

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE TO DEPLOYMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Many families are subjected to the crisis of the routine separation of a family member. Military practitioners and police officials are two examples of professions which require the regular separation of an individual from his/her family system. This paper describes and critiques the process of developing an occupational social work intervention to assist families in resisting the stress of deployments, that is, to increase their 'deployment resilience.' The presenter will explain the various factors which impact on the experience of separation, using international literature, his own clinical experience and research studies in the South African Navy. Seven clusters of factors which are associated with deployment resilience will be highlighted. He will then describe the process of developing a one-day, multiple couple psychoeducational programme which fosters these factors. Trial implementations of the Deployment Resilience Seminar are evaluated with regard to effectiveness and client satisfaction. The utilization of the seminar with couples and families experiencing such separations is explored. Recommendations are proposed to organizational management to reduce the stress of such separations.

INTRODUCTION

Deployments and routine separations of people from their family systems are common for many professions. Employees of the South African Police Services are one group of people who are frequently deployed for operational purposes. These separations place tremendous strain on the family system. When the family is unable to adjust adequately to these deployments, the ability of the employee to function optimally is undermined. It is thus of tremendous operational importance for organizations such as the SAPS to develop their employees' resilience to deployments.

This paper presents, in broad outline, the results of six years of research, clinical experience and programme development in the SA Navy, Simonstown. The various sources from which data were collected are described. The process of developing and testing a new intervention, called the Deployment Resilience Seminar (DRS), is described. Each of the eight factors which contribute to deployment resilience is then described, along with the DRS intervention for that factor and the evaluation of the DRS for that factor. Finally, several recommendations are made to management for the enhancement of deployment resilience.

DATA SOURCES

This paper is based on data from several sources, collected over several years. These sources are the author's clinical experience, a review of international literature and three local studies in the SA Navy. Although this data is largely military and specifically naval, the literature suggests that the data are relevant to all forms of routine separations.

Clinical Experience. During the author's six years of working with sailors and their families, several trends emerged which appeared consistent. These trends included marital estrangement due to prolonged absences, family violence possibly due to power and role

imbalances in the family, estrangement between children and their father due to absences during critical developmental stages, conflict over the spouses' relationships with extra-familial supports, financial problems, depression, inability to make and sustain healthy interpersonal relationships, marked work dissatisfaction and frequent requests for transfers to land bases.

Literature Survey. As a result of these trends, the author and one of his colleagues began collecting literature concerning routine and military separations in the family. A sizable pool of literature is available, most of which addresses military separations resulting from war. There is much consistency in international findings, regardless of the nature of the separation.

Emotional Cycles of Deployment. The author then initiated a study into the emotional and relational effects of naval deployments on sailors and naval wives. A random sample of married sailors (n=40) and naval wives (n=28) was taken of all vessels in Simonstown. A detailed questionnaire, developed by the author, yielded data that confirmed the findings of international researchers. The author was able to describe a cycle of emotions which both sailors and their wives go through during a deployment. The study also gave clues as to the profile of people who coped better or worse with deployments (Van Breda 1995b, 1995c & 1997a).

Coping with Deployments. The author later conducted a small study into the factors which sailors and wives believed reduced deployment stress. The nominal group technique was used with two groups (eight men and nine women). Similar lists of factors were produced by the men and women, many of which indicated the important role of naval management in buffering families from deployment stress (Van Breda 1995a).

Survey of Social Functioning. A third study entailed a social survey of almost 500 naval personnel, approximately half of whom were sea-going (Van Breda 1996). The study assessed the social and family functioning of participants, using the Heimler Scale of Social Functioning and the Family Assessment Device. This study enabled a comparison of the differences and similarities

between deploying and non-deploying naval personnel.

'DEPLOYMENT RESILIENCE'

Analysis of the Problem. In reviewing the available data, it became apparent that certain factors were associated with better coping during deployments and other factors with poorer coping. For example, low military rank tended to be associated with poorer coping and the availability of support systems with better coping. This led the author to coin the term *deployment resilience*, which is defined as the capacity to resist the stress of deployments. It was assumed that if the deployment resilience of families could be improved, sailors would be more combat ready and there would be fewer incidents of personal needs interfering with work performance.

Design of the DRS. Following Thomas' Design and Development Research model (1984), the literature was analysed and eight factors were identified which contributed to deployment resilience. Seven of the factors dealt with processes within the family system and formed the basis of the DRS. The eighth factor dealt with management issues and was incorporated into feedback to the SA Navy. The first seven factors were worked into a one-day, psychoeducational seminar for couples (whether married or not) who were subjected to routine deployments (Van Breda 1997b). The purpose of the DRS is to enhance the deployment resilience of naval couples.

