Authors suggest that these differences may be due to the fact that wives of field grade officers are typically older, have accepted the military lifestyle, they have more experience, and more available resources (2011). Likewise, wives who grew up in military families may be more adaptable because they know what to expect and are familiar with the culture (2011). Furthermore, wives who were raised in military families had significantly higher mental well being than those who were raised in civilian families (2011).

Impact on Children in Military Families

More than two million children have a parent on Active Duty or in the National Guard and Reserve, while two million more have a veteran parent (Lester & Flake, 2013). Annually, more than 90,000 children are born into families of active-duty service members (2013). The interaction between the non-deployed parent and their children can have a significant impact on the resiliency and coping ability of the children military families. A review of the literature by Waliski et al. (2012) concluded that parental mental health is a key risk factor for children of military families during deployment. Several studies involving military youth yield results showing that these youth noticed substantial changes in behavior in their non-deployed parent during the absence of the deployed parent. Teens from a qualitative study by Huebner and

Mancini (2005) reported that their mothers slept more often, were more emotional, more irritable, and had problems with concentration. The majority of the teen participants in the focus groups also reported that their mothers were stressed due to increased responsibilities, concerned about finances, and worried about the safety of their spouse (Huebner & Mancini, 2005).

Adolescents in another qualitative study using focus groups reported that their relationships with the non-deployed parent were strained due to parental worry, somatic illness, and anger (Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009). Childhood distress is closely linked to parental distress; therefore, when a deployed parent experiences greater combat danger, this can manifest as stress and anxiety in the non-deployed parent, thus creating child symptoms (Davis, 2010)

Barker and Berry (2009) conducted a study in which the child participants in their deployment groups had a deployed parent that on average was gone half of their lifetime. Generally, military youth have been identified as resilient and able to successfully adjust and cope with stress related to deployment (Esposito-Smythers, et al., 2011). However, deployment related stressors could negatively affect children when they become chronic and the children are not provided adequate support (2011). Children can be negatively affected by deployment separation from a parent or caregiver. Such negative effects can be social-emotional, behavioral, and academic (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Guzman, 2014). Furthermore, length of deployment has been associated with greater levels of physiological and psychological stress among children with a deployed parent. Parent deployment has been shown to result in increased child behavior problems (Barker & Berry, 2009). Deployments can be dramatically disruptive to a child's environment, causing events such as relocation, rearrangement of care giving and routines, and change of schools (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Guzman, 2014). In a survey study of 414 military parents and children by Aranda et al. (2011), parents of a child with a deployed parent reported

that their children experienced more psychosocial difficulties than did parents without a currently deployed parent. Furthermore, these parents stated children with a deployed parent had more internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, problems in school, and attention problems than did children without a deployed parent (Aranda, et al., 2011). Youth participants in this study reported significantly more psychosocial difficulties, internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, and school problems than did the youth participants without a deployed parent (2011). Similarly, children from military families in a study that surveyed 1,507 military children and non-deployed caregivers had more emotional difficulties, difficulties with school, family, and peer-relations compared to a national sample (Chandra et al., 2009). More specifically, length of deployment makes a difference in the children's ability to function in schools. Clever and Segal (2013) reported that children whose parents who had not deployed or deployed less than nineteen months in the same three years did better in school than children whose parents had longer deployments. Alarming, Cederbaum, et al. (2013) conducted an analysis of 14, 299 surveys from children in California and found that secondary school students from military families in one study were more likely to report depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. Moreover, even when controlling for grade, gender, and race/ethnicity, familial deployment compared with no deployment was associated with increased odds of depressive symptoms, experiencing sadness or hopelessness, and suicidal ideation (2013). Chandra et al. (2010) found that school staff felt that children of military families experienced anxiety related to parental absence, poor mental health of some non-deployed parents, increased responsibilities in the home, and difficulty accessing mental health services and that this affected their ability to function well in school. Acion et al. (2013) suggest that deployment of a parent is a possible risk factor for drinking, binge drinking, use of marijuana, other illegal drugs, and misuse of

prescription drugs. These behaviors were seen consistency across sixth, eighth, and eleventh grades (2013), every grade that was surveyed in the study. The cumulative effects of a parent's deployment appear to linger over time. For example, a child who falls behind one year in school due to struggles related to a parental deployment may fall further and further behind with subsequent school years (Engel, Gallaher, & Lyle, 2010).

Thus far, the end result of deployment has been discussed as the deployed parent returning home and readjusting with their family. However, the harsh reality that many military families face is that the return home for service members is not always so simple. Injury of the service member can completely change the postdeployment stage dynamic within a family. An injury can change the way in which a service member parents, on a short-term basis or permanently (Masten, 2013). This can also change a child's sense of emotional security. Masten (2013) discusses the potential stressors on military families caused by injury or worse, death:

“Chronic strains on the family, whether from changes in the wounded parent or the stress of caring for an injured family member, can undermine parenting and family systems or drain energy and emotional stamina from even the most capable parents or spouses. Bereavement can be complicated by depression or resettlement. Family finances can suffer. All of these problems generate stress on the family, which can interfere with multiple aspects of family function that support child development. Thus, it is not a surprise that research on children and families exposed to these adversities has found elevated symptoms and problems” (Masten, 2013, p. 206).

Uncertainty of the future can pose an emotional burden to both the injured parent and the caregiver, particularly in their attempts to answer the questions of their children (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013). Children can regress developmentally due to their uncertainty, worry, and fear pertaining to their parent's injury (2013).

Military families are at higher risk than their civilian counterparts for child maltreatment incidents. After 9/11, the rate of substantiated maltreatment in military families doubled. Rentz, et al. (2007) conducted a time-series analysis of 147, 982 cases in the Texas child maltreatment

database. They found that the rate of substantiated maltreatment cases in military families is 22% higher than civilian families (Rentz et al., 2007). More specifically, military families are 3.5 times more likely to have infants suffering from shaken baby syndrome than their civilian counterparts (Gessner & Runyan, 1995). Herman-Giddens and Vitaglione (2005) examined the child homicide rate in two North Carolina counties with large military populations. They found that the child abuse homicide rate in children from military families was more than double the state rate of child abuse homicide (2005). Since 2003, the number of children killed in military families has more than doubled. Deployment amplifies these serious problems in military families. In a study of 1,771 military families, Gibbs, et al. (2007) found that the rate of maltreatment is more than three times greater when one spouse is deployed compared to when not deployed. Moreover, the rate of physical abuse doubles, the rates of moderate or severe abuse are 1.6 times greater, and the rate of neglect is almost four times greater (2007). Rentz et al. (2007) found that child maltreatment in military families increases by 30% for each 1% increase in deployment or return from deployment. Furthermore, military families with a service member suffering from PTSD are at greater risk of child maltreatment (Prigerson et al., 2002; Rentz et al., 2006).

Sadly, some service members who deploy never return home. As of December 2012, 5,188 service members serving in connection with OEF or OIF have been killed in action (U.S. Department of Defense, Public Affairs Office 2012). The impact of death of a parent on children is so life altering that many times, the child and caregiver recoil from the full awareness and tragedy that the death involves (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013). The loss of a parent to death is a catastrophic event in the life of a child, violating their expectation that the parent will always be available to protect and help them (2013). Grasping the finality of death is extremely difficult for

younger children in particular and their grief and mourning manifest as protest, despair, and detachment (2013). Children and adolescents often experience challenges with sense of self, identity, and capacity to find meaning and purpose in their lives (Kaplow, et al. 2013). Youth are often preoccupied with concerns about whether their parent's death was scary or painful to undergo. Additionally, these youth who lose a parent in combat may experience intense anger or rage at the perceived responsible party, many times directed toward the enemy or the military. (2013). Due to the sense of heroism, many youth may not feel free to verbalize such thoughts or feelings. This can lead to emotional suppression, greater avoidance, and the prolongation of their situational distress (2013).

Positive Factors of Deployment and Military Life

In contrast, some research outlines the positive impact of deployment on military families and marriages. In study of 33 service members, subjects reported that deployments could promote self-improvement and provide higher pay (Merolla, 2010). Karakurt et al. (2013) discuss several studies in which spouses of service members reported stronger marriages post-deployment. Moreover, Karakurt et al. (2013) state that other researchers have failed to find significant changes in marriages due to deployment. The authors also suggest that spouses' understanding of the negative impact of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and exposure to combat are related to satisfaction in their relationship (2013). Research conducted in various war contexts has found that supportive emotional contexts such as supportive family members, access to health care, and community mental health agencies mitigate the adverse effects of deployment (Tunac de Pedro et al., 2011).

Devoe and Ross (2012) discuss that many parents with a deployed partner or spouse manage the demands of parenting successfully, develop family routines, and manage increased

stress as well as their household responsibilities. Moreover, some military spouses describe this mastery as a newfound independence and say that it can result in gains in confidence. This role transformation among non-deployed parents reflects potential growth and resilience among military families (Devoe & Ross, 2012). In Karney and Crown's (2011) comparative analysis of 566,895 records of military service and deployment found that for the vast majority of service members in their study, the longer that a service member was deployed while married, the lower the risk of marital dissolution. Deployment actually appeared to enhance marital stability (2011).

Furthermore, some research found that children of military families are highly resilient. Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, and Lerner (2013) maintain that this is a product of the relationships between children and the resources and people around them. Essentially, military life has its share of hardships but offers many resources for resilience as well, such as a supportive community and strong sense of belonging (2013). Children belonging to military families have opportunities to take on new responsibilities that can build self-confidence, particularly when a parent is deployed. Furthermore, stress can have positive and health-enhancing effects on children if it is brief and in the context of a stable and supportive relationship (2013).

Even in the most tragic circumstances where a service member parent is killed in action, many children of military families feel a strong sense of purpose and meaning. The children also receive support from the military following the death of a parent, including financial/resource support, continued access to health care, and helping communities, all being potential protective factors in the wake of such devastating loss (Kaplow, et al., 2013).

Impact of Deployment(s) on Individual Service Member

Service members experience countless hardships while deployed, such as physical challenges, uncertainty and exposure to danger, separation from family and friends, and long

working hours in an intense workspace (Duckworth, 2009). Unfortunately, many of these service members also experience various traumatic events such as hand-to-hand combat, explosions and resulting injuries, witnessing injury or death of friends and/or non-combatants, and exposure to decomposing bodies (2009). Copious research has reported the health effects of deployment on service members. Some of the adverse affects of deployment reported by service members include substance abuse problems, development of psychological problems, numerous physical health issues, and issues in their personal relationships and families. For example, in a study of 289,328 veterans who were using VA services for the first time following service in OEF or OIF, over one-third of veterans received mental health diagnoses (Seal et al. 2009). Furthermore, over 40% were found to have psychosocial and behavioral problems.

Female Service Members and the Impact of Service on their Families

Copious research has been conducted on service members and the effects of deployment on their family systems. However, most of these studies have focused on male service members. Considering the increasing presence of females in the military, it is crucial that researchers consider female service members specifically. Moreover, when pertaining to families, the absence of a mother or female caregiver may have a very different effect on the family system than the absence of a father or male caregiver due to the various roles that males and females can fill in the home. In addition, research should examine any possible differences in the effects of OEF/OIF deployments and deployment length and frequency on each gender. Few studies have focused on these specific factors and many questions remain unanswered.

Adler, Huffman, Bliese, and Castro (2005) conducted surveys of 3,339 service members to assess the effects of gender, length of deployment, and number of deployments on the psychological health of soldiers deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The authors found that

deployment length was related to increases in depression and posttraumatic stress in males but not for females. Previous deployment experience was significantly associated with lower depression and posttraumatic stress scores for both male and female service members (2005). More specifically, there is an interaction between gender and past deployment experience on the severity of PTSD and depression. Huffman, Adler, and Castro (2000) examined the effect of deployment length and previous deployments on the psychological health of 12,336 male and female service members who had been deployed to Bosnia between September 1997 and October 1999. The results that their comparative survey study yielded were intriguing; male distress increased over time whereas the female rates remained comparatively stable, and deployment length was related to decreased well being in male service members returning from deployment whereas this effect was not found in females (Huffman, Adler, & Castro, 2000). No relationship was found in females between rates of distress and deployment length but males were adversely affected by deployments that exceeded five months (2000). Kelly, Hock, Smith, and Bonney (2002) purposively limited the subjects of their study to 120 female Navy service members for their examination of psychological adjustment and well being of deployed and non-deployed women and mothers. They found that single deployed women reported the highest levels of depressive symptomology. These single deployed women and non-deployed female service members who were married had the highest levels of anxiety (Kelly, Hock, Smith, & Bonney, 2002).

