

5-8-2012

The Significance of Recreation and Leisure in the lives of Marine Wives during Deployment

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The Significance of Recreation and Leisure in the lives of Marine Wives during Deployment

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Graduation in the College Honors Program

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May 8, 2012

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Abstract

This study examined the significance of recreation and leisure in the lives of Marine wives coping with a deployment. Qualitative data was collected through videotaped Skype interviews with 5 Marine wives. The stressors of the current deployment, coping methods, and involvement in recreation and leisure activities were investigated. Results from the study suggest that involvement in recreation and leisure helps reduce stress from a deployment and therefore help Marine wives cope more effectively. Recommendations for future research were identified.

Keywords: military spouses, Marine Corps, recreation, leisure, stress, coping, deployment

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BACKGROUND

Stress is universal. It occurs daily; however the way we manage stress is as unique as our personalities. Over the past several decades, researchers have examined leisure as a coping method. As stated by Iwasaki and Mannell (2000), “leisure can be an important means of helping people cope with stress and maintain or improve their health” (p. 164). However, different populations often have different kinds of stressors to overcome. Currently there are over 1 million United States military spouses. Over the past decade, research regarding military spouses has increased, however there is little to no research about Marine spouses. The stressors and challenges are unique for military families and should be further investigated in order to learn more about the population and how to improve their quality of life. In this study, I have further examined the stressors and coping methods of Marine wives during deployment and the importance of recreation and leisure in their lives.

Military Background Information

In 2010, there were over 3.6 million military personnel. According to the Department of Defense, there are currently over 1.4 million active duty military personnel, with nearly 200,000 in the Marine Corps. In the 2010 demographics report of the military community, 48.8% of the Active Duty Marines were married and 32.5% had children. With over 1 million United States military spouses, 90,000 of these spouses are Active Duty Marine spouses and 97.9% female. The Marine Corps’ families outnumber the service members by almost 3%. Yet, just within the past decade military family research has developed.

According to the Department of Defense, over 150,000 military service men and women are deployed overseas. An average Marine deployment is 7 months, though some have been

known to extend up to 15 months. Not only do Marine spouses have to deal with the stresses of daily life but they also have the uncertainty of an upcoming move, training separation, or deployment. In a survey conducted by Dimiceli, Steinhardt, and Smith (2010), 85% of the military wives reported deployments as the most stressful experience they have dealt with in the past 5 years. Deployments are a difficult time for all of the family members, however a majority of the time it is the spouse that must overcome the challenges of deployment. In order to understand the challenges and stressors of a military deployment, the emotional cycle of deployment should be considered.

Emotional Cycle of Deployment

According to Pincus et al. (2004), information about the deployment experience regarding support and other resources should be shared early with families prior to the separation. Informing families early of what to anticipate allows them to prepare for the upcoming deployment and increases the likelihood of coping positively. Different stages under the emotional cycle of deployment are experienced by military families, from the time news of the upcoming deployment is shared to the return and reintegration of the service member. As illustrated in figure 1, the emotional stages of deployment include: (1) Anticipation of Departure, (2) Detachment and Withdrawal, (3) Emotional Disorganization, (4) Recovery and Stabilization, (5) Anticipation of Return, (6) Return Adjustment and Renegotiation, and (7) Reintegration and Stabilization (Morse, 2006). These stages can be grouped into 3 phases of deployment: Pre-Deployment, Deployment, and Post-Deployment.