The eight factors, in the order they are presented in the DRS, are:

- Emotional cycles
- Perspectives on deployments
- Support systems
- Finances
- Children
- Family structures

- Marriage
- Management issues (which are not addressed by the DRS)

Development of the DRS. The DRS was implemented twice, although only the first implementation was successfully evaluated. The first implementation was attended by 34 people (18 couples), of whom 24 (71%) completed the entire evaluation process. The couples were drawn from one ship and attended voluntarily, most spouses taking a day's leave from work to attend. Following this implementation, a number of changes were made to the DRS. The second implementation was run with another ship and was attended by 26 people, but because only eight people (31%) returned the follow-up questionnaires, the effectiveness of the seminar could not be evaluated.

Evaluation of the DRS. A preliminary evaluation of the DRS was conducted, using two forms of evaluation. Firstly, immediately after the seminar, couples were asked to complete a client satisfaction form, in which they were asked to rate their satisfaction with the presentation on each factor, using a Likert scale ranging from 1=poor to 5=excellent. After two months, couples were asked to complete a second client satisfaction form in which they were asked what they remembered as most helpful, how helpful the DRS had been during the following deployment and how many of the changes they had planned to make they had in fact made.

Secondly, the effectiveness of the DRS was evaluated using a single-system design. All participants completed a battery of scales prior to the DRS. Two months after the DRS, the same battery was completed. In the meantime, the ship had deployed for one month. The battery comprised three scales, viz. the Family Assessment Device (FAD) (Epstein, Baldwin & Bishop 1983), the Heimler Scale of Social Functioning (HSSF) (Heimler 1990) and the Deployment Resilience Scale (DRScale) (a new scale being developed by the author) (Van Breda 1997b).

T-tests, with a significance level of $p < .10$, were used to detect meaningful changes.

DEVELOPING DEPLOYMENT RESILIENCE

The eight deployment resilience factors will be described in this section. The intervention which was used in the DRS will be briefly mentioned, together with the evaluation of the outcome of the DRS for that factor.

Factor 1: Emotional Cycles of Deployment. Logan (1987) described seven emotional stages through which people go during a deployment. These stages were confirmed in a local study (Van Breda 1997a). Because sailors deploy several times a year, couples rotate through these stages, hence the term 'cycle'. Logan's model is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT

Stage	Title of stage	Duration of stage
PRE-DEPLOYMENT PHASE		
Stage 1	<i>Anticipation of loss</i>	Four to six weeks
Stage 2	Detachment and withdrawal	Few days prior to
DEPLOYMENT PHASE		
Stage 3	<i>Emotional Disorganization</i>	First six weeks of
Stage 4	<i>Recovery and stabilization</i>	Middle of deployment
Stage 5	<i>Anticipation of homecoming</i>	Six weeks prior to
POST-DEPLOYMENT PHASE		
Stage 6	<i>Renegotiation of marriage contract</i>	Six weeks after re
Stage 7	<i>Reintegration and stabilization</i>	Six to 12 weeks a

(Adapted from Logan 1987)

Many couples experience great distress during deployments, including depression (Beckman, Marsella & Finney 1979), loneliness (Farish, Baker & Robertson 1976), deterioration of self-esteem (Rosenzweig, Gampel & Dasberg 1981), decreased global satisfaction with life (Van Breda 1997a) and increased physical illness (Snyder 1978). While some affective and relational fluctuations over the deployment cycle are normative, some couples experience marked emotional turbulence.

The DRS allows couples to ventilate these feelings in a group setting. This results not only in the relief of catharsis, but also in the normalising of their experience. It enables couples to place their emotional distress in context and to take a step away from it. A full hour is given for this, as couples need to release their affect before being able to address methods of improving their emotional well-being. This process also builds group cohesion, which is necessary for the success of the DRS.

This phase of the DRS was well received, ranking third in their evaluations of each factor (4.4 on the scale of 1 to 5). Follow-up studies showed that 52% of participants found the realisation that they were not alone in their experience of deployments to be meaningful. This was, in fact, the most commonly cited value of the DRS at the two-month follow-up. There was a significant improvement in the score for emotional cycles on the Deployment Resilience Scale ($t=2.33$, $p<.05$, DRScale).

Factor 2: Perspectives on the Naval Lifestyle. The literature indicates, in accordance with cognitive theory, that one's perception of or attitude towards the military and deployments has a significant impact on one's coping with deployments (Milgram & Bar 1993). Knapp and Newman (1993) found that wives who *perceived* the military life as more stressful experienced significantly less psychological well-being than those who perceived the military life as less stressful. Another study found that wives' attitudes to their husband's units affected their husband's

morale and that personal morale influenced one's perceptions of the army-family interface (Rosen, Moghadam & Vaitkus 1989).