Although the previously mentioned studies examined differences in male and female service members' response to length of deployment, those studies were conducted before the OEF/OIF/OND conflicts. This is a critical factor because, as previously discussed, research has shown that these conflicts are very different in important ways than previous conflicts involving

U.S. service members. Therefore, deployments to the OEF/OIF/OND conflicts have been shown to have their own set of ramifications for service members and their families.

Some of the ramifications for service members who served in OEF/OIF/OND are adverse effects on family, work, and personal domains, posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), and PTSD and other psychological diagnoses. It is crucial to understand the gender differences among all of these possible ramifications for service members. Emerging research regarding OEF/OIF/OND service members has begun to examine gender differences. A study of 871 service members who returned from OEF/OIF operations found that the females recorded higher personal negative and family reintegration experiences than the males (Beder, Coe, & Sommer, 2011). For both genders, however, being in a permanent relationship was associated with positive experiences in the domain of family and work and having children was associated with a positive impact in the domain of family (Beder, Coe, & Summer, 2011). Another poignant finding for both genders was that direct combat had a positive effect on the reintegration experiences in the domains of work and personal but had a negative impact on family reintegration (2011). Furthermore, those who acknowledged having PTSD, the domains of personal, work, and family were all adversely affected. Beder, Coe, and Sommer (2011) also examined the impact of multiple deployments and the length of deployment and the possible effects on the domains of personal, life, and work. Findings were consistent with both genders; multiple deployments had a significant negative impact in both family and personal domains (2011). Additionally, length of deployment was measured in 6-month intervals and it revealed a negative impact in the personal domain but a positive impact in the work domain. Deployments that were over 24 months showed the strongest adverse effect (2011). Kline, et al. (2013) examined gender differences in posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) and risk/protective factors

among service members deployed to Iraq. More specifically, they assessed military preparedness and unit cohesion among 922 service members, which may buffer the psychological effects of combat (2013). They found that women in their study had a higher prevalence of probable PTSD post-deployment than their male counterparts. The female service members also had significantly higher PTSS post-deployment and scored higher on pre-deployment PTSS than their male counterparts. Furthermore, females scored lower on military readiness and military cohesion than their male counterparts (2013). Maguen et al. (2013) ($N = 329,049$) found that while male veterans of OEF/OIF were diagnosed more frequently with PTSD and alcohol and substance abuse, their female counterparts were more likely to receive diagnoses of depression.

Other factors to consider when discussing gender differences in effects of deployment are exposure to combat and other stressors such as sexual stressors such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, and military sexual trauma during deployment. Polusny et al. (2013) found that women reported greater sexual stressors during deployment than men while men reported greater exposure to combat situations. However, there was no gender difference in exposure to combat aftermath such as witnessing injured or dying people (2013). Gender was also found to predict higher PTSD symptoms after controlling for pre-deployment symptoms, prior interpersonal victimization, and combat related stressors (2013). Women reported more severe PTSD symptoms as well as higher rates of probable PTSD than their male counterparts.

Summary and Implications

The results of this review yield several important findings for understanding the effect of OEF/OIF/OND deployment(s) on service members, particularly female service members, and their families. Below is a list highlighting key findings:

- Research suggests that OEF/OIF/OND deployment(s) can have various adverse effects on service members including psychosocial diagnoses such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety, physical health problems, and issues readjusting upon return from deployment (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2011; Devoe & Ross, 2012).
- While research lists some positive effects of deployment for military families including higher pay, strengthened marriages, self-improvement for the service member, newfound independence and increased confidence for the non-deployed spouse or partner, and potential growth and resilience among military families (Merolla, 2010; Karakurt et al., 2013; Ling & Johnson, 2013) most research finds that deployments can be immense stressors for military families.
- Non-deployed spouses and partners struggle with increased responsibilities, financial hardships, and worry about the safety of their deployed partner (Duckworth, 2009; Huebner et al., 2010; Ling & Johnson, 2013).
- Military families are at higher risk than their civilian counterparts for child maltreatment incidents. The rate of substantiated maltreatment cases in military families is 22% higher than civilian families and military families are 3.5 times more likely to have infants suffering from shaken baby syndrome than their civilian counterparts (Rentz et al., 2007; (Gessner & Runyan, 1995). Since 2003, the number of children killed in military families has more than doubled and deployment amplifies these serious problems in military families (Herman-Giddens, & Vitaglione, 2005; Rentz, et al., 2007).
- Children who have deployed parents not only fear for the safety of their deployed parent, but they struggle with coping with the changes in the non-deployed caregiver as well as the role

shift and increase in their responsibilities in the home (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013; Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008).

- The research on gender differences and coping with deployment varies. Some research suggests that females report higher personal negative and family reintegration experiences than the males but both genders reported multiple deployments had a significant negative impact in both family and personal domains (Adler, Huffman, Bliese, & Castro, 2005; Huffman, Adler, & Castro, 2000). Some research found that female service members report higher rates of PTSD (Kline, et al. (2013), while other studies found that males had higher rates of PTSD while females had higher rates of depression (Maguen, et al., 2010).

Suggestions for future research are listed below:

- Future research should strive to better understand the differences in gender and coping with deployment in service members as well as how multiple and/or frequent deployments affect both genders.
- Families of female deployed service members should be more closely examined to determine if the effects of deployment vary from those of male service members' families.
- In order to better understand the effects of deployment frequency and deployment on female service members and their families, future studies should measure the length of time that service members and their families are separated, track multiple deployments, and specifically consider deployed mothers and the impact of their deployment(s) on them as well as their families.

- More specifically, there has been no longitudinal research with these mothers across multiple deployments to measure possible effects regarding deployment length and frequency and family coping, resiliency, and stress.
- Emerging research suggests that preoccupation with family well being is a serious concern for service members in combat theater (Devoe and Ross, 2012). Therefore, future research should measure service members' perception of the effects of deployment on their families while in theater and their levels of stress and military readiness.

In summary, research consistently has found that although resilient, military families are at risk for higher rates of substance abuse, substantiated cases of child neglect and maltreatment, and higher rates of behavioral and emotional problems than are civilian families. Moreover, research shows that these risk factors are compounded by deployment(s). Research has found that service members themselves face a number of risk factors individually as well, including increased risk for depression, PTSD, and other mental health issues as well as a number of physical health risks. However, more research is needed on the differences between male and female service members to fully understand the implications for these service members and their families, especially in light of contradictory research findings regarding female service members and their risk for PTSD, depression, and readjustment from combat deployments compared to their male counterparts.

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Chapter III

A Qualitative Exploration of Mothers on their First Deployment to Afghanistan

Abstract

Since the inception of the most current U.S. wars in 2001, the population of women in the military has increased to 11%. Due to the influx of women at war and the unique characteristics of the OEF/OIF/OND wars, there are many unanswered questions regarding the female military population and the effect of participating in these wars. In order to begin the exploration of these effects, this study explores the lived experiences of women at war. Using qualitative content analysis, interviews from six female military personnel deployed to Afghanistan in 2011 were analyzed and categories and subcategories were extracted from the data. These women were all unmarried mothers experiencing their first deployment. All participants discussed deployment-based effects as well as womanhood, with subcategories including such facets as pride for their work, experiencing trauma, and motherhood. Some implications from this study include the awareness of a gender-biased environment in the military, the impact of separation of mothers from their children, and insight on how these women cope with trauma in a time of war.

Introduction

Women in our U.S. military face a unique set of challenges. In recent wars, service women who are mothers account for more than 100,000 soldiers in the U.S. Military. This is nearly half the number of women who have been deployed (Alvarez, 2009). Individual service members experience countless hardships while deployed; physical challenges, uncertainty and exposure to danger, separation from family and friends, and long working hours in an intense workspace to name a few (Duckworth, 2009). Often service members also experience various traumatic events such as hand-to-hand combat,

explosions and resulting injuries, witnessing injury or death of friends and/or non-combatants, and/or exposure to decomposing bodies (2009). Post-deployment reports by service members include evidence of substance abuse problems, development of psychological problems, numerous physical health issues, and conflicts in their personal relationships and families. For example, of 289,328 veterans seeking initial VA services after OEF or OIF, the VA treated over one-third of the veterans in the study for mental health diagnoses (Seal et al. 2009). Furthermore, the VA found over 40% to have psychosocial and behavioral problems related to their military service.

Male services members or their families have been the focus of most research relating to military personnel to date. From 1973 to 2010 the number of active-duty enlisted women in the military quadrupled, growing from about 42,000 to 167,000 (Patten & Parker, 2011). Considering the increasing presence of females in the military, it is crucial that researchers consider female service members specifically. Moreover, when pertaining to families, the absence of a mother or female caregiver may have a notably different effect on the family system than the absence of a father or male caregiver due to the various roles that males and females can fill in the home. In addition, research should examine any possible differences in the effects of OEF/OIF deployments and deployment length and frequency on each gender. Few completed studies focus on female service members, how they differ from their male counterparts, how their families cope with the mother being deployed, and how female service members perceive their experiences in war. These and many other questions regarding this population remain unanswered.

Moreover, OEF/OIF/OND are unique wars due to the increasing number of

service members who experienced unexpected deployments, lengthy deployments, and multiple deployments. (Zoroya, 2012; Department of Defense, 2010). Research shows that length of deployment, number of deployments, and experiences on past deployments can affect the service members' ability to cope effectively with current deployment. Adler, Huffman, Bliese, and Castro (2005) found that deployment length correlates with increases in depression and posttraumatic stress in males but not females. Previous deployment experience was significantly associated with lower depression and posttraumatic stress scores for both male and female service members (2005). More specifically, there is an interaction between gender and past deployment experience on the severity of PTSD and depression. Huffman, Adler, and Castro (2000) examined the effect of deployment length and previous deployments on the psychological health of 12,336 male and female service members deployed to Bosnia between September 1997 and October 1999. The results show an increase in male distress over time whereas the female rates remain comparatively stable. Deployment length was linked to a decrease in well-being in male service members returning from deployment but not in females (Huffman, Adler, & Castro, 2000). The study found no relationship in females between rates of distress and deployment length but the effect on males proved negative during deployments that exceeded five months (2000). Kelly, Hock, Smith, and Bonney (2002) study of females in the Navy found that single deployed women report the highest levels of depressive symptomology. Among the women in the study, married women displayed the highest level of anxiety. (Kelly, Hock, Smith, & Bonney, 2002).

Although these studies examine several important factors for female service members, many of those studies pre-date the OEF/OIF/OND conflicts. This is a critical

factor because, as previously discussed, research shows that these conflicts are different in important ways than previous conflicts involving U.S. service members. Therefore, deployments to the OEF/OIF/OND conflicts have their own set of ramifications for service members and their families. Some of the ramifications for service members who served in OEF/OIF/OND are adverse effects on family, work, and personal domains, posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), and PTSD and other psychological diagnoses. It is crucial to understand the gender differences among all of these possible ramifications for service members. Emerging research regarding OEF/OIF/OND service members is beginning to examine gender differences but further research must be done to focus on the females serving in OEF/OIF/OND, as they are a growing population that far too little is known about. More specifically, more must be known about the experiences of female service members who are mothers and how the unique stressors of deployment in places of war may affect these service members' lives post-deployment.

Theoretical Framework

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of stress and coping is applied to military families in much of the literature. This theory asserts that available resources determine the way in which an individual copes with stressors. In addition, prior experiences, positive beliefs about oneself, physical well being, and problem solving skills are resources that one may use for effective coping (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2010). Cognitive appraisals of the stressor(s) mediate the effects of stress and guide the choice of coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In the context of military families, deployment and separation can be immense stressors. Using this theoretical framework, families must appraise the stressor, the threat

that it poses, and their available resources to then form a coping effort to maintain the well being and functioning of their family system. Lazarus (1993) reports adaptation in social functioning, morale, and somatic health are the outcomes of effective coping. Ineffective coping, particularly among military spouses, can result in the spouse having psychosocial, behavioral, or physical symptoms (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2010). Furthermore, if youth perceive parental support to be insufficient and doubt their own ability to cope with stress, stressors such as deployment may be appraised as detrimental to their well being. Consequently, the youth may develop behavioral and emotional health problems (Esposito-Smythers, 2011).