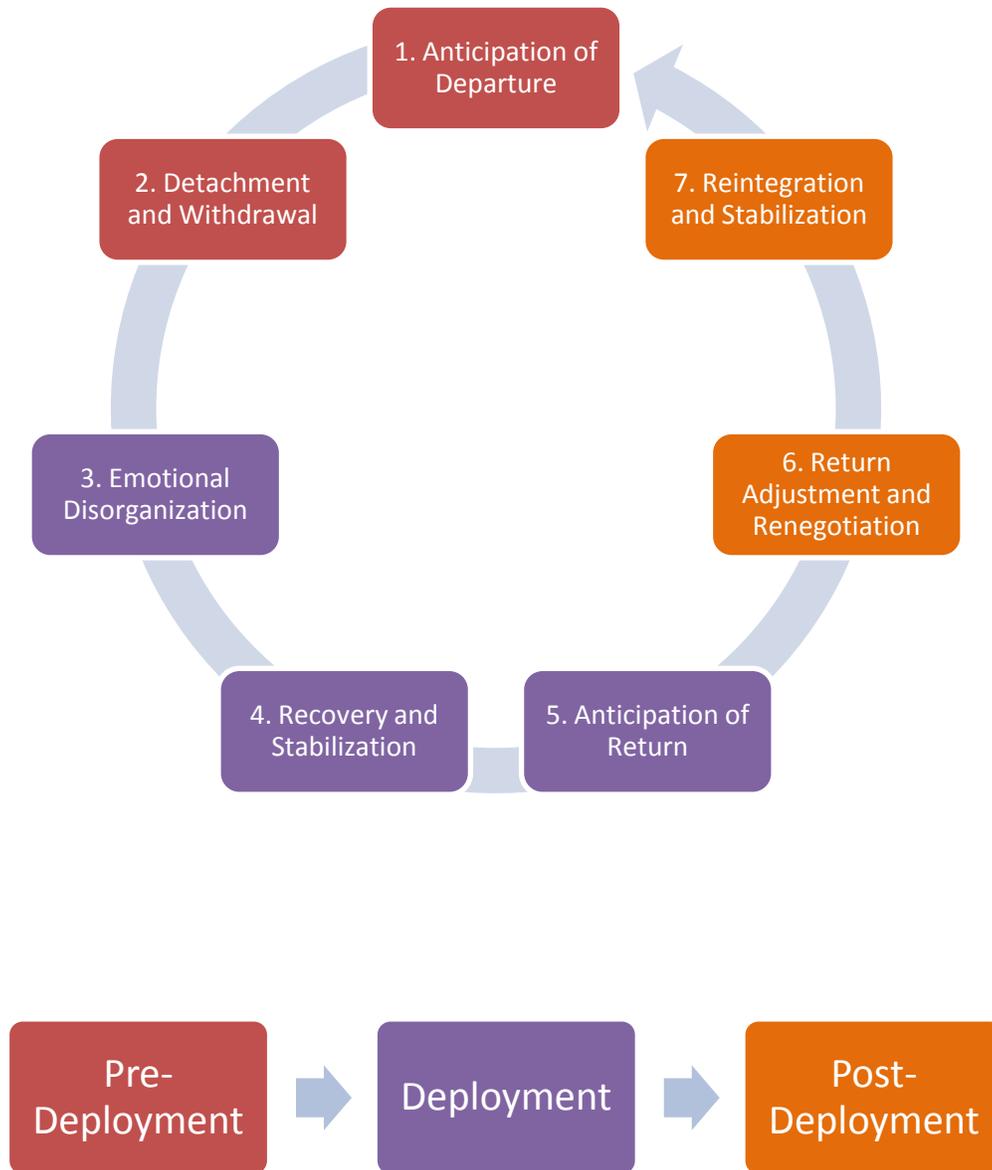


Figure 1: Emotional Cycle of Deployment from Morse (2006)

Pre-Deployment

The pre-deployment phase is characterized by denial, anticipation of loss, long hours away for train-ups, getting affairs in order, mental and physical distance, and arguments (Pincus, 2004). Many arguments occur because of the impending stress of the future separation in addition to the mental and physical distance of the couple. During the detachment and withdrawal stage, “Sadness and anger occur as couples attempt to protect themselves from the hurt of separation.” (Morse, 2006).

Deployment

When the service member departs, military spouses experience a “roller coaster of mixed emotions” (Pincus et al., 2004). This stage of emotional disorganization is exactly how it sounds. Wives are disoriented, sad, angry, anxious, overwhelmed, and some are relieved that their significant other has left so the deployment can be over as soon as it began (Pincus et al., 2004 and Wheeler & Stone, 2010). The knock at the door and being told your husband has been killed in action is every military spouse’s worst fear. Anticipatory grief “involves the feelings, thoughts and physical sensations that happen when you know someone is going to die or fear that someone may die.” (Lyles, 2006). Anticipatory grief is not a new concept, though many military spouses are finding relief in knowing the phenomenon has a name. Military spouses are able to recognize the issues and learn how to deal with the symptoms. Imagining the incident and funeral, shortness of breath, difficulty concentrating, agitation and restlessness, insomnia, headaches, and crying jags are some of the symptoms that can be experienced (Henderson, 2006 & Lyles, 2006). Anticipatory grief may begin in the emotional disorganization stage or it could

continue throughout the deployment. It is most important for wives and family members to recognize the symptoms and take appropriate action.

During the recovery and stabilization stage of deployment, military spouses discover several strategies that help them cope. Spouses gain confidence, though emotional support is still very important throughout the deployment (Morse, 2006).

The anticipation of return is characterized by excitement, apprehension, eagerness, and conflicting emotions (Pincus et al., 2004). Spouses are excited to welcome home their loved one but they are apprehensive about their significant other's condition upon return. Many spouses are concerned whether or not their service member and/or relationship will change.