In the SA Navy, there are many external factors which impede the maintenance of positive attitudes. These factors include unpredictable and erratic deployments, lack of personnel which results in extended sea duties and slow promotion, frequent night duties which disrupt family life, etc. A negatively self-reinforcing cycle is thus established.

The original DRS attempted to steer couples clear of talking about these issues, since most of them are unresolvable. However, this failed and the DRS was restructured. In a second implementation of the DRS this revised version worked well. Couples were afforded the opportunity to engage in a 'bitch' session about their frustrations. The resultant feelings of helplessness, rage and despondency were processed and the concepts of cognitive restructuring introduced.

Couples ranked this section second worst in the first DRS (4.0 on the scale of 1 to 5), although there was a significant improvement in perceptions of the navy ($t=2.54$, $p<.05$, DRScale). In the second implementation of the DRS, when this module had been modified, this rating improved somewhat (4.21 on the scale of 1 to 5).

Factor 3: Support Systems. There is strong indication that social support buffers families and the deploying member from deployment stress (Amen, Merves, Jellen & Lee 1988). The children of mothers who feel supported show better adjustment at home and school during deployments (Hiew 1992). Religious support is found to correlate with family resilience (McCubbin and McCubbin 1992). Sailors and wives who felt they could rely on other sailors or naval wives for help with a personal or family problem tended to experience a greater sense of general well-being (Rosen & Moghadam 1988), reported less sadness during deployments (Van Breda 1995a), had better overall social functioning, were more satisfied with their work, family,

friendships and relationships, and experienced better health, less depression and higher levels of energy (Van Breda 1996).

In the DRS, couples are presented with these findings and four areas of social support are identified, viz. naval, community, family and religious support systems. In gender specific groups, participants discuss why support systems are important for their gender and why people of their gender might not make adequate use of these supports.

Client satisfaction with this section was fairly low (4.1 on the scale of 1 to 5, it ranked third lowest). In the evaluations of effectiveness, religious support was found to improve significantly ($t=1.93$, $p<.05$, DRScale), naval and community support (DRScale) did not change significantly, satisfaction with friendships improved ($t=-1.65$, $p<.10$, HSSF) and family support deteriorated significantly ($t=-1.56$, $p<.10$, DRScale). The deterioration in family support could have resulted from the DRS increasing couple's awareness of conflict with extended family, without providing adequate means to improve these relationships.

Factor 4: Financial Preparation. Financial management has been associated with 'balance' in families with children at home (McCubbin & McCubbin 1992). Similarly, financial security correlates with general well-being and global life satisfaction (Rosen, Moghadam & Carpenter 1989). Other studies show that financial preparation decreases worry during military separations (Segal & Harris 1993).

In a local naval study, 74% of sea-going families were significantly concerned about their finances (Van Breda 1995a: 74). Furthermore, financial concern was found to be highest among those who experienced the most deployment stress (Van Breda 1995a: 30). Financial concern was associated with higher levels of anxiety and loneliness during deployments and was considered a significant factor in the stress wives experience due to deployments (Van Breda 1995a).

The DRS briefly presents the importance of financial preparation prior to deployments,

and couples were then given time to discuss their personal finances. This section received the lowest client satisfaction rating for the DRS (3.9 on the scale of 1 to 5). This could be because couples felt that without salary increases there was little value in discussing how to improve their financial situations. Nevertheless, couples' satisfaction with finances improved significantly ($t=2.15$, $p<.05$, HSSF). This could perhaps be attributed to an improved attitude towards finances over time. It may, though, be attributable to an actual change in the environment between tests.

Factor 5: Family Structure. Many families develop dysfunctional family structures as a result of the repeated separation of a member from the family unit. In some families, the father is pushed out of the family, in order for the family to cope without him during deployments. This family pattern, termed 'closed ranks' in military literature (Amen, Merves, Jellen & Lee 1988), results in substantial post-deployment difficulties (Lagrone 1978). In other families, the ranks are kept open, resulting in the father being welcomed back in on his return, but the family disintegrates during his absence (Jensen, Lewis & Xenakis 1986). "The extent to which this adjustment to separation is successful, however, is *inversely* related to the ease with which the family can accommodate his return" (Boynton & Pearce 1978: 130).

Some writers suggest that maintaining a symbolic presence of the family helps soldiers cope better with separations (Kirkland & Katz 1989). This idea has been tested with naval couples and has met with some success. It is hypothesised that such a practice helps the family find a balance between open and closed ranks, and has been termed 'maintaining a husband-aware family' by the author.

