

**“WAITING FOR THE NEW NORMAL”:  
A CASE STUDY OF MILITARY FAMILY SUPPORT PROCESSES  
IN THE STATE OF DELAWARE**

by

Tamara L. Salzbrenner

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science  
in Human Development and Family Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

The United States responded to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 by entering into military battle in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, a conflict that is officially known as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). In March, 2003 a second conflict was begun in Iraq referred to as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The challenges of the combined conflicts have had a tremendous effect on the United States' military. Troops are experiencing multiple and extensive deployments involving increased numbers of women and parents of young children, requiring long and stressful separations from family and community.

This study was conducted in the state of Delaware, and focuses on the reintegration of military veterans and their families upon return from deployment using the lens of systems, social organization theory and ecological theories. In order to ascertain if and how the needs of military families are being met, interviews were carried out with individuals who had experienced deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan as a service or family member. The interviews were analyzed revealing: (a) adaptation from

military to civilian life creates obstacles, (b) lack of accessibility to services is a support barrier, (c) military families experience a sense of marginalization from the media and the public and (d) support exists primarily from family members.

The results are important because they reflect the current state of support and indicate that attention is needed to improve methods of delivering and creating support systems for military service members and their families.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United States military has been involved in combat since October 7, 2001, with two major military operations: Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF; October 2001-ongoing) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF; March 2003-September 2010) spanning more than ten years. The combination of the OEF and OIF conflicts is unique in that it is the longest military conflict in our history, staffed by volunteer forces that have experienced an increase in the frequencies and length of deployments. The effects of numerous deployments along with the differences in location, types of injuries sustained and the diversity of personnel compounds the impact of the transition from military service and reintegration into civilian life (Ostavary & Dapprich, 2011; Sargeant, 2009).

Military families experience a complex interaction of systems generating from the culture of national policy, military institutions, society, the community, and the individuals within their families. These systems influence the pattern in which the members of military families function and adapt through daily and unique stressors as well as the reintegration process of military personnel to civilian life.

Many men and women return from war and adjust adequately to their lives after deployment while others return and experience difficulty in transitioning back to family life, employment and living in their community. The consequences of deployment in OEF and OIF has an effect on not only the military personnel and their families but also the ability of civilians, social workers, health and community support agencies to address the reintegration process with military clients and their families. Military personnel will return to civilian life with adjustment issues that are beyond the transfer from military to civilian culture. Many will return with physical disabilities while others return with emotional and psychological disabilities, resulting in self-medication with drugs and alcohol and/or higher rates of marital or familial problems (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011; U.S. Army Medical Department, 2008). The nature of the OEF and OIF conflicts involve severe blasts from explosives, resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI), which is being considered the “signature wound” of these wars (Okie, 2006).

The National Institute of Medicine reports that PTSD disrupts functioning in relationships with children (2010). In a study focusing on 199 male military veterans serving in Iraq or Afghanistan after 2001, those with PTSD or depression were five times as likely to identify problems with family readjustment, reporting

that their children acted afraid of them while one-third reported that their partners were afraid of them (Sayers et al., 2009).

This case study research includes perceptions of support systems that have an impact on military families available in the state of Delaware. The goal of this research is to strengthen the awareness of the interdependent systems influencing our military soldiers and their family members in order to positively affect the ability to transition from deployment to reintegration.

This study bridges family systems theory and social organization theory with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model of human development, adapting the ecological model specifically to military families. By combining these theories, the findings of the study enable an evaluation of the support systems that exist within the community and their impact on military families. This understanding will empower our community to develop programs and services which can be implemented to raise effectiveness in serving the families of military personnel. At the same time, the transparency and accessibility of current support systems are assessed, providing insight to the accessibility of existing community supports for military families.

This case study addresses the experiences of military families in the state of Delaware at reintegration with the following questions to guide its inquiry:

1. What types of challenges are experienced by Delaware military families during re-entry? (i.e. financial, logistic, psychological, emotional)
2. What support systems are beneficial to the military family and the soldier during deployment? Do these systems transfer to re-entry?
3. Are current supports inclusive of the changing structures in military families (single parent, blended families, lesbian and gay families, dual service families)?
4. Are the programs that currently exist addressing the perceived needs of military personnel and the military family? Are they easily identified by the military family as to their availability?