Post-Deployment

Although the service member has returned and the deployment has come to an end, new challenges have begun. During the return adjustment and renegotiation stage, "couples and families must reset their expectations and renegotiate their roles" (Morse, 2006). When the service member first returns, couples are often in the "honeymoon" period. They "reunite physically, but not necessarily emotionally" (Pincus et al., 2004). Couples and families must take the time to communicate. Changes have occurred during the past months and the family has to work together. The service member often returns to a more independent wife, grown children, and other changes in the home. In addition, the traumatic experiences the service member may have experienced could affect the marriage relationship. It is reported that approximately 11-20% of returning service members from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (National Center for PTSD, 2011). PTSD occurs when an individual experiences a traumatic event and the stress-related reactions continue

well after the experience. PTSD has 4 types of symptoms: reliving the event (eg. nightmares, flashbacks), avoiding situations that remind you of the event, feeling numb (difficult to express feelings), and hyperarousal (eg. always alert, suddenly angry or irritable, jittery) (National Center for PTSD, 2007). If symptoms continue without help, individuals can have a difficult time carrying on with their lives and generally their marriage will have difficulties. In addition, the next stage of the emotional cycle of deployment will be difficult.

The reintegration and stabilization stage takes several months. Unfortunately the length of this stage has been shortened because the period between homecoming and the re-deployment has decreased since September 11, 2001. The injuries service members acquired during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have also complicated reintegration and stabilization. As reported by the Department of Defense (2012), 47,595 military personnel have been wounded in action since October 7, 2001. Active duty Marines accounted for 11,722 of those injuries. From a result of these injuries, the deployment was cut short but the challenges were not.

It is important to examine the emotional cycle of deployment because it helps to understand the kinds of stress and emotional toll the deployment creates for military spouses and their families. Post-deployment research should not be overlooked, however the focus of this study is on the stages during deployment and the stress the deployment creates.

Stress

Stress has not been easily defined nor has one consistent definition been applied in research or life experiences. As stress is deemed dynamic and unique for individuals, a concrete definition is impracticable. However, research began with the coined term of stress by Hans

Selye (1956). Selye defined stress as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand.” Most early research is based on the stimulus-response approach; however, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued with this theory. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), “it is the observed stimulus-response relationship, not stimulus or response, that defines stress” (p. 15). There is no stress until the person deems it as “taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (p. 19). The researchers agree that in extreme circumstances such as natural disasters, military combat, imprisonment, and loss of loved ones stress is caused by the environmental stimulus; however, these adversities should not serve as a model.

Using Lazarus and Folkman’s cognitive appraisal theory, the environment is evaluated to determine the significance of the encounter (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Primary and secondary appraisals can be made by the individual. The three primary appraisals include irrelevant, benign-positive, and stressful. Appraisals considered stressful include harm/loss, threat, and challenge. Secondary appraisals occur when the encounter needs further management of what might and can be done. “Secondary appraisals of coping options and primary appraisals of what is at stake interact with each other in shaping the degree of stress and the strength and quality (or content) of the emotional reaction” (p. 35). If a coping option is difficult to discover or the primary appraisal of the encounter is of high importance, stress is likely to increase (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Though stress can be positive, known as eustress, the stress that is often researched is distress, or negative stress. Stress can be labeled as acute (or discrete) or chronic. The characteristics of chronic stressors include “threats of the possibility of harm, long-term, unresolved conflicts, long-term uncertainty, multiple, uncontrollable demands and complexity, under-rewards, and structural constraints such as resource deprivation and restriction of choice”

(Aldwin, 2011, p. 18). Acute stressors include life events and traumas such as starting school or a new job, relocation, death of a loved one, major accidents, or separation (Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003, p. 108).

The added challenges the military produces for a family creates unsuspected and unwelcome stressors. While most families face work-related, financial, children, and relationship difficulties, military families have the added challenges of training separations, deployments, relocations, and other unexpected military issues. In a survey conducted by Dimiceli, Steinhardt, and Smith (2010), 85% of the military wives reported deployments as the most stressful experience. Of this experience, issues with children, worry and uncertainty, lack of support, death/injury to a service member, and length of the deployment were reported most often to be associated with the stress of the deployment. Relocation and giving up a career were also reported as stressful experiences due to military challenges.

In a study conducted by Stone and Wheeler (2010) on the stress and coping strategies among National Guard Spouses, several important issues were discovered. The stressors of the National Guard wives were identified as “issues affecting the wives’ emotional and physical state, difficulties with childrearing responsibilities, and uncertainty about future involvement with the military” (p. 547). The widespread emotional and physical issues that occurred included “fear for their spouse’s safety, feeling as if they were on a “roller coaster” of emotions, an inability to concentrate on daily tasks, including work-related responsibilities, feelings of anxiety, and anger about their current situation” (p. 548). “Significant spousal distress interferes with completing basic routines, concentrating at work, and attending to the needs of children” (Pincus, 2004, p. 2).