Much of the research that applies this theory to service members specifically focuses on their families and not the service members themselves. Utilizing this framework, the proposed study will focus on the lived experiences of actively deployed service members while they face various stressors that are unique to combat situations. Because this theory asserts that available resources and prior experiences are resources that one may use to cope effectively, the proposed study will consider these resources and the effectiveness of the service members' coping while assessing the experiences of these service members.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of first-time deployed female service members who are mothers. This research study is designed to contribute to the research surrounding female service members of OIF/OEF/OND and their experiences in war. This study aims to yield a better understanding of the experiences of the female service members themselves, while deployed in combat

theatre. This is incredibly important as little is known about the lived experiences of female service members while they are deployed to combat theatres. Moreover, this study will focus specifically on service members who are mothers and explore lived experiences specific to those service women. This is an important contribution to the literature because better understanding these experiences can assist helping professionals in knowing their specific needs enabling them to tailor service provision for female service members who are mothers.

Research Question

This study is designed to explore the following question:

1) What is the lived experience for first time deployed female service members who are mothers serving in OEF in theatres of combat?

Participant Selection

The dataset includes interviews of eighty-six participants. These participants were female service members interviewed in Afghanistan during the Operation Enduring Freedom conflict. These female service members varied in military rank, age, and branches of service. Participants include women from the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy. Within these branches of service, participants were Active Duty as well as those who were National Guard and Reserve members. The only criteria for selection or inclusion were that the participants be a service member, be deployed in Afghanistan at the time of data collection, and be 18 years of age or older.

The selection criteria for this study included participants who self-reported to be mothers and experiencing their first deployment. All participants from the original

eighty-six interviews who met the selection criteria for this study were included in the analysis. Six of the original eighty-six interviews met the criteria for this study.

Data Collection Procedures

Archival data from previously conducted interviews was obtained from the researcher. The interviewer from the archival data set being used utilized non-probability sampling procedures to obtain an availability sample and allowed any interested service member to participate. The participants were deployed female service members who volunteered to participate in the study. Volunteers received no incentives to participate. Participants were stationed in several military bases across Afghanistan. These military bases were selected by the interviewer based upon several criteria: availability to travel safely to each site, bases in which Department of Defense Public Affairs officers were able to arrange interviews, and military bases in which there were military personnel interested in participating. These were one-on-one, face-to-face interviews between the interviewer and each participant. The interviews were videotaped by a film technician and subsequently transcribed into Word format by a research assistant. The duration varied for each interview, but the average length of time for an interview was about half an hour. The interviews were conducted in various locations on each base that provided privacy for the interview.

This paper is based on an analysis of six female service members who are mothers and on their first deployment, taken from a larger dataset collected for the purpose of a documentary film about the lived experiences of female service members. The initial project was proposed and approved through the Department of Defense. The interviews were conducted by the PI of the original project at various bases across the country of

Afghanistan in the winter of 2011. These interviews were semi-structured, beginning with questions asked of every participant. The interviews became less structured as they progressed, and spontaneous interview questions emerged from each individual's response to the questions. Every interview was video-recorded with the consent from the participants and subsequently transcribed into Word documents.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis, a widely used method to analyze text data, is the data analysis procedure chosen for this study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis is defined as a method of analyzing verbal, written, or visual communication (Cole, 1988). Although content analysis can be conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively, it is widely used qualitatively (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Down-Wamboldt (1992) notes that content analysis offers a content-sensitive method that is concerned with intentions, meanings, and context. This method is used highlight similarities or inconsistencies that can be found when conducting qualitative exploration and most importantly, to capture pertinent characteristics. This study utilizes secondary archival data and aims to identify participants' perceptions of their experiences and realities and this methodology is utilized to capture those important perceptions and any commonalities or differences among the participant group. Therefore, content analysis is utilized as the data analysis methodology in this study.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study is the use of secondary archival data. Because I did not collect the data used in this study, my analysis could be more general than it would be if I had conducted the interviews myself. There is great value in collecting data

first hand because acute observations can be made in the moment. For example tone of voice can change a way that a statement is interpreted, body language can be observed, and other contextual nuances considered when analyzing the data (e.g., noise, distractions, smells, etc.). Another limitation related to utilizing these archival data is the lack of demographic information for the participants in the study. Demographic data provides information about the population being studied and is necessary for determining if a sample is representative of any broader population. Demographic data can also provide useful information for deeper understanding of the participants (i.e., age, military rank, years of service) that would provide additional insights into participant characteristics. Lack of generalizability is inherent to any qualitative study and is an obvious limitation in this study. The participants in this study were female military personnel deployed during OEF to Afghanistan in 2011. Therefore, the data gathered and subsequently analyzed are only representative of their experiences and cannot be generalized to another population. Rossman and Rallis (2011) note, however, that findings from one study can still be informative and useful in other settings. Another limitation of this study is due to the copious amount of data collected. Interpreting qualitative data takes an immense time commitment as well as tedious attention to specific details of the data. The data used in this study are no exception. Despite best efforts of researchers to capture every nuance in participant interviews, it is impossible to capture every aspect of the experiences that participants discussed. Therefore, the findings in this study only reflect categories and nuances that I deemed representative of what the participants communicated in the interviews. Finally, trustworthiness is challenging to establish due to the subjective nature of data collection and analysis in

qualitative research (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Consequently, it is crucial for researchers using this method to clearly disclose their efforts and methods taken to preserve credibility during both data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The existing transcripts were analyzed using the inductive qualitative content analysis method as described by Elo & Kyngas (2008). Using inductive content analysis, the process began by organizing the qualitative data using open coding, making notes and organizing the data by adding headings while reading through the data. The headings were subsequently added to coding sheets and categories were freely generated. Following the open coding, the meaningful parts of the data were selected inductively to answer the research question: “what is the lived experience for first time deployed female service members who are mothers serving in OEF in theatres of combat?” The list of categories was then reduced by collapsing similar and dissimilar categories into broader, higher order categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). These categories were created to provide a means of “describing a phenomenon, generate knowledge, and to increase understanding” (Cavanagh, 1997). We divided the data into main categories and sub-categories by similarities and commonalities. Main categories included topics that every participant discussed in-depth during their interview. Sub-categories included topics that were not discussed by all participants, but were discussed in-depth and at length by several participants. This process was completed both by me and a second researcher trained by me before beginning the analysis process. Training incorporated reviewing content analysis processes, practicing analyzing “dummy” data, and completing a college course on social work with military personnel and veterans. Both researchers completed the

categorizing process independently and then we met together to complete the analysis. We discussed in depth and ultimately agreed upon the identified categories during several meetings. We also discussed lenses we utilized and any personal biases we may have had to ensure we remained as objective as possible while coding. For example, I used a trauma-focused lens for social work practice and research. This is a potential bias because my lens may cause me to under or over emphasize emerging themes based on my trauma focus. The second researcher offered a different perspective while coding and discussing the data because she did not use a trauma-focused lens. This process helped to increase objectivity and trustworthiness of both coders throughout the analysis.

Results

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of two main categories that have been labeled “deployment-based affect” and “womanhood”. These two categories have sub-categories that are explained with supporting quotes from the participants.

1.1 Deployment-based affect

This category has four sub-categories; “pride for their work”, “experiencing trauma”, “leaving family behind”, and “camaraderie”.

1.1.1 Pride for their work

Female service members voiced a great deal of pride in their work while deployed and found great meaning in knowing they were helping the civilians of Afghanistan. The participants who reflected on this pride throughout the interviews referenced their deployment as a positive experience. Participants felt a sense of purpose in aiding the Afghan people and found meaning as they changed lives and helped the civilians express their voice.

“Knowing that you’re here to help the civilians here and make a change in their lives, bettering that, them being able to have their own say. That’s the main thing. I don’t know how to put it all, it’s hard to explain. We look back home and how we have all these conveniences and we come over here and we don’t see that. It would be nice to see them have that as well. And see those changes as they grow into a bigger society and a better society.”

One participant discussed returning to her civilian job upon returning from deployment.

She voiced concern that her job may appear minimal because of the meaningful work she completed while deployed. She shared a specific interaction with an Afghan man who she treated medically.

“After doing these kinds of things, going back to my job seems to minimal. Taking care of the Afghan people who are very resilient. They want to get better. I had a patient who lost both his legs. He was newly married. Never once did he say, ‘I don’t want to live’. He wanted to have a family, take good care of them.”

Participants also normalized their service and sacrifice, discussing how they were no different than anyone else. They also specifically discussed how they chose to serve, and that it was important to remember that choice while deployed.

“Like, I chose to be here, volunteer. It’s a sacrifice for everybody. People at my job are filling in for me. Sacrifice for our families. We chose to do it. “

“We’re still people. Just doing what we need to do to defend our freedom. Everyday people.”

1.1.2 Experiencing trauma

Many participants discussed experiencing traumatic events. Those who discussed trauma referred to the events specifically and how it affected them. Participants also discussed seeing civilian injuries and how reality did not match pre-conceived expectations of deployment.

“And pediatrics, a lot of Afghan children. We went to classes for pediatric trauma but I don’t think we expected to see many and that’s what we’ve seen, caught in the crossfire. “

“It’s more challenging with the injuries you see than I imagined because I hadn’t experienced that injury before. This is a little bit different. And this is a little more intense. I don’t ever get used to it. Certainly not a shock but still just as upsetting.”

Another participant discussed trauma and public awareness. Although traumatic sights occurred in the operating room where she worked, she wished that the public could experience what she did so that they would be more aware of the cost and sacrifice of war.

“Just that these soldiers here, there are times when it’s gruesome to show these injuries but I wish the public could see the OR because I want people to understand what people give up here and what it costs.”

Only one participant discussed how they handled trauma while deployed. She alone discussed compartmentalization of trauma and how crucial yet difficult that process is because war continues after the trauma occurs.

“And what your mind does is, remember all the good things. Compartmentalize, put them away, they come out when something brings it all back. You’ll never forget the sounds that day. Even now I don’t ever really feel like when I’m sleeping like I can’t hear. If it’s 4-5 in the morning and we hear a lot of gunfire it brings it back again.”

1.1.3 Leaving family behind

A common concern among the participants was leaving their families behind. Several discussed what this meant to them and what they were missing out on while deployed. Specifically, much of the conversation about family during the interviews with the service members led to missing milestones with their children.

“By the time I get home my youngest will be walking.”

“Even though I have an older daughter I still miss the firsts. She’s talking; she’s drinking out of a cup at 10 months. Oldest daughter wasn’t even thinking about a cup. She’s crawling, walking, dancing together. Her birthday’s next month and I’m not going to be there...”

“I took them down on a break and left from there. It sucked. Got back, started packing and getting ready to go. It kind of sucked cause my oldest daughter can talk. So she’s more expressing her feelings, wants me to come home, so that kind of sucks. We talk, Skype every night. Talk on the phone.”

Although many of the participants communicate openly with their families while separated from them, one participant discussed the difficulty of communicating about deployment with her loved ones. She decided to not disclose certain events to her loved ones at home.

“I don’t talk much about what goes on here. When we were attacked in August all I did was send e-mails home saying I was safe. And the same with my job. Just communicate through email mainly. And of course internet’s not always working. I don’t want to talk about here, I want to know what’s going on at home. For now I just want to talk about things we miss together.”

1.1.4 Camaraderie

Camaraderie among service members appeared to greatly influence the deployment experience of the participants, resulting in more positive experiences among those who felt camaraderie. Service members who shared camaraderie also reported feeling safer due to the bond they shared with fellow service members.

“The camaraderie with coworkers. We have a shared experience and that’s something that will always be there when I see those people in the future. A bond there that you don’t have in your typical hospital environment.”

“I thought when I got off the aircraft I would be afraid for my life. But it’s just not like that out here. We do get fire every now and then. It’s kind of scary but I feel pretty safe around soldiers. If something happened we would take care of each other. I’m more comfortable than I thought I would be.”

“That there’s people out there always watching when we’re sleeping. Going to take care of us, do their mission. And we’re going to take care of them. That’s what we’re here for.”

“How I care about my soldiers. Leadership does care about the people. We are kind of a family here. We’re going to look out for each other, we do take care of each other. While we’re out here we’re one big family.”

2.1 Womanhood

This category has two sub-categories: “femininity” and “motherhood”.

2.1.1 Femininity

The participants discussed femininity in various ways. Some participants discussed looking forward to being out of the confines of uniform and regulations while others discussed what it was like to be a woman in the military. When asked what they look forward to the most when returning, participants shared the specific aspects of life back home that they missed.

“Definitely taking off my uniform for a while. Wearing strappy sandals, dangly earrings. Dairy. We don’t have good dairy here. Sliced cheese, pizza. Little things, sitting and talking with my husband, having a glass of wine. Playing with my children.”

“Can’t wait to wear my hair down. I’ll do my hair in my room just to see how it looks. But I have to put it up when I go to work. Manicures, pedicures.”