This study provides a qualitative perspective of the access and efficacy of community support to returning military in the state of Delaware. It is important that military families be given an opportunity to express their experiences and concerns regarding current supports. By focusing on the reintegration and giving military families a voice, we can determine if the needs of our military families are being addressed and

increase the capabilities of our State and local organizations to support military families in the State of Delaware.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Military Culture and Family Culture**

The relationships between military families and the American military have evolved from negligence to partnership. The primary foundation of the ranks of the Revolutionary War was single men; army regulations avoided referring to families and did not provide for soldiers dependents while on active duty or on in the event of a soldier's death. Compensation payments were not extended to widows and orphans until 1794, and the level of pay for enlisted men and noncommissioned officers discouraged marriage, as did the requirement of a soldier to receive permission from his commanding officer to marry (Albano, 1994).

Despite changes that allowed payment for dependents and female volunteerism, the military culture continued to discourage the enlistment of married men throughout most of the next two centuries until World War II, when the military realized that discouraging the enlistment of married soldiers would deplete their forces. An allowance for wives and dependent children was initiated and the concept of responsibility to the family was

established. Women were allowed to enlist, with the exception of married females, who were not allowed to enlist or be drafted. Furthermore, parenthood, pregnancy or marriage was considered grounds for dismissal (Albano, 1994). The 1960's became a turning point for families of military personnel and family support became a primary concern for military organizations with the political and societal concerns of the Vietnam War (Albano, 1994). Another major adjustment in the military system can be attributed to modifications in the structure of military preparedness from a draft to volunteer military (Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011; Cadigan, 2006). Furthermore, the issue of gender equality received greater attention and women were integrated into the ranks of the military. In OEF and OIF, 218,000 women were deployed as of April 2009. Currently, women do not serve in combat Special Forces but they are deployed to combat areas, serving in a range of support positions which involves traveling outside the military base, working with combat soldiers and being open to direct fire (Institute of Medicine, 2010). The increase of female veterans creates added issues which are specific to women, particularly in the area of health services and the configuration of family roles during deployment (Society for Women's Health Research, 2008).

The changes in society and family are reflected in the composition of the troops of the military as it makes the transition to accommodate the varying family structure. Military personnel is composed from a multiplicity of family types: two-parent families, single parent families, extended families, cohabitating couples, blended families, gay and lesbian families and extended family households (Lundquist, 2008; Cadigan, 2006). Because the armed forces are made up of volunteers, the variations in family structure must be acknowledged by military policy to maintain the troops required for the country's defense.

### **Called to serve: Those deployed and those at home**

When military forces are called to serve (whether it is for routine training or deployment during times of war), they are often met with long work hours, stressful training, and relocation in new environments where they may possibly face the threat of injury and death. Compounded with the fact that the service member is distanced from the family, the situation is exacerbated by concerns for the well-being of his or her spouse, children, parents and other military family members (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011). Those

same spouses, children, partners, and extended family members are all affected by the separation. The military family remaining at home faces the challenge of assuming the operational role vacated by their deployed family member. In many instances, the parent or caregiver left behind must assume new roles which they are not accustomed to performing, particularly if a gendered division of responsibilities has been employed. This situation is predominantly the case in the National Guard families, where the soldier may be deployed after spending time at home as a civilian (Weber, 2012). A lengthy deployment cycle presents the need to re-adjust the functioning of the family household network to adapt to new tasks to “fill in” for the deployed family member. The catalyst causing the challenge varies in each situation, as does the manner in which the family members react/adapt to maintain the status quo of the family unit.

Work related separation is a common factor in today’s society; impacting the quality of life as well as the functionality and psychological well-being of the family unit (Orthner & Rose, 2009). Extreme situations of military work-related separation along with the sacrifices and alterations made by both military personnel and their family members (who can be experiencing a crisis individually or collaboratively) affect

the organization, performance and psychological well-being of the individuals and the family (Coll, Weiss & Yarvis, 2011). These challenges are accompanied by a myriad of emotions which often affect the ability to carry out the increased responsibilities, as well as any responsibilities that may exist outside the family unit (i.e. school, work, etc.). The varied structures of systems that intercede during deployment do not end at reintegration. Instead, family functioning encounters another tier of the system framework as families must adjust their own structure, combining the assets and liabilities of their separation during deployment into a new organization for the family to function with the return of the service member (Sayers, 2011).