Many stressors are faced throughout deployment. However, during the recovery and stabilization stage of deployment, military spouses discover several strategies that help them cope.

Coping Methods

When faced with stress or a stressful event, individuals are forced to respond in some way that results in finding ways to cope with the situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage [including master, minimize, tolerate, and reduce] specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). In other words, coping is efforts one takes to manage stressful demands.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), strategies of coping can be classified in two areas, which are problem-focused and emotion-focused. Dimiceli, Smith, and Steinhardt’s study (2010) used these two strategies to examine the ways of coping among the wives of deployed service members. Problem-focused coping (PFC) strategies “involve actively doing something to resolve the situation or alter the source of the stress” (Dimiceli, Smith, & Steinhardt, 2010, p. 352). PFC strategies included active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, emotional support, instrumental support, and religion (p. 357). Emotion-focused coping (EFC) strategies “attempt to reduce the emotional distress caused by the stressor” (p. 352). EFC strategies included self-distraction, denial, venting, substance use, behavioral disengagement, self-blame, and humor (357). As stated by Iwasaki and Schneider (2003), “Problem-focused approaches are typically direct actions...whereas emotion-focused approaches are indirect” (p. 108). Dimiceli, Smith, and Steinhardt (2010) discovered that women used PFC strategies more often than EFC

strategies. Acceptance, planning, active coping, religion, self-distraction, and emotional support were most frequently used. When PFC strategies were more frequently used, wives experienced less depression (Dimiceli, Smith, & Steinhardt, 2010).

Further coping strategies were analyzed by Stone and Wheeler (2010) in which they discovered five coping strategies that military wives used to cope: “(1) expressive activities, such as artistic endeavors and journaling, (2) support from family and friends, (3) religiosity and spirituality, (4) reliance on technology for communication with their deployed spouse, and (5) avoidance of the situation” (p. 550). Several wives mentioned the importance of keeping busy and using the separation as a tool to improve themselves.

Recreation and Leisure

In the process of coping and improving the quality of life, the benefits of recreation and leisure programs and activities are endless. Researchers have noted that recreation and leisure improves individuals’ physiological and psychological health. On average, for every hour spent exercising, you increase your life span by 2 hours (Langreth, 2000). Psychological benefits of exercise include elevated mood, enhanced self-esteem, greater social integration, less depression, reduced stress, among several more (Leitner, Leitner, & Associates, 2004). In addition, passive leisure activities such as crafts, hobbies, and social activities like visiting friends improve psychological well-being (Siegenthaler, 1997). According to Milgram and Bar (1993), high self-esteem serves as a barrier to secondary stress reactions (anxiety, depression, somatic complaints, and performance decrement).

Supportive resources, including social support, social networks, and the neighborhood environment, can help promote physical activity and leisure time physical activity. These

resources can influence individuals to participate in recreational and leisure activities. As stated by Keller, Fleury, and Rogers (2010), “when social support is present, time spent in physical activity increases by 44% and the frequency of physical activity increases by 22%” (p. 100). From this evidence, one can conclude that leisure activities involving social support can encourage individuals to participate. If individuals are struggling with depression, supportive resources may help them participate in leisure activities and therefore reap the benefits of recreation including stress reduction, increased self-esteem, and enhanced mood.

Play and recreation are frequently used interchangeably. Several play theories examine the reasons for and benefits of participating in recreational activities. According to the recreation theory (Weiskopf, 1982), the primary motivation for play is the need to restore or re-create energy. By participating in recreation and leisure activities, individuals rejuvenate their energy and are better able to manage stress. The relaxation theory (Kraus, 1984) states that play provides individuals with tranquility, an environment to relax and convalesce. In addition, play can be used to release emotions, as deemed by the Catharsis theory (Ellis, 1973). Recreation and leisure activities allow individuals to release negative and pent up emotions through a positive outlet. These three theories correspond to my research. By restoring energy, recuperating, and releasing pent up emotions, individuals are able to manage their stress more effectively.

Throughout the past decade, researchers have frequently investigated leisure and its connection to stress and coping. Several studies have confirmed that participating in recreation and leisure prevents health issues, improves self-esteem, and relieves stress. In a study conducted by Siegenthaler (1997), leisure provided participants an outlet from stress and helped them cope with traumatic events, such as a death in the family.

Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) examined the hierarchical dimensions of leisure stress coping in which they defined leisure coping strategies and leisure coping beliefs. Leisure coping beliefs refer to leisure as a buffer for stress, while leisure coping strategies mediate stress. They discerned that “leisure coping strategies represent a process by which a certain stressful event triggers the use of a specific type of leisure to cope with stress and maintain good health” (p. 167), as illustrated by the diagram below.