One service member discussed being a female service member and what she hoped her daughter learned from her.

“Hopefully my daughter will take that being a female doesn’t matter. If that’s what you want to do you can get away with it.”

2.1.2 Motherhood

Motherhood was a common sub-category during analysis, with most participants discussing their experiences as deployed mothers separated from their children. One participant identified as a mother at home but also as a mother figure during deployment.

“I’m sort of a mother figure around younger men, they come look at me as a mother figure. I think that helps them. I too know that we can be used in those situations. She’s a mom, maybe she might know how to deal with this. That sort of thing.”

Several mothers discussed what it was like to be away from their children and what they looked forward to experiencing with their children once they returned from deployment.

“Can’t wait. I think I’m very excited to see family, children hug and smell. Conversations with [my] husband and having a day off. I’ll be surprised by what’s difficult and what’s easy I think. Other things will be challenging. But I’ll be surprised by what those things are.”

“My daughter 5, son 2. Prepared daughter a little but she didn’t really understand. Any my son just he thinks I live in the computer or on the phone. When my husband turns on the computer my son runs around saying hi mommy hi mommy. Just always talking to me on the computer. At first though he was very stand offish. He had a difficult time at first. Now seems to enjoy it.”

One mother captures the struggle of a mother being separated from her children ever so poignantly.

“It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done. I don’t cry much anymore, but. [crying] Sorry. I don’t ever want to do it again.”

Discussion

Exploring the lived experiences of these female service members revealed two main categories that included “deployment related effects” and “womanhood” which highlighted many aspects of experiencing deployment through the specific experiences of mothers on their first deployment. Across both main categories the experiences of these deployed female service members were expressed in largely positive terms.

Many of the participants experienced traumatic events such as being under direct fire, medically treating severely wounded children and adults, and being separated from their families. Yet these women still displayed positivity throughout their interviews regarding these experiences.

The results of this study yield several implications for further research as well as clinical practice with the female service member population. Highlighted throughout the data is the importance of womanhood and the implications that carries in a gender-biased environment. Mothers who are experiencing separation from their children discuss missing out on many of their children's milestones. This needs further exploration to elaborate on the effects of this separation on both mothers and children.

Furthermore, only one participant discussed how they cope with trauma during deployment in spite of several other participants experiencing significant trauma. This is not a surprising finding as research has repeatedly shown that worker who experience trauma in their professions do not typically discuss their coping mechanisms. More exploration is needed on the experience of trauma and how women cope with these events during deployment and both the short and long-term effects of this trauma on female service members, with comparisons with male counterparts. Further exploration can help inform social work practice with this population if there was a better understanding of how these women experience trauma and what, if any, coping skills they are able to utilize while deployed. If successful coping mechanisms are found through further research, social workers can employ these skills in clinical practice to military personnel pre-deployment so that negative consequences from trauma and deployment could possibly be lessened before they manifest into much larger issues for the military personnel.

All of the women in this study were experiencing their first deployment, but it is important to note that none of the participants mentioned this first deployment fact in any significant way during their interviews. Instead, the participants discussed camaraderie

and overwhelming pride in their work, including finding purpose in helping the civilians of Afghanistan. When considering the theory of stress and coping framework, this finding raises interesting questions about the importance of camaraderie and pride for the study participants. Padden, Connors, and Agazio (2010) listed positive beliefs about oneself and physical well being as effective coping skills. The positive resilient attitudes regarding their work and the camaraderie with their fellow soldiers may provide valuable insight into how these female soldiers cope. This finding could help inform social work practice to work more effectively with deployed and returning military personnel and assist these women in developing and maintaining effective coping skills so that they can better cope with the ramifications of combat, readjustments, and other stressors associated with military service.

Table One: Categories and Sub-Categories

Deployment-based affect	Pride for their work	"Like, I chose to be here, Volunteer. It's a sacrifice for everybody. People at my job are filling in for me. Sacrifice for our families. We chose to do it."
	Experiencing trauma	"And pediatrics, a lot of Afghan children. We went to classes for pediatric trauma but I don't think we expected to see many and that's what we've seen, caught in the crossfire."
	Leaving family behind	"I don't want to talk about here, I want to know what's going on at home. For now I just want to talk about things we miss together."
	Comradery	"We are kind of a family here. We're going to look out for each other, we do take care of each other. While we're out here we're one big family."
Womanhood	Femininity	"Can't wait to wear my hair down. I'll do my hair in my room just to see how it looks. But I have to put it up when I go to work. Manicures, pedicures."
	Motherhood	"It's the hardest thing I've ever done. I don't cry much anymore, but. [crying] Sorry. I don't ever want to do it again."

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Chapter IV

A Qualitative Analysis of Married Mothers and Multiple Deployments

Abstract

Presently, 11% of our nation's Armed Forces are female service members. As the increase in females in the military continues, so does the increase in unanswered questions regarding that population in the OEF/OIF/OND wars. Moreover, concern regarding multiple deployments is on the rise. Many women who serve are mothers, which adds to the growing list of questions about the specific effects of war on female military personnel and their families. Using qualitative content analysis, interviews from five female military personnel deployed to Afghanistan in 2011 were analyzed and categories and subcategories were extracted from the data. These women were married mothers experiencing their second or more deployment. All participants discussed deployment-based effects, womanhood, and family. Subcategories included with subcategories including such facets as pride for their work, experiencing trauma, and motherhood. Some implications from this study include the awareness of a gender-biased environment in the military, the impact of separation of mothers from their children, and insight on how these women cope with trauma in a time of war.

Introduction

Currently, 11% of the Armed Forces are comprised of female service members. Over the past thirty-five years, the number of active-duty enlisted women in the military quadrupled, growing from about 42,000 to 167,000 (Patten & Parker, 2011). As the number of female service members grows, so does the list of unanswered questions pertaining to this population. So little is known about the experiences of these women and research still primarily focuses on their male counterparts. The few studies that have examined gender differences since the beginning of the Operation Enduring

Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) wars have found that, in fact, there are many differences between male and female service members and the way they are effected by war. Service members experience numerous challenges while deployed such as exposure to danger, exposure to trauma, physical challenges and injury, and separation from family and friends (Duckworth, 2009). In these current wars, exposure to various types of trauma such as witnessing injury or death of friends and colleagues, exposure to extreme physically traumatic injuries such as traumatic brain injury, poly trauma, and injuries from improvised explosive devices can have serious effects on individual service members. Because the lived experiences of women have not been studied, the effects of such experiences on female service members are unknown.

In these current wars, there are more than 100, 000 service members who are mothers in the U.S. military (Alvarez, 2009). This accounts for nearly half the number of females who have been deployed. To date, male services members and their families have been the focus of most research. However, with the increasing number of female service members, research must begin to consider the experiences of these women and the effects of war on this population. Furthermore, because many of these women are mothers, some of them single, the absence of a mother or female caregiver may have a markedly different effect on the family system than the absence of a father due to the specific family roles in the home. Moreover, many military mothers are single and when deployed, their children have to go to alternative caretakers, many times in a different town and environment than what the children are used to. Kelly, Hock, Smith, and Bonney (2002) studied female service members, comparing single mothers to married mothers. They found that single deployed women reported the highest levels of

depressive symptomology and married women displayed the highest level of anxiety (Kelly, Hock, Smith, & Bonney, 2002).

OEF/OIF/OND also is unique in that these wars call for longer, unexpected, and more frequent deployments. Currently, there is little known about the overall effect of these frequent and lengthy deployments on service members (Zoroya, 2012; Department of Defense, 2010). It is known that number of deployments, length of deployments, and the experiences from previous deployments can affect service members' abilities to cope successfully with their most current deployment (Adler, Huffman, Bliese, and Castro (2005). Previous deployment, for example, was significantly correlated with lower PTSD and depression scores in men and women (2005). Length of deployment also correlated with increase in depression and PTSD in males, but not in females. In a pre-OEF/OIF/OND study, the effect of deployment length and previous deployment on psychological health found that male distress increased over time whereas female rates remained stable (Huffman, Adler, & Castro, 2000). The study found no relationship in females between rates of distress and deployment length (2000).

Many studies of female service members, although helpful, pre-date OEF/OIF/OND. Deployments in OEF/OIF/OND have been found to have adverse affects on family, work, and personal domains as well as yield psychological diagnoses such as PTSD and depression in large numbers in those who serve. Because these conflicts have introduced service members to trauma, injury, and other experiences unique to these wars, it is critical that research begin to focus on the female service members of these current conflicts and their lived experiences. We must understand how men and women experience these wars similarly and differently so that we may begin to understand the

ramifications of the experience of these wars on female service members. Although emerging research is beginning to examine gender differences among service members, further research must be conducted to first understand in-depth the experience of these women. These experiences are incredibly important to study and understand not just for the service members' benefits, but also so that family dynamics and the effect of mothers deploying can begin to be understood.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of stress and coping emphasizes that available resources determine how individuals manage stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Additionally, cognitive appraisals of the stressor(s) in an individual's life influence the choice of coping strategies and mediate the effects of stress (1984). In this framework, there are several resources that individuals can utilize for effective coping including physical well being, prior experiences, positive beliefs about oneself, and problem solving skills (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2010).

Military personnel are faced with various stressors including deployment, combat, separation from loved ones, exposure to trauma, and reintegration once they return home. Their families experience immense stressors as well including separation from their loved ones, adjustment of responsibility in the household, and constant concern for their deployed family member. Using the theory of stress and coping as a framework, families must assess the stressor(s) and the threat(s) they pose as well as the resources available to them. They then form a coping strategy based on their assessment to maintain the functioning of their family system and cope effectively. Outcomes of effective coping include somatic health, morale, and adaptation in social functioning while ineffective

coping, particularly in military families, can result in the non-deployed partner or spouse having psychosocial, behavioral, or physical symptoms (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2010). Esposito-Smythers (2011) discuss the youth in these families and their risk for developing behavioral and emotional health problems if they perceive parental support as inadequate and doubt their own ability to cope with stress. Serious stressors such as deployment of a parent could possibly be appraised as disadvantageous to their well being.

Utilizing the theory of stress and coping as the theoretical framework, the proposed study will focus on the lived experiences of actively deployed service members while they experience significant stressors distinctive to combat situations. Available resources, positive attitudes, and prior experiences will be considered in this study as well as the participants' coping effectiveness while analyzing the content of the interviews.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of female service members who are married mothers returning home to their families and communities after multiple deployments. This research study is designed to contribute to the research surrounding female service members of OIF/OEF/OND and the war related challenges they face. Furthermore, this study aims to yield a better understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of the female service members during deployment. Moreover, this study observes support systems of female service members who are married and mothers. This study examines only married mother service members with multiple deployments to obtain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of women who have previously experienced deployment(s) and have children and spouses.

This is incredibly important as little is known about the experiences of female service members while they are deployed to combat theatres. Moreover, this study will focus specifically on previously deployed service members in order to deepen our understanding of the impact of multiple deployments on the experiences of these women. This is an important contribution to the literature because knowing of these experiences can assist in improving in knowledge of the needs as well as service provision and delivery for female service members of OEF/OIF/OND.

Objectives and Research Question

This study is vital because in the existing body of literature regarding female service members and deployment, the prominent trend is discussing the affects on non-deployed family members and their resulting problems aforementioned. There is a serious gap in the literature focusing on how these service members are directly affected by deployment and the concerns of family and returning home. Moreover, understanding how these concerns might be intensified by being a mother and having to leave her children is important for further understanding the impact of the OEF/OIF/OND wars on female service members. This study also specifically focuses on married mothers so that the results might yield a better understanding of the experiences of married females and what their familial support systems look like during a deployment. Furthermore, this study focuses on mothers who have been deployed multiple times, which will assist in further understanding the impact of the multiple deployments characteristic of OEF/OIF/OND on the lived experiences of these women in war. This study explores the following question:

1) How do female service members who are married mothers and who have experienced previous deployment(s) serving in OEF and deployed in theatres of combat understand and perceive their experiences and realities?

Participant Selection

The dataset includes interviews of eighty-six participants who were OEF female service members interviewed in Afghanistan. These female service members varied in military rank, age, and branches of service. Participants include women from every branch of the Armed Forces, with an exception of the Coast Guard and were Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve members. Criteria for selection or inclusion included that the participants be a service member, 18 years of age or older, and be deployed in Afghanistan at the time of data collection.