Families subjected to regular deployments experience difficulties with shifts in role allocation - this was a problem for 59% of naval families (Van Breda 1995a: 23). These difficulties were associated with higher stress, anxiety, loneliness and marital conflict, a lack of social support and a feeling of loss of control (Van Breda 1995a).

In the DRS, participants are presented with the concepts of closed and open ranks and the husband-aware family, and several ideas are suggested which can assist in maintaining a husband-aware family. Participants then produce humorous skits to illustrate these ideas.

This theme was highly rated by participants (4.6 on the scale of 1 to 5, ranked second highest). General family functioning was found to significantly improve in the follow-up study ($t=2.07$, $p<.05$, FAD), as was behavioural control, ie. agreement about family expectations ($t=2.58$, $p<.05$, FAD).

Factor 6: Children and Separation. Local studies show that men perceive the needs of their children to be the greatest factor making deployments difficult for their wives (Van Breda 1995a: 47). Children experience an emotional cycle similar to their parents (Kelly 1994b). Father absences have been shown to have a detrimental effect on many children, particularly boys (McCubbin & Dahl 1976; Applewhite & Mays 1996) and younger children (Kelly 1994a). Children, particularly the oldest son, are often parentalized during deployments (Riggs 1990), which can precipitate enmeshment with the mother (Wertsch 1991) and conflict with the father (Levai, Ackermann, Kaplan & Hammock 1995).

Maternal coping and well-being, social support and family functioning prior to deployment have repeatedly been shown to have a buffering effect on children (Black 1993; Segal & Harris 1993; Hiew 1992). More recent papers address the differences, or rather, the absence of differences between maternally and paternally separated children in military families (Applewhite & Mays 1996; Kelly, Herzog-Simmer & Harris 1994).

In the DRS, a group discussion is facilitated concerning children's experience of deployments (according to developmental stages) and ideas for assisting children to cope more effectively with deployments are explored (eg. the use of a deployment snake). This theme was moderately rated by subjects (4.4 on the scale of 1 to 5, ranked third highest). No statistical

improvements could be detected in the parent's management of their children. It is likely that parents require a separate and more intensive programme for caring for their children.

Factor 7: Marriage. Local research showed that, for both men and women, having a stable, secure and happy marital relationship was, by far, the most important factor in helping families cope more effectively with deployments (Van Breda 1995a). Of course, even couples with healthy, well-functioning marriages find deployments stressful (Segal 1986).

A key dynamic in the marital relationship is that of role changes and authority. Riggs (1990: 152) notes, for example, that wives who establish "independence and self-sufficiency" enhance their coping with deployments, and advocates women adopting an androgynous gender role. Other authors also suggest, however, that husbands need to be able to cope with an independent wife (Lagrone 1978).

In the DRS, the issues of female androgyny, male security with this, conflict resolution (including the danger of violence), sexuality and communication are addressed. Couples are then taught and exercise the Intentional Relational Method (Clinebell 1984), in which partners make statements about what they appreciate in each other and what they need from each other.

This topic was rated most highly by participants (4.7 on the scale of 1 to 5). In the first client satisfaction assessment, 27% of participants indicated that they realised the importance of communication with their partners. In the follow-up evaluation, 17% referred to this realisation as their greatest gain from the DRS. In the evaluations of effectiveness, however, the factors associated with the marriage relationship showed no statistically significant changes.

Factor 8: Management of Deployments. Local research highlights a number of factors external to the family which influence the family's ability to resist deployment stress. The experience of deployment was found to vary between different groups of ships. In exploring the reasons for this, two main factors emerged (Van Breda 1997a). Those with the highest

deployment stress were found to work on ships which had erratic, unpredictable deployments. These ships also had no support groups for families during deployments.

It appeared that the duration of deployments was a less significant factor in predicting deployment stress than was the frequency of deployments (Van Breda 1997a). When deployments are longer and less frequent, families have time to adjust to the phases of togetherness and separation. Short but frequent deployments require the family to continually adjust to the coming or going of the husband, which effectively prevents the family from ever achieving a period of stable functioning.

The DRS does not address these issues, since the family does not have the ability to directly modify these factors. These management issues are in the hands of the managers of individual ships and the management of the SA Navy as a whole. However, in the various discussions, participants aired their frustrations about most of these issues. The senior managers of the ship, who were present, heard these complaints and the author's statements about how these issues do impact on deployment resilience.