Figure 2: Stress, Leisure, and Health from Iwasaki and Mannell (2000)

Kleiber and Hutchinson (2000) researched ways in which leisure is beneficial in coping with negative life events. They stated that “leisure may both serve to “buffer” stress (come between the person and the stressor) but also promote resilience or the personal capacities to better withstand stress” (p. 161). They revealed the following 5 ways in which leisure provides individuals with the ability to cope with stress and negative events.

For positive distraction and escape

“Healthy distractions” are often beneficial in managing stressful situations. They can replace feelings of distress or anxiety for positive feeling and provides distance so one can feel restored. For example, you just had a really terrible day and your friends invite you to play board games. Instead of focusing on your terrible day, the fun and laughs with your friends distract you from your earlier negative feelings.

As a source of hope

Leisure activities can provide people with something to look forward to and give meaning to their lives.

In restoring a sense of self

By participating in leisure activities that reaffirm personal values or provide a space for people to be themselves again, leisure can help people find themselves.

In promoting personal transformation

When people experience a stressful situation or negative life event they may turn to new leisure activities that benefit their lives.

As a resource of strength and support

Leisure activities provide individuals with social support and the belief that they are able to control the situation. Self-determination and social support are buffers against life stress.

In Kleiber and Hutchinson's research (as cited in Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003), "leisure provides an opportunity to restore the disruption of one's normal life patterns when she/he experiences negative life events" (p. 110). The deployment of a significant other is a major disruption of a military spouse's life. Recreation and leisure can provide spouses with balance and outlet for their emotions.

A survey conducted by the National Military Family Association (2009) asked military families what family support services they utilized and the value of those services. 97% of 804 participants completed the entire survey with over 80% of the respondents' military spouses. Recreation and fitness centers were identified as very useful or somewhat useful by 69% of the families. In addition, 1 out of 2 participants use recreation and fitness centers. According to the

survey, more than 80% of participants use a family support/readiness group and/or a family readiness individual. Outside of the military, friends were the most important resource for 82% of the participants. From these results, one can conclude that recreation and leisure services and social support are very important and useful to military spouses and families. In a study conducted by Wood, Scarville, and Gravino (1995), similar results were discovered. Spouses adjusted well to separations when they had a strong social support network and had access to family support group activities.

ACTUAL STUDY ON MARINE WIVES

I investigated recreation as a coping method for Marine wives dealing with a deployment. According to Iwasaki and Mannell (2000), “leisure can be an important means of helping people cope with stress and maintain or improve their health” (164). When faced with a stressful situation, individuals “engage in a certain coping action in response” (167). Based on my understanding of the importance of leisure in coping, I investigated leisure as a coping action in response to a husband’s deployment among Marine wives. There has been previous research on coping strategies and military families but little on how wives cope with deployments, specifically how recreation can help wives cope with a deployment. During deployment, military spouses are on a roller coaster of emotions. Many spouses at one point or another feel disoriented, overwhelmed, sad, angry, abandoned, numb, anxious, and worried (Pincus et. al, 2). Therefore, research of how recreation helps Marine wives cope with deployments will be beneficial to the field as well as the wives and their families. By understanding and learning more about the population and their needs, recreational professionals can better create recreation

programs military families will be interested in and benefit from. When wives are enjoying their leisure time and family life, the military benefits from the increased readiness and retention of their husbands (Shores & Scott, 2005). Therefore, learning how recreation can be used as a coping method for Marine wives benefits the whole military community as well as leisure providers.

The research questions I examined are as follows:

1. What are the major stressors experienced by the wives whose husband's are deployed?
2. How do they cope with these stressors through deployment?
3. In what ways are leisure and/or recreational activities helping the wives cope?

METHOD

The method for this research was a qualitative exploratory study using informal interviews. Semi-structured, videotaped, Skype interviews were conducted with 5 different Marine wives. A convenience sample was used to select the wives and the requirement for participation was over the age of 18, must be currently going through a deployment, married to a Marine, have at least a high school diploma, and do not have a psychological or physical disability. The ages of the wives were 19, 21, 23, 27, and 27. Three of the five wives had children and the length of the marriages ranged from 9 months to 4 years. In regards to education, two had associate's degrees, two had some college experience, and one was currently going to college full time. The two with college degrees were stay at home moms. The wives with some college experience were working, one from home part time and the other full-time. The wife completing her degree was not currently working. Four of the five wives had

experienced a deployment with their Marine before. During the interviews, the women were just beginning month 4 of the 7 month long deployment.

With open-ended questions, more information was discovered about these women: how they are dealing with the deployment of their husband, the stressors of this deployment, their coping methods, and their recreation and leisure activities. Information discovered was transcribed into written notes. Participants are referred to as participant C, D, E, K, and M.