For the purpose of this study, the selection criteria included married mothers experiencing their second, or more, deployment. I used all interviews that met these criteria in this study. This resulted in me using five of the original eight-six interviews in the study. The criteria helped focus this investigation on the lived experiences of married mothers who had experienced multiple deployments.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher obtained archival data from previously conducted interviews. The interviewer used non-probability sampling procedures to obtain an availability sample and allowed any female service members interested and willing to participate. Those who volunteered to participate in the study were all deployed service members, stationed in several military bases across Afghanistan, who received no incentive to partake. The interviews took place in the country of Afghanistan in the winter of 2011 and were semi-

structured, beginning with questions asked of every participant. As the interview progressed, the interview became less structured and spontaneous interview questions materialized from the individuals' responses to previous questions.

The interviewer selected interview sites using the following criteria: accessibility of safe travel to each site, military bases in which Department of Defense Public Affairs officers were able to arrange interviews, and military bases where service members were willing to take part in the interview process. Interview sites on each military base varied and were chosen based on privacy and accessibility. The interviewer conducted one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with each participant. A film technician videotaped these interviews. Interviews varied in length but averaged about a half hour each. Participants provided written and verbal consent to be interviewed and video taped. A research assistant subsequently transcribed video taped interviews into Word format.

Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is one of many research methods utilized to analyze text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Cole (1988) defines content analysis as a method of analyzing verbal, written, or visual communication. Although this method can be conducted quantitatively, it is a widely used qualitative method of analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis offers a content-sensitive method of analysis that is concerned with intentions, meanings, and context (Down-Wamboldt, 1992). This method is used to capture pertinent characteristics and highlight any similarities or inconsistencies that can be found when conducting qualitative exploration. Content analysis was chosen as the method of analysis in this study because this study aims to identify how participants perceive their experiences and realities and this methodology is

utilized to capture those important perceptions and any commonalities or differences among the participant group.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study is the use of secondary data. Because I did not collect the data used in this study, my analysis could be more general than it would be if I had heard the interviews myself. There is great value in collecting data because observations can be made, tone of voice can change a way that a statement is interpreted, and body language can be observed. Similarly, another limitation to this study is the lack of demographic information collected in the initial data set. Demographic data (i.e., age, military rank, years of service) would provide a deeper understanding of the participants and how representative they are or are not of the broader population. Researcher biases are another limitation to qualitative research. Although measures such as identifying and managing personal partialities decrease researcher biases, they cannot be completely eliminated from the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Another limitation to this study is the lack of generalizability that is inherent to any qualitative study. However, findings from one study can still be informative and useful in other settings (Rossman and Rallis (2011). The participants in this study were female military personnel who were deployed to Afghanistan in 2011 during OEF and therefore the data gathered is only representative of their experiences and cannot be generalized to another population. Another limitation is due to the volume of data collected for analysis. Interpreting this data took extensive time and tedious attention to the content of the data. It is important to note that even with the time and attention spent during analysis, it is impossible to capture every aspect of the experiences that the participants discussed. The findings in

this study only reflect the themes, commonalities, and differences that emerged through my analysis and that I determined representative of what the participants communicated in their interviews. Lastly, content analysis has its own specific limitations. These challenges relate to establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study as well as its data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Because of this, it is crucial for researchers using this method to explicitly disclose their methods and efforts taken to maintain credibility during data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The existing archival transcripts were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis method described by Elo & Kyngas (2008). Using inductive content analysis, the process began by organizing the qualitative data by using open coding, making notes and organizing the data by adding headings while reading through the data. The headings were subsequently added to coding sheets and categories were freely generated. Following the open coding, the meaningful parts of the data were selected inductively to answer the research question: “what is the lived experience for first time deployed female service members who are mothers serving in OEF in theatres of combat?” The list of categories was then reduced by collapsing similar and dissimilar categories into broader, higher order categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). These categories were created to provide a means of “describing a phenomenon, generate knowledge, and to increase understanding” (Cavanagh, 1997). We divided data into main categories and sub-categories, by similarities and commonalities. Main categories included topics discussed by every participant at length and in-depth during their interview. Similarly, sub-categories included topics discussed in-depth and at length by several participants, but not all. Both

the second researcher, who I trained before either researcher began the analysis process, and I completed this process. I trained the second researcher on the content analysis process and we completed practice analyses with “dummy” data. The second researcher gained valuable insight into the population by completing a social work course focused on studying and understanding military personnel and veterans. We both completed the categorizing process independently. We then met together multiple times to identify, discuss and agree upon categories, eventually completing the analysis. . We also discussed personal biases and lenses that we used while coding in order to enhance objectivity as much as possible. For example, my social work practice and research lens is trauma focused. My lens could cause bias because by me using a trauma-focused lens, I might be prone to over or under emphasize themes . The second researcher does not share my trauma lens and therefore was able to offer a different perspective while discussing and coding the data. We used this process to help enhance trustworthiness and objectivity throughout the analysis.

Results

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of three main categories that have been labeled “deployment-based affect”, “family”, and “womanhood”. Secondary categories emerged from the four main categories that are highlighted with quotes from the participants.

1.1 Deployment-based affect

This secondary category has five sub-categories; “pride for their work”, “concerns about lack of support returning”, “experiencing trauma”, “camaraderie”, and “deployment struggles”.

1.1.5 Pride for their work

The service members took great pride in their work while deployed and that pride reflected in their interviews. Much of the discussion about pride for their work appeared to be rooted in patriotism for their country. One participant discussed the freedom that Americans are afforded and how proud she was to help maintain those freedoms and teach others how to appreciate them.

“First, to have an appreciation for the freedoms that we have. We’re blessed to live in the US. Understand what the military means. To ensure we maintain those freedoms. I’d like them to have an appreciation for others, those who have less than we do. In terms of freedoms, transportation.”

Another service member’s pride was rooted in the opportunity she had to defend the constitution of the United States. She adamantly discussed that her work and sacrifice were not for political reasons or politicians, or to defend the country itself. She was proud to defend the American way of life.

“I think it’s important to know that it’s not about politics or president or democrats or republicans. Cause we’re all volunteers. Other thing that’s important to understand, when I took my oath I didn’t say I would defend my country or president, I said I’m going to defend the constitution. So military’s here to defend our way of life, not a particular government.”

One participant was proud because of the amount of responsibility she was given. She compared her work to that of friends, family, and discussed how her work on deployment suited her personality type.

“...Sometimes I look at what I’m doing, going out tomorrow. Think about what my friends are doing back home, my sister, stay at home mom. And that is just not for me. I’m type-A., going out, doing stuff. People pay a lot of money to go through these experiences, and we’re getting paid to do it. Lots of responsibility but I like it.”

Two participants discussed pride in their work in relation to what they were doing for the Afghan people. One discussed the balance between combating the enemy and helping the civilian population. She hoped that the public knew the good things that the military was doing instead of just focusing on the violent combat aspect of her work.

“We were talking about this the other day. Making sure everyone sees what good things we’re doing. The idea of killing. There are fighters who are coming here to terrorize this population. Who don’t know any other way than to kill them. So yeah we’re getting rid of these bad people. But I hope they’re also going to have tall wheat and more water next year.”

The other participant compared her last deployment to the one she was currently working on and being proud that this deployment was better than the last. She discussed pride in positive actions of officers as well as pride in the Afghan community. She even mentioned possibly vacationing there which speaks volume to her faith in her work making a positive change for the civilians and country of Afghanistan.

“Having Iraq has made me feel better about this one. That’s some of the decision to stay after disliking Iraq so much. Whereas ok, pride in seeing fellow officers doing good things. Might erupt into civil war. But I have to think that in 10 years they’ll be ok. It’s kind of a pretty area, maybe in 20 years vacationing here.”

Lastly, one of the participants spoke of her pride in the work she was doing very simply by stating, “I’m glad I made a difference in someone’s life.”

1.1.6 Concerns about lack of support returning

Three study participants mentioned this sub-category somewhat vaguely. However, one of the service members discussed her concern and opinion regarding support upon returning home in great detail throughout her interview.

“This is an all-volunteer army. We chose to do what we do. So they don’t have to. No draft. We could be like other countries where people are forced to do 2, 3, 4 years of service. Even if you don’t support the war, support the soldier. Because somebody’s son or daughter or wife is wearing this uniform. We make the choice, just support us. If that

means you won't let somebody park in your yard because they want to protest a funeral across the street, that's support. Shake a soldier's hand in the mall. I appreciate it, I never take it for granted. Don't worry about it I say, I like what I do. It doesn't have to be a political statement. Just, we're people. We have families, I have a 2-year-old at home that I can't wait to go home and see. Support me. Don't worry about my political views because I might not agree with what's going on either, but here I am wearing this uniform so support us. Don't take it for granted....So get our back, support us, that's really it."

1.1.7 Experiencing trauma

This is classified as a sub-category because although there were powerful statements made about it, only two participants discussed the topic. One participant talked of witnessing trauma while working in the medical field during deployment. She mentioned the shock of how many local, civilian patients she had and recounted a specific instance in which she medically treated children who were traumatically injured after playing with a land mine.

"Here I was surprised at how much local national I would see. Help take care of the locals. People live primitively, stove explosions in their little huts. Whole family's burned. Also we took care of a group of kids playing with a mine. Three cousins, mine went off."

Another participant discussed how being under incoming fire affected her. She compared her reaction to those of civilians and discussed how she coped. She also compared her last deployment and her reaction to trauma to her response to the current deployment's traumatic events.

"Yesterday we took incoming. I wasn't scared. Average civilian in this situation they freak out. But for us it becomes normal. So a friend got his by an IUD. You're upset but you move on. Learn how to compartmentalize those emotions. For my last deployment I was rattled when I got home. Out here I don't have time to deal with stuff, emotions, drama. You put it in a spot to be dealt with later. Last deployment when I got home I needed space. And you work through things and move on. This one will be similar, Things that happened that I can't deal with now. So I'm putting in a place and will deal with it later. 10 months from now. Just how you have to do it, can't be vulnerable. Not environment to have weakness. Don't know a better place to put it. Range of emotions is

just limited. Yeah, just have to tuck it away. 10 months from now start processing it, work through emotions, deal.”

1.1.8 Camaraderie

Camaraderie was a consistent sub-category throughout analysis of the data.

Participants discussed the bonds they formed with their fellow service members and the value of those relationships. One service member, a commanding officer, discussed how she wanted her soldiers to view her stating, “...I want my soldiers to see I’m willing to do the same things they are. If they’re willing to put their life on the line, why am I different? I can probably have one of my senior NCO’s do female engagement, but initially they need to see that I’m not afraid to get my hands dirty or boots muddy.”

Other participants discussed the various personalities of their fellow service members and learning how to adapt to one another through patience, tolerance and understanding.

“I’ve made a lot of friends. The cohesiveness. A lot of different personalities, you grow and learn to understand people. Tolerate people, be more patient, understand people’s feelings. Also the security forces they’re a little rough around the edges. So you see yourself picking up other’s bad habits. Recognize that and try to get back to who I am.”

Another participant disclosed that she worried more for her fellow service members than her family at home. “I find myself worrying about my soldiers more than my family at home. When they go out it’s, I’m worried like a mother. I have friends in the line troops. When they go out, you develop emotional relationships with these people because you’re with them so much and they have your back all the time.”

1.1.9 Deployment struggles

This sub-category represents various struggles that the participants discussed in their interviews. One service member mentioned this deployment was much harder than

the first time but remained positive about the experience nonetheless.

“Always wanted to join Army. Never regret, but a hard decision. I’ve come to find that out on this deployment, a lot harder than first time. But I’ll never take it back. Gave me opportunity to grow as a person. Go to school, make a difference. There’s very few people who would actually serve in the military. So for myself I feel very proud for myself. Not an everyday thing. Will I stay in I don’t know, it’s just a process right now.”

Another service member recounted her initial struggle when first arriving to her deployment zone. However, she, too found positivity in her difficult situation. She recalled that after two months, her situation was much more positive because she was able to make friends and adjust her behavior to better suit her environment.

“Go to room, open door, pitch black, people asleep cause they work at night. People angry, find empty bunk, no place to put your stuff. Then figure out over a few days. Now, after 2 months, it’s a different situation. Some people have left, we’ve made friends. And I’ve made a mental note to be nicer to the next new people. It’s just disorienting. Everyone here is so ready to go home, can hardly teach you what you need to know. So I take away from that, how do I want to behave. Lay that groundwork with coworkers, let’s be nice.”

2.1 Family

This category has two sub-categories; “affect of military service on spouse” and “affect of military service on children”.

2.1.2 Affect of military service on spouse

A concern that was prevalent throughout the interviews with the service members was their concern for their spouses. Specifically, participants were concerned about the affect of their own military service on their spouses civilian careers. One participant discussed couples that begin as dual-military and how, most of the time, the male does not re-enlist and the female does. She mentions gender norms and spouse resistance to moving frequently.

