Association of Spouse Deployment on Pregnancy Outcomes in a US Military Population


SUMMARY: Relationships between spousal deployment, maternal outcomes, and neonatal outcomes were examined via chart review and surveys of 397 pregnant women. Pregnant women with a deployed spouse had a greater risk of preterm delivery and postpartum depression than women whose husbands were not deployed during pregnancy. No significant findings were found between the deployed and non-deployed groups regarding neonatal outcomes (e.g., weight).

KEY FINDINGS

• Pregnant women whose spouses were deployed were three times more likely to both have a preterm delivery and experience postpartum depression than spouses of non-deployed personnel.
• There were no significant differences in neonatal outcomes between the deployed and non-deployed group.
• Researchers also compared traditional vs group prenatal care and found no differences in preterm delivery or postpartum depression rates.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

• Continue educational efforts to military families on effective parenting practices with newborns
• Support programs for pregnant mothers whose spouses are deployed
• Educate community-based obstetric/gynecological providers to sensitize them to the potential challenges of pregnant women during spousal deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

• Continue educational efforts to military families on effective parenting practices with newborns
• Support programs for pregnant mothers whose spouses are deployed
• Educate community-based obstetric/gynecological providers to sensitize them to the potential challenges of pregnant women during spousal deployment
METHODS
• Participants were recruited at obstetrician visits at an Army medical center at the end of their first trimester.
• Prenatal data were gathered by electronic medical records, and postpartum data were gathered at participants’ postpartum visit.
• Statistical analyses compared deployed vs non-deployed pregnant participants on both maternal and neonatal variables.

PARTICIPANTS
• Participants were 397 pregnant spouses of Active duty Soldiers.
• Women were primarily White (64%), Black (17%), and Latina (11%).
• Average age of women whose husbands were deployed (n = 183) was 25.4 years (SD = 4.7) and women whose husbands did not deploy (n = 214) was 25.7 years (SD = 4.8).

LIMITATIONS
• The sample was limited to women whose spouses were deployed during the entire pregnancy; findings cannot be generalized to spouses who were deployed for a portion of the pregnancy.
• A screener questionnaire was used to determine postpartum depression, which may introduce bias due to its brevity.
• Participants’ spouses were from solely an Army population, which may limit generalizability to the broader military spouse population.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
• Gather information about additional factors that may contribute to increased rates of preterm delivery and postpartum depression.
• Follow mothers over a longer period of time during and after spousal deployment to assess postpartum depression rates at different time intervals.
• Evaluate rates of preterm delivery and postpartum depression among female Service members.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS