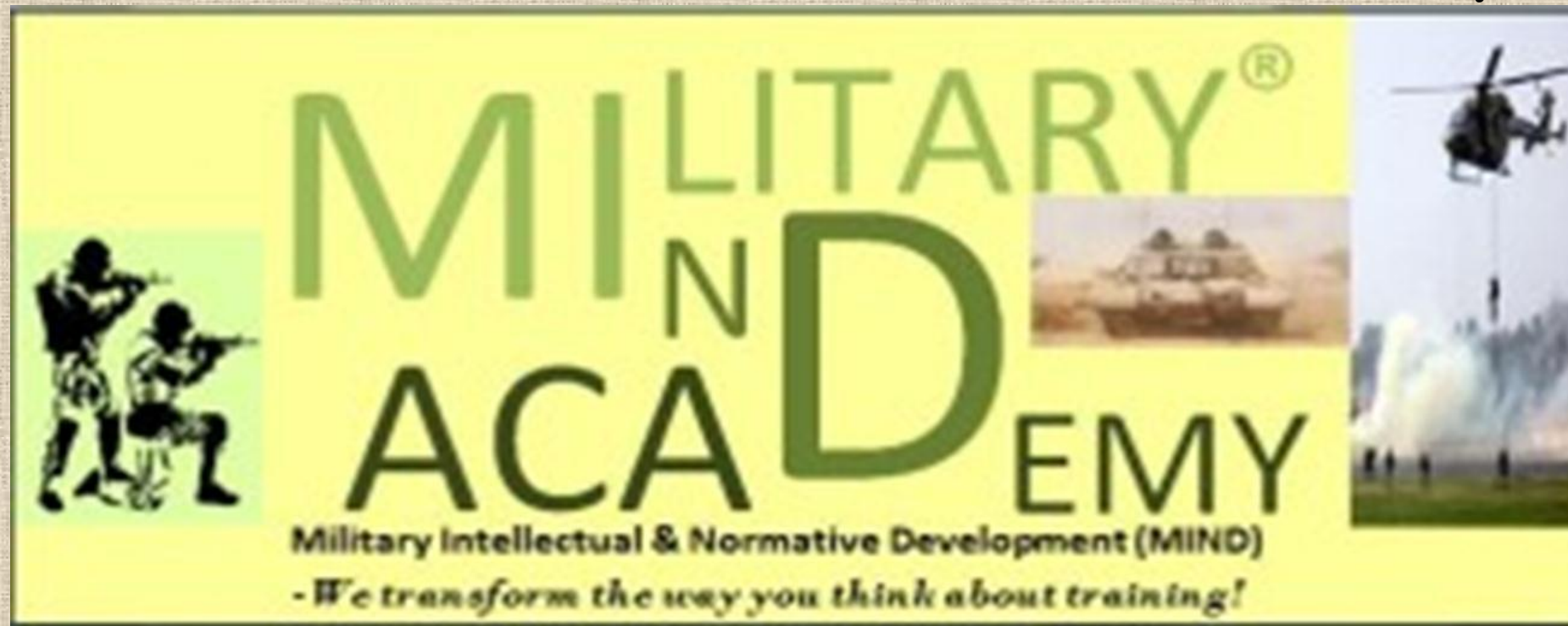


Role of Military Spouse in Post Deployment Reintegration of Soldiers

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The Ultimate Weapon is Highly Trained Mind!

Review of literature

- Understandably , research on military deployment mostly focuses on combat veterans and reaction to stress and trauma, with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the forefront (Pincus et.al,2004; Rawat ,2013; Rawat & Wadkar,2007; Stanley ,1990)
- On return from combat , soldiers face a variety of challenges and as such post deployment reintegration is critical (Bonanno,2004; Rawat & Wadkar,2007; Dursun ,Urban & Dean,2018; Wood et. al,2018)
- It has been reported that military spouses are the strength behind the uniform and critical to soldier well being ,morale and commitment to serve ,all of which impacts mission readiness ,mission effectiveness as well as retention/attrition in the military (Adler et. al ,2007;Brickman,1982; Dursun,2018;Rawat,2013; Segal,1985)

Review of literature (Contd..)

- Research indicates that there are **identifiable characteristics of soldiers and their spouses who cope well as a team BDA deployment** . These individuals seek out social support and talk about areas of difficulty, utilize rationalization as a defense mechanism, and engage in active problem solving (Atler et. al,1996;Booth et.al,2009; Bartone,2003;Rawat,2008; Yi, Smith, & Vitaliano, 2005).
- Burrell et. al (2006) found that separation of a soldier from his or her family was more predictive of poor spousal well-being than any other aspect of military life.
- Resilient soldiers and their families believe that they can grow from both positive and negative experiences of deployment ; they exhibit positive emotions such as gratitude and interest, laugh, and have a sense of control over events, as well as tendency toward an overly positive view of themselves (Burrell et al,2007; Chandra et.al,2009 ; Segal,1986; Rawat & Wadkar, 2007)

Research

- The research involved detailed study of two soldiers and their spouses as respective entities, through
 - Observation
 - Interaction
 - Semi structured interviews
 - Self reports

Perspectives on Role of Military Spouse

- Own identity and career put on backseat due to frequent relocation, transfers ,child rearing ,managing day to day family responsibilities due to soldier deployment including that of caregiver to aging parents
- Overcoming separation pangs and anxiety of soldier risk to life and limb, being strong for the children' and forced single parenting due to deployment
- Early identification of soldier's changed behaviour (returned from deployment as a different person ,not the one whom I know)
- Sustained efforts to accept the soldiers present condition and changed behaviour ,sleep disorders as well as behavioral expectations
- Persistence in progressively bringing about 'equilibrium' in family dynamics and mutual readjustment and realignment to changes in family dynamics



Rationale of the study



- Reintegration of the soldier is critical on return from deployment and all efforts must be made to help him/her not just cope with stressors of combat but come out stronger from exposure to combat
- While institutionalized interventions are in place (e.g. reducing deployment risks and vulnerability , increasing personal hardiness and resilience , psychological debriefing, team venting as well as identifying those at risk beyond ‘normal response to deployment’), not much research has been done to find how ,if at all, military spouses can facilitate in mainstreaming their soldiers on return from deployment and hence this study .

Objectives of study

- Attempts to study how military spouses play a critical role in soldier reintegration post deployment and suggest optimal interventions before, during and after deployment in combat zone with focus on those characteristic role that the military spouse plays that make the soldier come out stronger.

Method or Research Design?

The study is not defined by a specific methodology , but by the object of study (role of military spouse as a specific , unique way to facilitate soldier reintegration and identify interventions that helped soldier to work through their unique challenges of combat exposure and gradually form a different identity and spousal provided opportunity for reintegration , ‘spouse restoration’ and re-adaptation to a new life post deployment .

Method

Case history method, Family Dynamics and Interventions (as needed), Simulations in real environments or induced environments

1. Identify target population
2. Set up meetings with soldiers and their spouses
3. Record their stories
4. Enhance the story through structured questionnaires to elicit the nature of family dynamics of soldier and spouse, history of deployment with challenges faced ... take them through the motions of unique stressors of before, during and after deployment
5. Create a list of spousal roles played / expected to play by the soldier BDA deployment (mother, wife, daughter-in-law, friend, gatekeeper etc)
6. Facilitate the soldier and spouse in realistic expectations and shared family responsibilities through the tasks of stabilizing the home front while soldier deployed
7. Test their response through a form of stimulation or real experience
8. Re-test steps 4 to 7...
9. Review whether problem has a satisfactory resolution or there is need to re-define and/or re-research the problem!

Case studies

- Case study 1
- Case study 2



Case study 1

- Maj DS is a 31 year old serving soldier with 9 years of military service ,his wife NS stays in SFA with their 6yr old son
- Challenge for NS to help DS cope with CSR and related behaviour(expressed aversion to bright light ,noise and sudden movement), poor interpersonal relationship with significant others and sustain healthy intimate relationship with DS .
- NS initially reported that DS often displayed negative effects of combat exposure on marital adjustment , social functioning , emotion focused coping by DS to avoid stressors of deployment (substance abuse), cognitive distancing and emotional numbing(lack of interest in significant activities , estrangement and feelings of detachment) on return from deployment
- Highest stress score, DS expressed poor sense of self and low self esteem.

Case Study 1 (Contd...)

- DS held himself responsible for injury of his buddy(also NS's brother) who became wheel chair bound after IED blast while they were on a patrol
- DS often displays anger bouts which are often directed at the unit CO and towards NS ;
- NS a very strong and resilient spouse who comes from a military background(father a retired colonel) and DS morale is directly and strongly influenced by her positive attitude towards everything military (it's a way of life ,not an occupation!)

Case Study 1 (Contd..)

- NS not only influences her husband DS(she expressed absolute satisfaction with military life and her relationship with her husband and routine interaction with other unit families) provides but also other military spouses in the unit ,indirectly impacting unit morale and operational readiness BDA deployment ; her enthusiasm is infectious and percolates to other spouses in SFA
- NS happy and satisfied with her own life and feels that she too contributing to the military ‘in her own small little way’ by ‘ continuous and sustained efforts in guarding the home front’ while soldier husband away on deployment due to exigencies of military service .

Case study 2

- Brig. VK is a 52 year old officer with 30 years of military service and belongs to a well to do agricultural family from Rajasthan ; has been married to BK for 25 years and have a 19 year old daughter studying in college
- During cadet training he represented NDA, Khadakwasla as well as IMA Dehradun and subsequently Services in swimming at national swimming championship, where he was awarded gold medal as best swimmer ; an officer of high caliber -VK passed out as second in order of merit from NDA as well as IMA
- VK is an upcoming career officer with outstanding reports as well as impeccable course gradings (including senior command course and higher command course) and professional postings that included instructor tenures in military training institutions , foreign assignments as part of UN ,operational service and deployment in operational area when posted with his unit
- Three months back ,VK returned from deployment after serving for two years in a highly operational area and is presently posted in AHQ as staff officer to a three star general and awaiting nomination for NDC as well approval for higher rank to General

Case Study 2 (Contd...)

- His spouse BK is a 'no nonsense' military spouse who places a lot of demands on her husband and 'manages his career', nurturing a lot of ambitions in VK becoming a General for her to 'enjoy the perks and privileges that come with high office'.
- When NDC list was out and VK's name was not nominated ,his world came crumbling down and was extremely stressed on two counts

Case Study 2 (Contd..)

- VK shared that what stressed him most was not the fact that his name was not nominated for NDC but that his wife would continue to chide and nag him that his other course mates (who were perceived by VK and BK as less competent) found their way to NDC while he could not (thus dashing her unrealistic aspirations of becoming a senior officers wife) .
- VK came for counselling as besides his career ,his marriage too was now on the rocks as an unsupportive BK would find reasons to taunt him for small little things and that ‘he couldn’t take it anymore’ and was deciding to seek premature retirement from the military because of his spouse’s attitude

Case Study 2 (Contd...)

- BK on the other hand shared feelings of abandonment by her husband VK as well as by the military who did not recognize the ‘sacrifices that she made to give VK an opportunity to make a career in the forces’.- She felt let down and ‘being all alone’

Renegotiating the ‘HUMP’ post deployment

Protracted adjustments to changed family dynamics and overcoming apprehensions of how both will readjust to expectations from each other in :

- **Household Roles** – Shared responsibilities in and outside house including responsibilities towards both their aging parents
- **Universal Roles** – Emotional connections need to be reestablished between soldier and spouse
- **Marital Roles** – Intimate partner relationships
- **Parenting Roles** – Contributions in child rearing

Findings

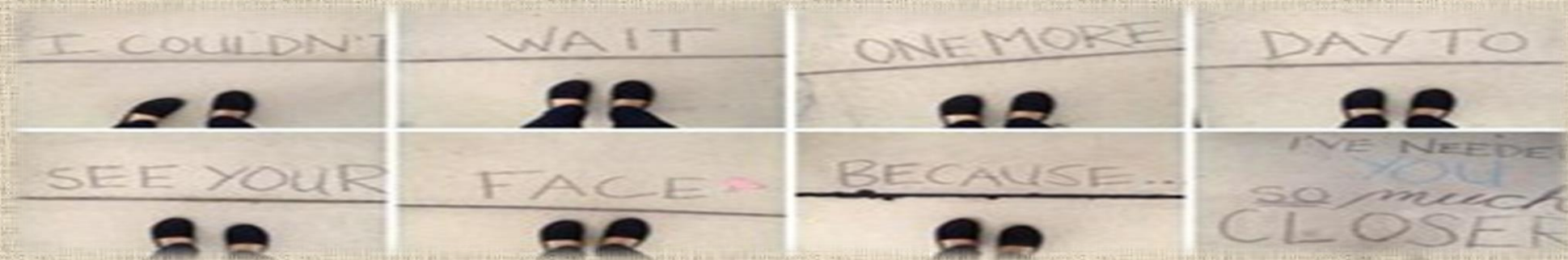
- Social support and military spouse adaptability may serve as protective factors that influence adjustment and post deployment reintegration of soldier
- Shared power that facilitates building and rebuilding a strong family dynamics , emphasizes hope and acceptance, enhances effective and realistic problem solving and develops confidence in soldiers ability to adapt post deployment
- Self efficacy and self confidence of the military spouse may be perceived as a challenge for soldiers who may want to seek control and ‘equilibrium’ of being ‘the man in the house’ on return from deployment ; the military spouse may provide the necessary balm and healing component of successful reintegration by better understanding the challenges of combat exposure during deployment .
- Support system and spouse as a critical coping resources of a soldier (Including Counselling) may play a crucial role in reintegration of the soldier .

Conclusions

- When a soldier joins the military ,the entire family serves and we need to acknowledge the critical role and sacrifices being made by the military spouse
- Research suggests that military spouse espouse a sense of belonging and take pride in contributing to National security ;they have a significant role in not just retention /attrition of soldier ,but also on their morale ,commitment to serve and functional fitness to include mental health as well as family adjustment
- Military spouses are a force multiplier whose solidarity with soldier's responsibilities instill a sense of sacrifice by the entire family by continuous adaptation to a demanding VUCA environment

Conclusions

- Military spouse play a critical role in structure and functioning of military as an organization and in influencing soldier attitude and behaviour in the military ; they have the potential to kindle positive memories of deployment and hold the possibility of tremendous growth by giving meaning to deployment and facilitate the soldier in his 'coming back home' .
- Need to have more research on the military spouse to better understand their critical role in selection , continued willingness to serve and retention /attrition of the soldier as well as soldier well being ,morale and commitment



Acknowledging the Military Spouse

- To acknowledge the sacrifices that the military spouse makes and salute her indomitable spirit that sustains the soldier through thick and thin , a book ‘Military WAGS’ is being released in India with contributions from military psychologists and military spouses contributing chapters .
- ‘Military WAGS’ will be released during WARMCAMP International Military Psychology Conference in Mumbai ,India from 15 to 18 Aug 2019 (details at www.militarymindacademy.com)
- Those of you interested in contributing a book chapter may do so by 31 May 2019 at samtanktrooper@yahoo.com

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- Thank You for Your Attention
- Questions/Comments/Suggestions?
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