“It’s crazy because most military women are married to other military men. And if it comes down to who’s going to stay in it usually ends up being the woman. Gender norms, I don’t know. I think it is difficult. Husband’s not a fan of moving every 3 years and starting a new career. Gender norms play in there. Thankfully I have a wonderful husband, a great sport. That’s a lot of added pressure.”

Another participant expressed the same concern. She specifically discussed employer’s hesitation to hire military spouses, stating, “Employer will look at military spouse, and why would they invest and hire someone they’ll only have a couple years. So that’s just added pressure on those who want to work.” Another participant discussed the affect of military service on family in general. Her concern was rooted in thoughts about the length of the war and how families will be affected long-term.

“Yeah, and that’s not just towards women. In military we’ve been at war several years. The longest ever in history that we’ve been at war. So given that fact, that will affect many families. So I’m curious what the long-term effects will be on children. Especially deployments home a year, gone a year. Those in air force doing the same thing, but that’s a very challenging thing. Obviously has impacts on families and children.”

2.1.2 Affect of military service on children

The most prevalent sub-category throughout the data was the service members’ concern about the affect of military service on their children. Some participants discussed their concern for their children adjusting to new routines when they returned for deployment. They talked about not wanting to interrupt their routines and fears of their children not recognizing them. As one participant stated, “Now the challenge will be getting to know my daughter again. At that age where you come home for a visit then leave again, don’t know how it’s going to be. If it’ll be a challenge for me or my husband to get her back on a schedule. If she misses me it’ll be hard.” Another participant recounted a time when she was away from her family for training and then compared that experience to the one she anticipated upon returning home from deployment. She, too,

expressed concern for her family adjusting when she returned home, and even entertained the idea that it was easier for her to be deployed than for her family to be alone.

“Only time away from family was 5 weeks away from training. Got home, everyone wants a piece of me, and I just wanted a little bit of space. Probably that. Husband and I have some differences about what we’ll do when I get home. I just want to go home. Family can come see me. But after I settle in at least it’ll be summer, a chance to get to know each other. I also think though, different routines, kids will have grown a lot in emotional levels. I’ll have to adjust to that. This is how we’re going this now, new laundry detergent. Don’t want to be hyper critical. Just want to say thank you so much for taking care of our kids, our house. Try to tell my husband I know you have it rough. Sometimes I think easier for me to be here than for family to be home by themselves.”

Another participant discussed how difficult the transition of her coming home from deployment might be on her daughter because her daughter and husband will have a specific routine that they have adapted to and she is not part of it. “Biggest thing is, I’m a control freak. I find myself telling husband how to parents on Skype. So they’re going to have routine and habits and I’m going to want to change them and I can’t. Daughter will be almost 3 by the time I get home, she’ll have had a year of living the good life with daddy. Then I’m the strict one home, and she’ll be shocked. It’s, how do I fit in their little buddy partnership they have. Partners in crime right now.”

Others discussed the return home from the last deployment and expressed hope that their children would react the same as they did last time. For example, one participant discussed her daughter’s reaction when she saw her for the first time after deployment. She reminisced, “She wasn’t standoffish and ran right into my arms. It was easy. I hope this time the transition is the same. I’ve left a younger daughter this time. Hoping big brother will step in again, hope they welcome me with open arms. But if they don’t that’s ok, it will take a while to get back into normal routine. I won’t be hurt if it’s one versus the other. But if they come into my arms that would be totally awesome.”

Another participant recalled a similar instance with her children, stating “Yeah, she just ran, even faster than big brother. She just looked at me, and I looked at her, and I said, ‘Who the heck are you?’ She just looked like a grown woman. There’ll be a little bit of ‘Who are you again, what happened?’”

One participant with an older child discussed the ramifications of having an older child with more understanding of the deployment situation. “15 year old is old enough to worry. ‘What is daddy has to raise us by himself? How is everything, are you safe? Do people fire rockets at you?’ On a similar note, another participant with a teenage daughter expressed worry about how her daughter would interpret her actions because she was calling to speak to the younger, more moldable children more often than the older daughter. “I have so many duties that I have to get rest and not sacrifice that. So my daughter who’s the oldest she’s probably thinking ‘My mom never calls me, oh my gosh!’ But I try to let her know I’m thinking about her, and she knows I love her. I would rather speak to the younger ones who are more moldable...” Lastly, another participant discussed how her husband called her several times in one week due to their children’s behavior. “This week kids were having meltdowns, probably called 4 times last week. So I call home, talk to kids and husband.” The same participant then expounded on communication issues with her spouse and children stating, “Sometimes he’s really stressed out, ‘call back later’. Sometimes I hang up the telephone and think, ‘thank God I’m not there right now’. They say, ‘I miss you mom’. You say ‘well I’m trying to work right now. I’ve got stuff to do.’ I don’t want to get involved in their daily things. Wanted my husband to have control over that. Try not to think about what the laundry room looks like. He does send pictures. I’ll say they need a haircut.”

3.1 Womanhood

This category has two sub-categories; “femininity” and “motherhood”.

3.1.1 Femininity

The sub-category “femininity” appeared multiple times throughout the interviews. Participants discussed ways they maintained their femininity while deployed in a predominantly male setting. One participant mentioned that she didn’t want the fact that she was a female to be forgotten and elaborated on steps she took to ensure that she was still seen as a female.

“I don’t try to be less of a girl. I still wear makeup, use pink pens. Not overly girly but don’t want it to be forgotten. I could very easily just wake up and go to work and be a grungy girl, but I want to be girly girl still.”

Much of the discussion involving the sub-category “femininity” regarded being a woman in a predominantly male military. Below are the accounts of service members who discussed being a woman and a minority among their male counterparts.

“...I don’t think about the woman thing a whole lot. Get so used to being a minority. If I’m in a room with more than a couple women I notice that. Just not many around. There are times especially when younger, you get feelings hurt or people aren’t relating to you. Men just relate in a different way, and one among 30 or 70 can be isolating at times. But just learn to deal with it your own way and react as best you can. “

“They [male counterparts] like it cause I’ll play the girly part. But when it comes to business the line is drawn. They don’t say, we respect you but their actions show it. And that is a huge accomplishment in infantry. You really have to prove yourself all the time. The bar is set so high with tactically smart guys. Not something I usually do but I’ve adapted and learned. When we’re briefing I understand my role and what’s going on. I’ve learned to adapt to this kind of life.”

“When I first went to pilot training I won’t say it was a non-issue. It was 2000, a lot of older guys and it was very new to them. Because women were only allowed in flying combat in ’93. That was the first of the women fighter pilots. 6 at first, then it’s hovered right around 2% of female fighter pilots are women. I’m not a first by any stretch of the mind. But for a lot of guys I was the first girl they had had in the squadron. Wanted to prove myself but who doesn’t? And on a day-to-day basis I don’t think about that at all.

Just is. But there are 6 women air crew in my squadron, in a small one, which throw those numbers way off. We're like 10%. So you notice that, but it's a great thing. Just a non-issue."

"Tough question. Doesn't define me but it's who I am. Think about it daily, pointed out daily especially over here. Deal with ANA a lot, not used to dealing with women. Hooted at. But interacting with peers I don't think about myself as a girl commander. I'm a peer. My experience in being combat arms type unit though have really helped me to adjust being one of the guys. I try to be one of the guys, it's just easier that way. You're accepted if you're one of the guys."

One woman and her female colleagues planned a special event to commemorate their service as women in the military in honor of women's history month. They organized an all-women flight mission over Afghanistan.

"Wasn't my idea but it's women's history month in March...We have so many women, so we're going to go fly an all-women mission over Afghanistan. So, a good event to occur during women's history month."

Lastly, one service member talked about the importance of recognizing that they [women] are not any different than their male counterparts. She discussed perceptions of female service members and the calling to serve that she felt made all service members the same.

"Yeah, I could tell you that from my women's sex and guns class. Read books about gender in military and gender in war. A lot of it covered people's perceptions of women in the military and why that's odd. I don't think it's odd at all. I don't know, but we're not any different than anybody else. There's calling to serve but I don't understand why people would think negative things about why women join. For me and the people I know it's the same. Same as the guys and everyone we've met. We just want to serve our nation and love our country so much and it's the best way to serve."

3.1.2 Motherhood

The participants discussed motherhood in great detail, expounding on issues with their children, what it was like to be separated from them, and what they missed the most about their children while deployed. One mother discussed how her commanding officer

redirected her idea of being separated from her children into a more positive frame of thought and how that helped the service member focus on her job and her self-care.

“Yes. My squadron commander called this a mommy hiatus. So focus on myself. Be more physically fit, spiritually fit, that helps me. Also be able to do some academic things. PME testing while I’m here. Keep myself busy. Not just work and eat and sleep, get something out of this besides that. And it is a hiatus. Not worrying about packing lunches, focus on my job and my mission.”

Some participants discussed generational military in their families and what that meant for their children. One mother in particular had a very moving story. Her son was deployed at the same time as her, a Marine in recon. She discussed the possibility of him coming in as a patient in her trauma room, and having to consider the possibility of medically treating her own wounded son. She also discussed communication struggles with him and how she coped with her fears for his safety.

“Yes, here in country. Don’t have a lot of contact, he’s in recon. Some email contact. Other than that I don’t know what he’s doing. Had a million people ask me if son came to trauma room. And I’ll ask Marines where they’re from. And if they are I know what he’s doing down there. Haven’t run across anybody yet. But I keep asking cause lots of activity down in south. He’s in danger, but a smart kid. He loves his job and his fellow Marines. Just have to pray and know he’s in god’s hands. And if he does show up that’s ok, because that means he’s in great care...”

Another participant discussed her spouse, who is also in the military and how they balance parenting responsibilities while she is deployed. She expounds on the struggle of being a dual-military family and how her family has adapted to that lifestyle including having to put having another child on hold while she deployed. From her account, it appeared that her husband took the responsibility of many of the primary parenting tasks due to her being away on assignment and then deployment.

“A 2-year old. My husband, he’s also a soldier. He’s a recruiter in local community we’re from. He takes care of my daughter. He does everything. Not just now—this last year has been nuts. Prior I was away for 5 months. He watched her for 5 months. Got home, found out I was taking command, put second baby on hold. Took command. It’s very time-consuming. Get up and leave at 5/5:30 am, get home at 7 pm. He basically did everything. Took her to daycare, dinner, bath time. I come home as playmate for a couple hours. He’s been super-dad. He’s holding down fort this year while I’m come. So hopefully we can PCS, move somewhere else when I get back. Go somewhere where we can settle down and have another baby. Hopefully not have to put second baby on hold again.”

One mother also discussed the support of her husband and his skills as a father.

However, she ached for her children and expounded on why being a deployed mother is different than a deployed father, discussing the bond that a mother has with her child after carrying him or her for nine months.

“Difficult to define. It is different. I carried my kids in my belly 9 months, there is a bond between mom and kids. I can’t put words to it. Just feel it deep in my chest. It is different with a mom being deployed. I just know that it’s different. Maybe a bigger impact. My husband is the best dad ever, kids are in wonderful hands. But if it was my husband deployed it would just be a little different.”

One service member talked about what she and her husband hoped their children to understand about her military service. She could not put into words what exactly she wanted them to understand or know about her service, but she and her husband hoped that their love of airplanes and flying would be passed down to their children as a legacy.

“A lot of things you can’t put your finger on. But I’d like them to understand. I’d also like them to have a love of flying. If they have a love of airplanes that’d be cool. Husband and I will foster that. If they don’t like them that’s fine too, but we’ll foster it. My husband and I talk about it, it’s important to us both. We’ve had them up in friends’ airplanes, take them to air shows, talk about flying a lot.”

Lastly, several participants discussed what they missed most about their children and what they looked forward to upon returning home. They mentioned looking forward to everyday “mom” tasks such as changing diapers, hugging their children, and just

having time to spend with their children. Listed below are three examples of these mothers articulating their experiences and what they look forward to the most upon their return from deployment.

“A long list. Biggest thing is giving my kids lots of hugs. Especially my baby girl. Changing diapers, getting them dresses, making them breakfast. Dropping them off at school, day to day things.”

“...I want to go home right now. My daughter told me last night, on Skype. He comes and answers phone on Skype, but 4 year old sits down at the chair. Which is entertaining. She was so excited. She said momma we are going to the place with the chocolate chip pancakes, and it was awesome. Sorry, just thought I’d share. I just really miss them...”