In a review of military personnel policies Card, et al. reported that one-half of military personnel have responsibilities to family members, either as a spouse, parent, or partner. This is a major change in the demographic structure of the military from previous decades (2011). This transformation has led the Department of Defense (DOD) to realize that emphasis must be placed on a sense of community in the military and that family considerations need to be addressed in order to increase the appeal to individuals contemplating enlisting in the military. The DOD has

proactively supported policies and programs that recognize the contributions made by military members and their families, many of which are supported by community and government programs (Weiss, Coll, Gerbauer, Smiley & Carillo, 2010).

The effects of deployment and success of re-entry are dependent on the functioning relationship of the deployed family member and his or her spouse or family support system. With the combination of diverse systems in the military organization, the family structure, the community and society, the journey of reintegration depends on various factors which impact the success of the family's reintegration process (Sayers, 2011).

Willerton, Wadsworth, and Riggs (2011) emphasize the importance of the military culture that is embedded in military personnel and the carryover that transfers to military families. The military, as an institution, places extreme demands and high expectations on the soldier, relying on him or her to extend his or her abilities to the absolute limit of his or her potential in order to serve cause and country. The military family places similar demands for the soldier in order to maintain the organization and support of the family. The military system can be described as a culture comprised of distinct ethics, core values, and firm

hierarchical roles to which service men and women conform. Similar expectations are made of military families in regards to commitment to the military organization's culture (Weiss et al., 2010). In order to assure that a successful transition from deployment to civilian life is achieved it is crucial that the returning soldier and his or her family is provided with the support needed to succeed in the re-entry process.

### **Interrelation of Systems and Supports with Military Families**

Military families are the nucleus of various groups which have a profound effect on the adjustment of the reintegration process. Federal and state policies and programs influence the participation of military in situations which require deployment. The policies determined by politicians and lawmakers are affected by political opinion and are particularly susceptible to contributions and popularity during times of re-election (Blow et al., 2012). These have a direct effect on the military institution, the personnel, and their families. The military institution establishes the policies, culture and supports that service members and their family adhere to (Weiss et al., 2010). Extended family and friends, as well as the community, provide support through child care, School

Learning Programs (SLP), and activities that support the military effort. Each of these has a direct effect on the military family, trickling down to the parent, the child and spouse (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Aronson et al., 2011; Saltzman et al., 2011).

The commitment of military personnel and their families to serve is challenging, whether the country is in a state of war or peace. Training, relocations, and deployment take their toll on military families, testing their resilience as the stressors of military and civilian life are combined and therefore the systems intersect, calling for adjustment on the part of the individuals involved. The demands of the military system have a strong effect on the family system, affecting the level of influence on behavior and expectation of the military family members (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011; Weiss et al, 2010). In comparison, the family has a strong impact on the military, as evidenced in the transitions the military has made in accommodating the family members of enlisted personnel by providing benefits and support. With the interdependence of military and family systems, there is a cascade effect of influence between the individual, the family, the military and the community. The results of this study identify the current supports in the state of Delaware, ascertaining

their effectiveness through the combined lens of family systems theory, social organization theory, and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory. It is in understanding the interdependence of individual development, family relationships, and military and community influence that we can improve the services and assistance provided to military personnel after deployment. By recognizing the interconnection of systems affected by the military we can better serve the families and military personnel who serve our country. The study examines the support systems that currently exist, pinpointing their strengths and weaknesses, and provides a source to increase awareness among military families of support that exists outside of the military system. Concurrently the results of this study inform policy makers and leaders in the community as to how they can increase public awareness in the support processes provided and strengthen the potential for development of further supports in the community for military families.

## **Families and Communities**

No matter what the size of a community, the family boundary is penetrated by the factors of social organization. The social organization established by a community, whether formal or informal, is how people cooperate and provide mutual support; including the controls that regulate patterns of interaction, behavior, and networking within the community. Mancini and Bowen refer to families as being "...embedded in multiple contexts that reflect community structure and process" (2013, p.2).

The structural and interactional aspects of a community impact the family as a unit and as a member of the community (Mogey, 1964). The relationship between families and society adjust with the changes in family configurations, social norms, legislation and policy, the economy, military conflicts, etc. In this study, how military families perceive community supports will be examined from the viewpoint of military families who have experienced the reintegration process, detaching themselves from active deployment and transitioning into civilian life. It is hypothesized that the ability to participate in community or social organizations outside the military will depend, in part, on the military

family's ability to "perceive" which supports exist within the community, as well as partake in them.