RESULTS

After discussing with the wives about the challenges and stressors, coping methods, and the impact of recreation and leisure during the current deployment of their husbands, I have found some interesting results. First I will examine the difficulties the women were dealing with during this deployment, followed by several coping methods they utilized. The third section will inspect the recreation and leisure activities the wives participate in and the importance of these activities to them.

Stressors

Research question 1 examined the stressors and challenges the wives were experiencing while their husbands were deployed. After reviewing the interviews and transcribed notes, I discovered four themes: child rearing responsibilities, lack of family support, communicative issues, and specific challenges without husband's support.

Child rearing responsibilities

Three of the five wives interviewed had children. Each mother mentioned the difficulties of raising their child without the support of their husband and/or family. The transition from taking care of their child with the help of their husband to becoming a single parent was an obstacle to start with but in addition the wives were far from home with no family close by.

Participant M's challenges were in regards to both parenting and the lack of support. Because her child became ill and she did not have her family or husband there, she had to quit her job in order to care for her child.

Lack of Family Support

The lack of family support is related to the difficulties in parenting. All the wives with children mentioned not having family close by or not enough family support during the current deployment. Participant C was pregnant with her second child and would be having her son before her husband returned. She said that it was not the labor she was worried about but what she will do with her one year old when she is giving birth. Her family is far away and she was concerned her mother would not be there in time for the birth.

Communicative Issues

The technological advances since WWII have allowed military spouses to communicate with their significant others more frequently. However, the issues with communication were two fold. On one hand the opportunity to speak with their husbands is a godsend. Several wives mentioned the importance of just hearing their husband's voice just to know that he is alive and well. Yet, participant E discussed the stress of the phone calls. When she is at class she is unable

to answer the phone. She is worried that her husband will call during class and she will be unable to answer and miss the opportunity of hearing his voice. Then again, participant D stated that not hearing from her husband everyday has made the deployment better, “[When you wait for them to call] you don’t do anything because you are afraid they are going to call.”

Specific Challenges without Husband’s Support

Several of the wives discussed stressors that were particular to their life; however the experiences were all similar in that their husbands were not there for support. For example:

Participant K had to kick her roommates out of her house because they acted very differently once her husband left for Afghanistan. This situation would have transpired differently if she had the support of her husband.

Before the departure of her husband, participant C discovered that she was pregnant with her second child. Within several weeks of the deployment, she had an appointment to receive an amniocentesis. She found out that her baby will have Down syndrome. Initially she was overwhelmed by the news, especially without her husband by her side, but now she has come to terms and is excited to be having another baby.

Coping Methods

Research question 2 examined the coping methods the women utilize to overcome the challenges of the deployment. When first asked the question about how they cope with this deployment, the wives continually mentioned “staying busy”. The coping methods they revealed have a direct connection with recreation and leisure. Their responses have been categorized into child play, exercise, supportive friendships, working, and religion.

Child Play

Although parenting was a stressor the women discussed, each of mothers said that the love and playfulness of their child and the responsibility of caring for him or her helps them cope with the current deployment. The activities and events they attend with their children create something to look forward to and get out of the house for the day.

As stated by participant C, “I don’t have the time to sit there and like cry hysterically because I’m really upset. My son still needs to be fed and played with...I don’t have the luxury because if I really, really miss him it doesn’t matter because I still have to take care of my child.” She also shared that it is hard to be upset because her child is smiling and laughing all the time and she is able to play with him.

Participant D did not have her child during the last deployment. She stated that this deployment has been easier because she has had to take care of her child. According to her, having a child has helped the time go by faster.

Exercise

Physical activity was an important coping method for several wives. Walking and running helped them clear their head, release steam, and keep a routine. In addition, the activity allowed them to find exercise partners. The relationships formed gave the women support to complete the workout and cope with the deployment.

Participant D discussed her exercise routine. She walks in the morning with a few other mothers and then at night she runs with one other friend. The activity keeps her busy and she is also able to have her son with her in a stroller.

Participant M also talked about the importance of running for her well being. She is active in a group called Stroller Warriors. The group was formed 2 years ago by a Marine wife and since then has grown to over 200 participants. Women of all ages, with or without children, meet on certain days to run. Participant M said the group is “very welcoming and encouraging”. It provides “a sense of community and they understand or are aware of the military lifestyle.”

Supportive Friendships

As previously mentioned, supportive friendships are beneficial to coping with a deployment. Several of the wives stated that their close friends have significantly helped them through the deployment. Participant M said that she was very lucky to have moved into her housing complex because her neighbors are wonderful. They are all really great friends and created a strong support system. Participant E also discussed the importance of her friendships; “[My best friend] keeps my spirits up and keeps my mind off the deployment.”