“A hug. Can’t wait for that moment when we walk down off that plane, when they run up. I hope she knows me. Sleep in my bed, hang out with them. I hear all these people going to Disney but no, I’m just going home. I want to do normal day-to-day stuff with her. Don’t want to take a fancy trip, don’t want to lose time. Just want to hang out, figure out how to fit back in their life.”

Discussion

Analysis of the data collected regarding the lived experiences of these married mothers that had been deployed multiple times yielded three main categories that included “deployment-based affect”, “family”, and “womanhood”. These main categories were present throughout every participant’s transcript and were further analyzed into sub-categories for further and clearer understanding. Within the main category “deployment-related affect”, experiences varied from quite positive to participants expressing serious concerns about returning home. Despite these concerns, most of the participants discussed a great sense of pride in their work. These positive attitudes about their experiences as well as their pride in their work appear to serve as possible coping mechanisms. In the theory of stress and coping, positive attitudes about self are said to serve as coping mechanisms when facing significant stressors. Knowing effective coping

skills, especially those that are effective while individuals are deployed, could be very helpful in working with military personnel.

The main category “Family” was the most prevalent of the three main categories, as it was discussed the most throughout all of the participant interviews. Concerns about their children adjusting due to their absence was the most paramount concern among the participants, with concerns ranging from worrying their children would not adapt well to new routines after they returned from deployment to concerns that their children may not remember them. This is an important finding for social work practice. In regards to the theory of stress and coping, the concern for family well being while deployed, although quite natural, could be detrimental to coping in the face of deployment related stressors. Participants also discussed concerns regarding their family dynamics upon their return. They discussed fear of not “fitting back in”, fear of changing their family’s learned patterns, and they disclosed concern about the weight of responsibilities placed on their spouses. Many of the participants praised their spouses for being resilient and adaptable and followed with expressions of concern regarding how their spouse’s ability to cope. Ineffective coping can have psychosocial, behavioral, or physical symptoms so knowing what effective and ineffective coping skills for this population is critical when working with them pre and post deployment as well as during deployment (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2010). Concerns were also founded in previous experiences with deployment(s). Due to the pattern of multiple deployments in these most recent wars, this is an important implication for further research as well as social work practice. Further exploration is needed to truly understand the magnitude of the effect of multiple deployments.

Several implications for further research emerged from the results of this study. Present throughout the data was an overwhelming account of mothers who are greatly concerned about the affect of their service on their children. There was also a consistent focus on motherhood throughout the data, including the participants thinking of what experiences they were missing with their children while deployed and their ache to be with their children. This needs further exploration as these mothers struggle with motherhood and concern for their children while deployed. Further research should explore if these concerns have any affect on military readiness in female service members. Research should also begin to explore how spouse support possibly effects the coping skills of female military personnel. Similarly, affects of mothers' deployment on children have yet to be explored in great depth. Furthermore, under the main category "Womanhood", participants discussed what it was like being a female in the military. Most of these accounts were positive, with some showcasing the resiliency and adaptability of female service members in a predominantly male military. Gender differences have yet to be explored in depth, with only a few studies comparing female military personnel to their male counterparts. A parallel study with male participants in a similar context could yield insight to any differences and commonalities between women and men. With the increasing number of women in our Armed Forces as well as their changing roles with the new lifted combat restrictions, exploring any similarities and differences in coping, experiences, and perception of their military service could be incredibly informative for research as well as social work practice. All of the participants in this study had been deployed previously and that was reflected in their interviews. Many of the participants reflected on past deployment experiences as a comparison for

their experience in their most current deployment. Further research should explore if previous deployment experience is largely a protective factor for female service members or a risk factor.

Table Two: Results of Content Analysis

Deployment-based affect	Pride for their work	"Other thing that's important to understand, when I took my oath I didn't say I would defend my country or president, I said I'm going to defend the constitution. So military's here to defend our way of life, not a particular government
	Concerns about lack of support returning	Support me. Don't worry about my political views because I might not agree with what's going on either, but here I am wearing this uniform so support us. Don't take it for granted... So get our back, support us, that's really it.
	Experiencing trauma	"... People live primitively, stove explosions in their little huts. Whole families burned. Also, we took care of a group of kids playing with a mine. Three cousins, mine went off."
	Comradery	"The cohesiveness. A lot of different personalities, you grow and learn to understand people. Tolerate people, be more patient, understand people's feelings."
	Deployment struggles	"I've come to find that out on this deployment, a lot harder than the first time. But I'll never take it back. Gave me opportunity to grow as a person."
Family	Effect of military service on spouse	"... Gender norms, I don't know. I think it is difficult. Husband's not a fan of moving every 3 years and starting a new career. Gender norms play in there."
	Effect of military service on children	"Now the challenge will be getting to know my daughter again. At that age where you come home for a visit then leave again, don't know how it's going to be. If it'll be a challenge for me or my husband to get her back on a schedule. If she misses me it'll be hard."
Womanhood	Femininity	"I don't try to be less of a girl. I still wear makeup, use pink pens. Not overly girly but don't want it to be forgotten. I could very easily just wake up and go to work and be a grungy girl, but I want to be girly girl still."
	Motherhood	"I want to do normal day-to-day stuff with her. Don't want to take a fancy trip, don't want to lose time. Just want to hang out, figure out how to fit back in their life."

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Chapter V

Conclusion

Women in our U.S. military are a unique population who face a distinctive set of challenges. Currently, about 11% of our military is comprised of women, the highest percentage of women who have ever served. One hundred thousand of these deployed women are mothers (Alvaraez, 2009). Along with separation from their children, female service members experience other difficulties such as exposure to trauma, uncertainty, grueling physical challenges, and lengthy work hours in an incredibly stressful environment. These experiences often result in the development of substance abuse, physical and psychological problems, and interpersonal issues among the female service members and their families. In spite of the growing number of women in the Armed Forces, male service members remain the focus of most military personnel research conducted. This collection of papers aimed to contribute to the knowledge base of female service members and explore the lived experiences of these women while deployed.

The first paper in this collection, a comprehensive literature review, yielded interesting findings. The review revealed some positive aspects of deployment for both male and female service members such as self-improvement for the service member, higher pay, newfound independence, strengthened marriages, self and increased confidence for the non-deployed spouse or partner, and potential growth and resilience among military families (Merolla, 2010; Karakurt et al., 2013; Ling & Johnson, 2013). The majority of research, however, finds that deployment can be immense stressor for military families. Non-deployed family members struggle with newfound responsibilities and financial hardship while the deployed service members experience adverse effects of deployment individually such as combat exposure, traumatic experiences, and physical

challenges. Moreover, findings suggested that military families are at higher risk than civilian families for child maltreatment incidents, especially during deployment. Children of deployed parents struggle with coping with changes in the non-deployed parent (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013; Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008). These changes in the non-deployed parent can include higher stress levels, more responsibility and less time for leisure or activities with children, and emotional ramifications such as anxiety and depression. Children of deployed service members can struggle to adapt to increased responsibilities in the home such as helping the non-deployed parent with tasks that the deployed parent used to complete.

The review of the literature on gender differences and coping with deployment yielded varying information. While both genders reported multiple deployments had a significant negative impact in both family and personal domains, female service members report higher personal negative and family reintegration experiences than their male counterparts (Adler, Huffman, Bliese, & Castro, 2005; Huffman, Adler, & Castro, 2000). One study found that female service members reported higher rates of PTSD (Kline, et al. (2013), while another study found that males had higher rates of PTSD, and females had higher rates of depression (Maguen, et al., 2010).

Although the review of the literature yielded many answers to questions surrounding the female service member population, it also generated many suggestions for further research. Some of these included: understanding the differences in gender and coping with deployment, exploring how multiple deployments affect both genders, and more closely examining female service members to determine if the effects of deployment on their families reflect or vary to those of their male counterparts.

Exploration of female service members' experiences while deployed could offer more insight to these questions and expound on possible effects that deployment(s) have on their families as well as the service member themselves. The second and third papers in this dissertation collection aimed to explore some of these unanswered questions and offer insight into the lived experiences of female service members while deployed.

Two qualitative studies were conducted using existing data from interviews with female service members while deployed in Afghanistan in the winter of 2011. The data were comprised of interviews in which the interviewer that gathered the initial data allowed the participants to expound on issues that were important to them. Utilizing content analysis for both studies, intriguing findings emerged from the study transcripts. The first study is an analysis of interview transcripts of six service member mothers experiencing their first deployment. The second study is an analysis of interview transcripts of five service members who are married mothers and have been deployed previously. Although some of the findings were similar across both studies, there were some intriguing differences.

Findings from the first study included two main categories: "deployment-based affect" and "womanhood". Under each of these main categories, several sub-categories emerged. The sub-categories encompassed ideas captured through the content analysis that were discussed in great detail but not as widely discussed as the main categories. Under the first main category, "deployment-based affect", four sub-categories emerged including "pride for their work", "experiencing trauma", "leaving family behind", and camaraderie. Both sub-categories "pride for their work" and "camaraderie" captured strength in the participants and highlighted their positive attitudes regarding their

deployment, mission, and their fellow soldiers.

The second study yielded interesting findings. There were three main categories that emerged from the data analysis including “family”, “womanhood”, and “deployment-based affect”. The main category of “deployment-based affect” produced the following five sub-themes: “pride for their work”, “concerns about lack of support returning”, “experiencing trauma”, “camaraderie”, and “deployment struggles”. The sub-category “concerns regarding lack of support coming” was a prominent sub-category, with participants expounding on their concerns with adamancy. For example, one participant stated, “...Support me. Don’t worry about my political views because I might not agree with what’s going on either, but here I am wearing this uniform so support us. Don’t take it for granted....So get our back, support us, that’s really it.”

“Family” was a main theme in this study due to the volume and extent of discussion of family in the participant interviews. Although a broad main category, the sub-categories under this category specify the content of the discussions. Two sub-categories emerged, “affect of military service on spouse” and “affect of military service on children”. Participants in this study discussed the affect of their military service on their spouses, mentioning concerns about their spouses having to move frequently and spouse difficulty obtaining and maintaining employment due to the nomadic lifestyle of military families. Participants discussed concerns about their children as well including fear of their children adapting to the return of their deployed parent, the affect of multiple deployments on military children, and concerns that their children may not remember their deployed parent upon their return.

Womanhood was the last main theme and two sub-themes emerged from the analysis including “femininity” and “motherhood”. Femininity was discussed by participants in the context of physical appearance (e.g. “I don’t try to be less of a girl. I still wear makeup, use pink pens. Not overly girly but don’t want it to be forgotten. I could very easily just wake up and go to work and be a grungy girl, but I want to be girly girl still.”) as well as in the context of hoping to teach their children that a woman can achieve what she wants. One participant explicitly expressed her hope stating, “Hopefully my daughter will take that being a female doesn’t matter. If that’s what you want to do you can get away with it.” Motherhood was discussed in great detail. Participants elaborated on stories about their children and discussed their thoughts of what their children were doing now, and expressed their pain of being separated from them. One participant stated, “...Difficult to define. It is different. I carried my kids in my belly 9 months, there is a bond between mom and kids. I can’t put words to it. Just feel it deep in my chest” while another articulated her pain by saying, “I want to go home right now...I just really miss them”.

There were many commonalities between both studies. For example, specific effects of deployment on mothers remain largely unknown, but these studies provide insight into what some deployed mothers experience while being away from their children. Many participants across both studies discussed missing milestones (e.g. their child’s first steps, birthdays, and physical growth) with their children. Missing their families (e.g., becoming tearful when discussing separation from family, stating “I want to go home now”) was a common concern among all participants in both studies. Participants in both studies seemed focused on their current deployment despite

participants in the second study having past deployment experience. Although the participants from the second study referenced their previous deployments to make comparisons to their current tour, they largely discussed their current deployment and the experiences they were having in relation to being deployed. Both studies shared two main categories. The first category across both studies that every participant discussed was deployment-related affects. The subcategories within the main categories varied slightly, but were widely similar across both studies. For example, participants in both studies expressed great pride in their work while deployed. Some participants discussed finding meaning in their work and earning satisfaction in helping the civilian families. Other participants even discussed adoration for the strength and resiliency of the Afghan people, while one participant discussed the beauty of the land and suggested she might vacation there in the future. Participants in both studies talked of the importance of camaraderie and how meaningful their fellow service members were to them. One participant even expressed more concern for her fellow soldiers than her family at home and compared her concern for her soldiers to that of a mother. Several participants across both studies discussed not only feelings of cohesiveness but also safety due to camaraderie. Participants illustrated the importance of the relationships with their fellow service members with specific statements such as “they have your back all the time”, “...I feel pretty safe around soldiers. If something happened we would take care of each other”, and “we’re going to look out for each other, we do take care of each other. While we’re out here we’re one big family.” Another commonality under the deployment-based affect main category across both studies was experiencing trauma. Participants in both studies discussed experiencing traumatic events that ranged from being under fire to

treating severely wounded civilians, particularly children. Some participants discussed these traumatic events in detail, naming specific instances but there were no obvious differences in how trauma was discussed across the two studies. However, a unique finding specific to the second study's participants was found. The mothers who were married and had been deployed two or more times focused on concern for their children readjusting. More specifically, they discussed previous deployments and how their children coped before and expressed concern "this time" and how the children would cope. The participants in the second study also expressed great gratitude for their spouses and conversed, in-depth, about the effects deployment(s) had on their spouses.