### **Military Presence in the State of Delaware**

The State of Delaware has a historic record of involvement in the military which can be traced back to the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), continuing to the present with the Afghanistan War (Delaware National Guard, 2016; Wiggins, 2010). Dover Air Force Base (DAFB) is located in Dover, Delaware in Kent County. The State of Delaware is comprised of three counties (New Castle, Kent and Sussex) with Delaware National Guard units in each county resulting in a significant military presence in a small geographic area.

In 2015 the United States Census Bureau reported a population estimate for the State of Delaware of 935,614 (US Census Bureau, 2015). The Delaware Veterans Coalition (2016) reports that there are nearly 80,000 veterans who reside in Delaware. The combination of veterans and military residents at DAFB in the state is 9% of the total estimated population of the State of Delaware. Adding the members of the Delaware

National Guard, which includes the Delaware Army National Guard and the Delaware Air National Guard, and those military service men and women who are full-time military that reside in Delaware increases the percentage of military personnel and families who reside in the state.

### **Summary of the Situation**

The United States involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has been ongoing since October of 2001, with a deployment of approximately two million service members. The re-entry of military veterans into civilian life will have an impact on military families and the communities they live in. The experiences of war, the transition from military life to civilian life and the possibility of dealing with physical injury or psychological trauma can have adverse effects on the re-entry process (Brown, 2011). Historically, society has experienced the effects of inadequate preparation for the re-entry of military veterans. Vietnam War veterans returned home to a country that was unwelcoming and unprepared in regards to support systems, employment, and health care (Vinokur, Caplan, & Williams, 2011). In order to avoid a similar outcome,

planning and preparation have been essential to assure that military veterans are not subjected to the same scenarios. There have been indications in the media that raise concern in this area. In 2013, reports were made regarding the mistreatment of military veterans at Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals. Reports continue regarding cover ups, backlogs, and the inability to provide adequate health care (Zorroyo, 2014). Protests were made on college campuses regarding the showing of *American Sniper*, a movie depicting the story of Chris Kyle, a former Navy SEAL (Svrluga, 2015) and events in Florida resulted in a group of college students taunting and disrespecting wounded war veterans (Ellis & Stapleton, 2015). These incidents reinforce the concern that the country may not be prepared for the influx of soldiers returning to society when this conflict comes to an end.

## **Chapter 3**

### **THEORETICAL APPROACH**

The theoretical frameworks applied in this study include systems theory, social organization theory, and the life course perspective. By using these varied theoretical approaches for inquiry in this study, the researcher obtained the perspectives of military personnel and families experiences at the individual, familial and social level, and about the influences of governmental policies regarding re-entry in the state of Delaware.

#### **Systems Theory**

Systems theory views the family as an organized structure and is comprised of traits such as wholeness of order, hierarchical systems, adaptive self-stabilization and adaptive self-organization. The family is composed of smaller sub-systems (parental, marital, and sibling) while being embedded in a larger system (Cox & Paley, 1997). Each family unit is a distinct entity that reacts to stressors in a way unique to its own

organization; there is no single method to employ when dealing with family stressors. Systems theory is pertinent to the analysis of military families as it takes into account the interaction of the family members, the effects of social and gender roles, and the changes that transpire in the event of military deployment as the family members transition their roles to maintain their family system. Using systems theory as a tool we can identify the factors that impact military families and evaluate the scenarios in which families may be affected during reintegration, the challenges these adaptations will present and how the family adjusts their “system” or method of coping.

### **Social Organization Theory**

Mancini and Bowen (2009) propose social organization theory based on the operation of formal and informal support systems in the United States military (Bowen & Martin, 1998). Social organization theory analyzes the aspects of social organization and how communities build resiliency to adapt to the needs of its residents. Mancini, Nelson, Bowen, & Martin (2006, p.246) conceptualize communities as “places,

targets, and forces for prevention.” Social organization theory is equally applicable to this study as high value is attributed to communities and the efforts of their resources, which must change and evolve to realize effectiveness in addressing the issues of the citizens within the population. Mancini and Bowen (2009) refer to communities as “...living systems, they face opportunities as well as challenges--some expected and some unexpected.” (p. 249). Like military families, communities experience a combination of situations which require combined attention and management. The combined approach of family systems theory and social organization theory provide a basic interpretive methodology for this study in the ecological perception of military families in the community.