Interestingly, the participants reported that they perceived these factors to improve after the DRS ($t=2.54$, $p<.01$, DRScale). It is possible that the managers, having heard these various comments, not only developed new patterns of relating with their families which reduced deployment stress, but also new patterns of management with their sailors which reduced deployment stress. This was an unexpected, but valued improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE DEPLOYMENT RESILIENCE

Various recommendations can be made to enhance the deployment resilience of personnel who are routinely subjected to deployments.

Preparation for Deployments. Families should receive at least one week's notice to

prepare for a deployment. Problems during separations frequently result from inadequate preparation of the family, eg. arranging finances, fixing the car, etc. Furthermore, couples need time to emotionally prepare for separations. This preparation typically involves emotionally separating prior to the physical separation. While this process of separating is often uncomfortable for couples, it has been found to be important for the survival of a healthy family unit. When families do not have time for emotional separation before a deployment and reunion afterwards, they develop a closed ranks family structure.

Planning for Deployments. Employees and their families should have as much information about the deployment as possible prior to leaving. This information is important for the emotional preparation of the deploying member, the spouse and the children. Children, particularly, need to know for how long the parent will be absent. They also benefit from being shown on maps and photographs where the deployed parent is working when absent.

Contact during Deployments. Sometimes deployed members are not able or permitted to contact their families during deployments. This will not damage the family if it occurs occasionally and for good reason, but when it is typical it results in loss of family cohesion. Some people prefer not to contact their families during deployments since telephone calls are felt to be impersonal. However, managers need to actively promote such contact in order to maintain the family relationships.

Support Groups. When employees are routinely deployed, it is important to establish additional support networks for the families. Families who identify with the military and who participate in military activities tend to have higher deployment resilience. Wives who can rely on other military wives for personal support have higher deployment resilience. Most families have natural support networks with churches, friends and family. However, during the stress of deployments, families also need the support of others in a similar situation who understand what

it is like to have a deployed family member (Van Breda 1995a). These groups should be run by the families themselves, with support and guidance from social workers.

Family Patterns. The DRS describes numerous actions families themselves can take to enhance their deployment resilience. These include talking about their feelings, tolerating some emotional distress, developing support networks, ensuring they are financially prepared for emergencies during deployments, developing positive attitudes towards deployments and the employer, developing a husband-aware family system, attending to the psychosocial needs of the children, encouraging the independence of the wife and promoting healthy marital relations. Managers should become familiar with these guidelines and actively promote them among their employees. Employees who deploy and their spouses should be encouraged to attend the DRS and follow-up discussions.

Caring Managers. The words 'caring' and 'military' possibly do not belong together, yet some research indicates that they are not mutually exclusive. Segal and Harris (1993) have shown that the morale and commitment of army families and employees are enhanced when they feel that management is interested in their personal needs. Caring also improves the retention rate of personnel. Caring can be manifested in time off for important family needs, eg. taking the wife to the doctor or attending a child's birthday party.

Morale Maintenance. Over time, deployments, no matter how well managed, take a toll on the well-being of the employee and the family. The organization should take steps, from time to time, to allow ventilation of frustration by the employee and his/her family. Use should be made of specially trained personnel (as is done for trauma debriefing) and professional staff (social workers, psychologists, etc) to facilitate these sessions. Periodic ventilation prevents the buildup of unhealthy negative affect and allows employees and their families to maintain acceptable levels of morale.

CONCLUSION

The DRS as a whole was rated highly by participants (4.8 on the scale of 1 to 5). Eighty three percent of participants rated the seminar as having helped a lot or quite a lot during the deployment which followed the DRS. A high correlation was found between the helpfulness of the DRS and the number of changes made based on the DRS ($r=.81$, $p<.001$). This could suggest that the changes suggested are subjectively helpful to families.

The 52% of subjects who made most or all of the changes they had intended to make as a result of the DRS showed significant improvement in 22 of the 35 variables (as opposed to only one improvement among those who made a few or no changes). Furthermore, in six additional areas, the former group did not deteriorate where the latter group did. This suggests that those who incorporated the principles of deployment resilience in their families showed improvements in 80% of the factors assessed. Thus, when the recommendations are followed through, the DRS is able to significantly improve the social and family functioning of couples who experience routine separations.

The Deployment Resilience Seminar summarizes the wealth of information that has been collected from the literature and studies in the SA Navy. The DRS is specifically written for a naval audience, but is based on literature which is drawn from navy, air force, army and the private sector. McKendrick (1997) suggests that the DRS could, "with relatively minor contextual modification be used fruitfully as the foundation for intervention programmes dealing with family separation in any context." The DRS may, therefore, have value for SAPS personnel who, due to deployments, are routinely required to be absent from their families.

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