Womanhood was a main category across both studies as well. The subcategories under this main category in both studies, motherhood and femininity, were consistent across both studies as well. Participants in both studies discussed femininity in various ways, several of them mentioning missing aspects of civilian life such as "wearing strappy sandals, dangly earrings", "can't wait to wear my hair down", and not wanting it to be forgotten that they are women. However, the participants in the second study expounded on femininity in a more in-depth way, discussing their experiences as women in a military culture that is largely male. Participants discussed "having to prove yourself [as a woman] all the time", "getting used to being a minority", and how being "one of 30 or 70" can be isolating but one must "learn to deal with it...and react as best you can". One participant in the second study mentioned not wanting to be seen any differently than her male counterparts in the public eye stating, "I don't understand why people would think negative things about why women join. For me and the other people I know it's the

same. Same as the guys and everyone we've met. We just want to serve our nation and love our country so much and it's the best way to serve."

Motherhood, the other subcategory under the main category, "Womanhood", was a prevalent topic in both studies. Many of the mothers reflected on communication with their children and what they missed about them. However, there were differences in how the mothers discussed motherhood and military service. The mothers in the second study elaborated more on their relationships with their children. One mother discussed her son, who was also deployed. This mother talked about her struggle with worrying for his safety while she was also deployed. Participants in the second study discussed multiple children and how they communicate while deployed using Skype, a technological program used for video and audio calling that can be conducted via the internet.

There was variation in two subcategories under the main category of deployment-based affect in both studies. In the first study, participants discussed a common struggle due to leaving their families behind. Specifically, participants discussed missing milestones with children and the pain of being away from their families. However, participants in the second study discussed this in such depth and frequency that the analysis yielded an entire main category, "family", to properly illustrate the magnitude of concern and frequency of discussion of their families in their interviews.

The second study yielded two more subcategories for the main category "deployment-based affect", "concerns about lack of support returning" and "deployment struggles". Both of these subcategories were quite prevalent throughout the second study and non-existent in the first. This can be attributed to these being related to multiple deployments, which are not applicable to the participants in the first study. The service members in the

second study discussed concerns regarding lack of support upon returning in a comparative context to their previous deployment(s). These service members have already experienced deployment(s) before, and their concerns are based upon those previous experiences. The subcategory, “deployment struggles”, is similar in that regard. Many of the statements made by the service members are comparisons to other deployments. For example, one participant stated, “I’ve come to find that out on this deployment, a lot harder than first time. But I’ll never take it back. [The situation] ... gave me opportunity to grow as a person.”

Lastly, the second study was unique from the first study, presenting a third main category all its own. “Family” was so prevalent a topic in the interviews that it presented as a main category in analysis. This category had two sub-categories, “effect of military service on spouse” and “effect of military service on kids”. In these subcategories, the participants discussed at great length their concerns about the effect their military service has on their children. Prevalent ideas that presented throughout these subcategories were concerns about “fitting in” to their families again, concerns about their children remembering them and adjusting, and concerns about their spouses’ career instability due to the military lifestyle. These participants also discussed how crucial the support of their spouses was to the functionality of their families while deployed.

Relevance to Existing Literature

There are several important findings that relate to the existing literature regarding female military personnel. One consistent finding in the literature is that OEF/OIF/OND deployments can have adverse effects on service members of both genders including physical health problems, issues readjusting from deployment, and various psychosocial

issues including depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2011; Devoe & Ross, 2012). Both of the studies completed in this dissertation yielded findings that support these earlier findings. Although participants did not name specific psychosocial issues, many discussed concerns about readjustment and experiencing trauma, which are precursors to the aforementioned psychosocial issues.

Previous researchers identified positive results of deployment. Some benefits included higher pay, strengthened marriages, self-improvement, and newfound independence for non-deployed spouses (Merolla, 2010; Karakurt et al., 2013; Ling & Johnson, 2013). Results from both of my qualitative studies support earlier findings that self-improvement and newfound independence for non-deployed spouses are positive outcomes of their deployments. Similarly to their spouses, many participants reported positive attitudes, self-improvement, and pride and purpose in their work while on deployment. Some participants also discussed how strong and independent their spouses had become during their deployment because the spouses were navigating various home responsibilities as well as managing extra duties being a single parent.

Another finding consistent with the existing literature are the struggles that children of a deployed parent face. Examples include concern for the safety of their deployed parent, coping with changes in their non-deployed parent, and changes in responsibilities in the home (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013; Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008). Although the two studies conducted for this dissertation did not include child participants, the mothers of these children voiced concerns about their children. Participants reflected that their children worried about them and missed them while being

deployed and they wondered if their children would experience any undesirable and lasting effects from experiencing these emotions.

Although findings from both studies were consistent with existing findings, these studies are also unique in several ways. The primary unique facet of these studies is that the data were collected from female military personnel while in an active war zone. Most studies regarding military personnel have investigated male participants. These studies provide insight into the experiences of female military personnel, an underserved and little researched population that is rapidly growing and seeking social work services post deployment. Furthermore, the data for these types of studies are typically collected after the participants' return from war rather than during active deployment, combat, immediate trauma, and constant stressors. These two studies yielded findings captured during war time providing a valuable addition to the existing literature. Capturing the events, emotions, and experiences of military personnel in real time offers a glimpse into the experience of war, the effects of war and deployment, and the coping mechanism utilized by those experiencing the stressors of war. Capturing data from participants while actively engaged in war offers researchers and practitioners a deeper understanding of deployed women's experience of war and the immediate effects of the stressors caused by war.

Implications

Due to the exploratory design of these studies, the findings yielded several research implications for future research. One of the most prevalent categories across both studies was the participant's concern for their family members that remained stateside while the participants were deployed. Research has suggested that preoccupation with family well-

being is a concern for service members while deployed in a combat theater (Devoe and Ross, 2012). Although the overwhelming concern for their families is not a surprising find, it leaves questions to be addressed regarding how this concern could affect the service member's levels of stress and military readiness while in combat.

Another issue that emerged related to the main category in the second qualitative study, "family". Because it only presented in the second study, questions regarding the cause for the focus on family emerge. For example, one might ask of the overwhelming concern and focus on family in the second study is due, in part, to previous deployment experience, the mothers being married, or possibly the age and military experience of the participants. This creates many more questions that need to be explored through research in order to better understand this population and the various dynamics affecting them and their families.

Several implications for social work practice emerged from these studies. Probably the most powerful implication was that of the coping mechanisms the participants displayed through their positive attitudes about themselves and their jobs. This positivity is directly linked to the theory of stress and coping. According to Lazarus (1993), adaptation in social functioning, morale, and somatic health are the outcomes of effective coping. With such positivity and morale associated to the participant's sense of camaraderie, their coping in the intensely stressful combat situations could be greatly strengthened. This is critical for social work practice with this population because if more is known about how they can cope effectively while deployed, there is a possibility of decreasing some of the negative ramifications of deployment while deployed as well as upon return of these military personnel. This could affect the way practitioners educate

and prepare military personnel pre-deployment, assist them during deployment, and assess their coping and readjustment ability upon their return.

Another important implication involves avoidance. Avoidance or denial is widely known as a coping mechanism in stressful situations and it appeared to apply to the participants in both studies (Prati, Pietrantonio, & Cicognani, 2011; Weinstein & Ryan, 2011). For example, one participant discussed communication with her family stating, “I don’t want to talk about what happens here.” Instead, she chose to discuss what her family was doing back at home. Other participants showed similar tendencies of avoidance. Several participants discussed experiencing or seeing traumatic wartime events, but only one participant discussed how she was coping. Similarly, participants mentioned previous deployments and how difficult the reintegration had been, but did not discuss specific issues or mention how they were coping or planned to cope through this deployment. This is an important implication for social work practice and research because understanding and recognizing avoidance/denial in the midst of severe stressors can assist practitioners in effectively treating soldiers. Understanding avoidance can provide practitioners with insight about the extent of avoidance, why and when it occurs, and what types of events trigger avoidance as a coping mechanism. Further exploration is needed to better understand avoidance/denial, how this coping mechanism functions, and resulting long-term implications. Answers to these questions could be crucial in helping deployed female soldiers recover from the trauma of war.

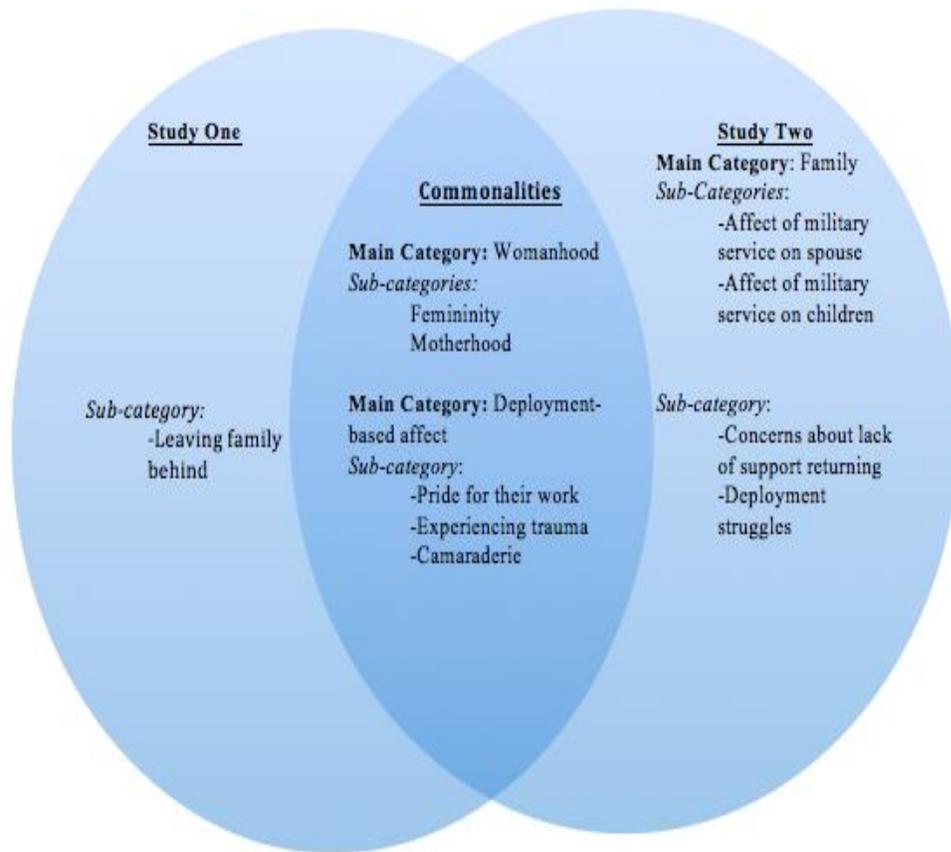


Figure One: Diagram of Findings

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Vita

Autumn Lowry was born in Chattanooga, TN, to the parents of Rhonda Johns and David and Charlene Lowry. She is the last of five children: Amber, Ashlei, Rusty, and Wesley. She graduated high school from Meigs County High School and was accepted to Tennessee Wesleyan College where she developed a love for the behavioral sciences. She graduated from Tennessee Wesleyan College in May 2009 with a Bachelor of Science in Human Services, Criminal Justice, and Sociology as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Science. She was then accepted into the University of Tennessee's College of Social Work for their Master of Science in Social Work program. She graduated with her Master's degree in May 2011. She was then offered a graduate research assistantship at the same institution for their doctoral program. Her research area of interest is military personnel, trauma exposure, and treatment of trauma with combat veterans. Her teaching interests include social work practice with military personnel, issues in aging, social welfare policy, and social research methods. Autumn completed her Doctor of Philosophy degree in December of 2014 and is currently working for the Department of Veteran's Affairs.