Working

I have included volunteer opportunities, full time jobs, and school work into this category. Several wives discussed their working habits and how the work has helped them cope with the deployment. The “staying busy” aspect was very important in their work, in addition to the friendships formed.

Two of the women volunteer with the family readiness group and said that the support and activities of this group helps them cope. For participant C it helps her know what is going on with the unit and also helps her meet new people and stay busy. She finds the group very beneficial. However, another wife disagreed. According to participant K, the drama within her husband’s unit has caused stress for their relationship. She works to avoid the drama with the

other wives, specifically in her family readiness group. Yet, by knowing what irks her and avoiding the stress, is a way of coping with the situation.

Participant E is a full time college student. She stated that school has been the most beneficial in coping with this deployment because she focuses on her work and it keeps her busy.

Religion

The importance of religion and God was not discussed by all of the wives, however participant K said that God has helped her most throughout the deployment. He gives her the strength to carry on and the faith everything will be alright.

Recreation and Leisure

The third research question examined the effectiveness of recreation and leisure activities in helping the women cope with the current deployment. In each interview, the women agreed that recreation and leisure activities do help them deal with this deployment. Several participants discussed that recreation activities help provide them with energy to tackle life's challenges and a healthy distraction to keep their mind off the deployment and missing their husbands. For example:

Participant D discussed her love of gardening. She said it is a great stress reliever and it is enjoyable. She is excited to show her husband the transformation around the house and all she has accomplished. As she stated, "You get more energy to do stuff rather than waiting around for a phone call. It helps pass the time and gets my mind off worrying about my husband...I can live and I think that's important in a deployment is being able to live your life." She ended the

interview by saying, “You have to learn to live without your husband and continue on with your life. If you don’t live you’re going to be miserable.”

Participant C stated, “The worst thing someone could do is not do anything.” She continued by saying meet new people, stay busy, go to events; “just don’t stay inside all day”.

Several recreation and leisure activities were referred to in regards to helping the wives cope. The activities have been categorized into passive, active, and social leisure.

Passive Leisure

The passive activities that were discussed by some of the wives included reading, watching TV, listening to music, singing, and making care packages. The women said that these activities restored their bodies and provided relaxation. In addition, the leisure time helped keep their minds occupied. Participant M stated that she engulfs herself in a book in order to cope with her husband’s deployment. In order to pass the time and restore herself, Participant K enjoys taking a nap in her leisure time.

Active Leisure

Several wives mentioned the importance of active leisure activities in their daily routine. As mentioned previously, Stroller Warriors is an important recreation activity to participant M. She said that the exercise provides an outlet and a “burst of energy”. Running, walking, and gardening are active leisure activities that helped a majority of the wives cope with deployment. Active leisure allowed the women to release emotion and provide energy to carry on throughout their day.

Social Leisure

The importance of social leisure was mentioned by all the wives. Social leisure was the number one coping method utilized. The activities with their friends or child enabled them to keep busy and get out of the house. They received the support they needed to cope with the deployment while keeping their minds off worrying and missing their husbands. Examples of social leisure discussed included volunteering, community events, going out to eat, going out for a cup of coffee with friends, going to the beach, playing their child, and going to the park.

The following table depicts the different ways the wives are coping with particular stress through various leisure activities.

Table 1: Stress, Coping Methods, and Recreation and Leisure of Marine wives

Stress	Coping Methods	Recreation and Leisure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child rearing responsibilities • Lack of family support • Communicative Issues • Specific challenges without husband's support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child play • Exercise • Supportive friendships • Working • Religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive (eg. Reading, TV, music) • Active (eg. running, gardening) • Social (eg. volunteering, community events, going out with friends)

DISCUSSION

The deployment of a spouse is a stressor unique to military life. In the interviews conducted with 5 Marine wives I discovered stressors of the deployment, coping strategies the wives utilized, and the role of recreation and leisure in the coping process. The four areas of stressors were child rearing responsibilities, lack of family support, communicative issues, and specific challenges without husband's support. The 5 categories of coping methods included

child play, exercise, supportive friendships, working, and religion. Passive, social, and active leisure were mentioned as sources of relaxation, restoration, and a coping resource during the deployment.

Another area of research that was interesting included the wives' views on deployments. Several women said that a deployment makes the relationship stronger. Participant C stated that "everyone should have to deal with a separation...It helps your relationship and makes you appreciate everything you have." She continued to say that her husband gets on her nerves sometimes so she thinks the deployment is beneficial. Of course, as participant M perfectly stated, "Everybody's experience is different."

However, there were many similarities in the wives responses. They all mentioned the importance of staying busy. Going outside of the home was very important to them; staying in the house all day would make the time go by much slower. The women all had positive commentary on recreation and leisure activities, whether they knew it or not. They discussed the importance of social activities and many had exercise in their daily routine because of the outlet and social network it provided. In addition, the passive leisure allowed the wives to feel restored and relaxed.

A comment made by participant C should be discussed further. She stated that "if people were more involved I think that they would realize how many resources are available to them." This brings up an interesting theory. There are some wives in the military, or people in general, that complain there is not anything to do or there are wives that have a difficult time with deployments that do not know how to cope. In both situations, support should be addressed. Recreation professionals should work hard to publicize their programs, in addition to military

support groups be formed before the start of a deployment. However, there are some circumstances in which individuals are depressed and do not want to participate in activities. Once again, support groups should be created and outreach programs utilized. With these programs, friendships develop and wives will have the opportunity before hand to know if an individual is having a difficult time coping with the deployment or other circumstances.

In conclusion, during a deployment there are several challenges and stressors the wives experience. However, when the spouses engage in recreation and leisure activities, their stress is elevated and they are able to cope with the deployment more effectively.

CONCLUSION

From my research, I have concluded that recreation and leisure activities, especially social leisure are very important to Marine wives. My diagram was developed from my results and shares the importance of recreation and leisure activities in the coping process of a military deployment. When spouses experience a deployment, stressors occur. When they participate in recreation and leisure activities the stress is reduced and therefore they are able to cope with the deployment more effectively.

My research could be further expanded by conducting a quantitative research study and look more in depth to the benefits of specific leisure activities. Leisure research may be very useful to the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs (MWR) in order to improve military families' well-being during deployment and quality of life in the military. By understanding a populations needs, leisure providers will have the knowledge to help them cope through deployments. It also provides additional information for future research. For example,

recommendations for the military bases to provide more recreational opportunities for families with deployed spouses.

However, the challenges and stressors of military life are not just limited to the issues during deployment. The challenges can continue after the service men and women return, especially in regards to PTSD and the reintegration and stabilization stage of the emotional cycle of deployment. Therefore, further research should investigate the effects of these issues on military spouses and how recreation plays a role. Since recreation and leisure activities helped these Marine wives cope during deployments, it would be interesting to see the role they play after deployment.

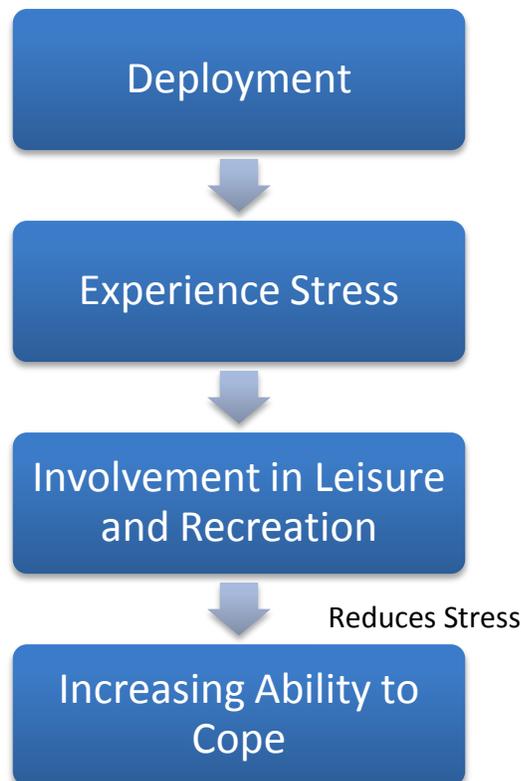


Figure 3: Recreation and Leisure in the Deployment Coping Process

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Interview Guide

Background:

1. If comfortable, please provide me with your age?
2. Describe your education and work experience.
3. How long have you been married?
 - a. How has being in the Marines affected your marriage?
4. Do you have any children?

Deployment:

1. Are you in the beginning, middle, or end of the current deployment?
2. Has your husband been deployed before?
3. Describe the challenges and stressors of this current deployment?
 - a. On you
 - b. On your relationship
 - c. On your children (if applicable)

Coping Methods:

1. What helps you cope through this deployment?
2. What has been the most beneficial in helping you cope?
 - a. Family/friends
 - b. Recreation and leisure activities
 - c. work

Recreation and Leisure:

1. How do you spend your leisure time now?
 - a. Are you involved in any recreational activities?
 - b. How do you spend your leisure time with your friends/family?
 - c. Do you have any hobbies?

2. What is your favorite leisure activity now?
 - a. How much time do you spend on it and what do you like about it?
 - b. How do you feel being a part of this activity?
3. How do these leisure and recreation activities help you cope with this deployment?
4. Do you specifically engage in recreation/leisure related activities in order to cope with the deployment?
 - a. If so, what activities do you use?
5. Is there anything you would like to share about this deployment experience, your coping strategies, or recreation and leisure activities?