### **Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory**

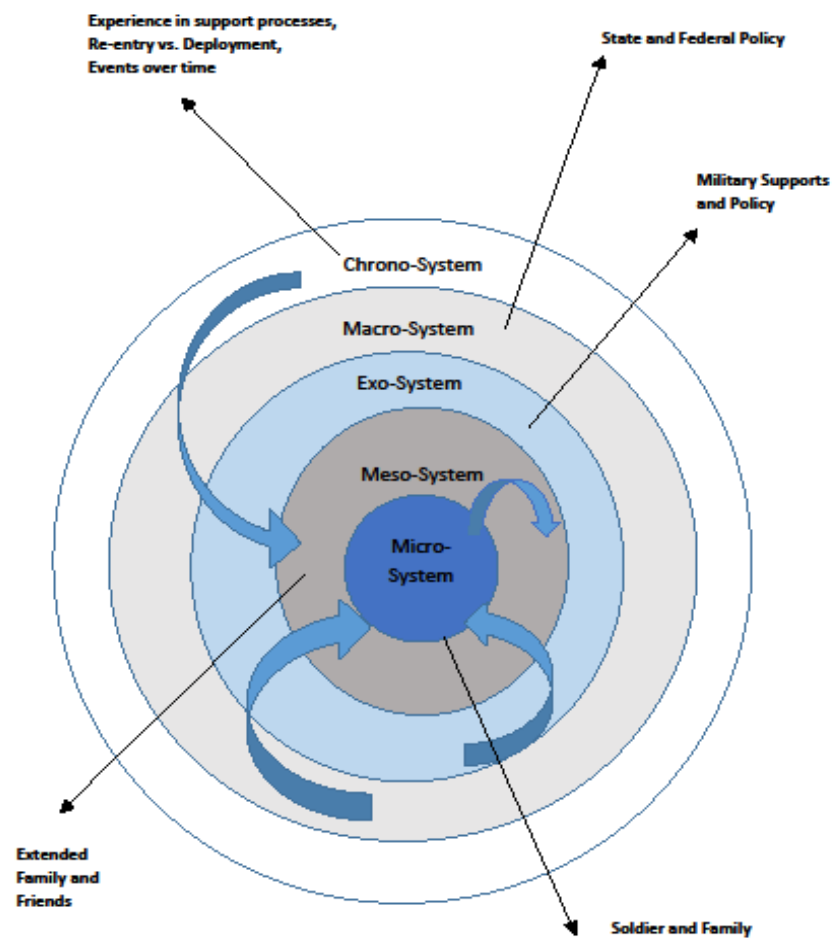
Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) first proposed the ecological theory of development in the 1970’s, suggesting that the interactions of an individual with others and the environment are key components in human development. Bronfenbrenner (1977) identified the types of environments

as the microsystem, the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) focus on ecological theory initially concentrated on children, theorizing that when relations between the different microsystems were compatible the development of the child progressed more smoothly than if there were disturbance among the systems. The family, which is identified in the microsystem, plays a key role in the developmental process, and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) focus evolved over the years in regards to the process of human development and the effects of the cultural context in which the individual exists. He asserted that more attention must be given by researchers to an individual's reaction in the environment as opposed to a lab setting, that the importance of time must be considered in the environment for human development and argued that research should be informed by social policy (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory of human development is a multilayered model, identifying transitions not only at the immediate environment level but also interactive at community and higher order

systems. In adapting the original model to reflect upon the impact of the various external systems that affect the military family (see Figure 1) the military family represents the microsystem, which is at the nucleus of the mesosystem (extended family and friends), exosystem (military supports and policy), macrosystem (community supports, state and federal policies) and the chronosystem (re-entry vs. deployment, events over time, and experience in the support process).



*Figure 1 : Interaction of external systems that affect the military family: An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's model.*

The interface of these systems and their interactions have an impact on the microsystem, affecting the family systems theory which addresses how each individual family adapts to the changes presented by deployment and reintegration. The responses of each case study are assessed in the framework of systems theory, social organization theory, and ecological theory. This approach provides a more expansive view for assessing our social readiness for military re-entry.

## **Chapter 4**

### **METHODS**

#### **Design of Study**

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach for gathering data. The qualitative interview guide (See Appendix A for the semi-structured interview procedure) was developed by the researcher with guidance from her graduate thesis committee members. The guide was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Delaware (See Appendix B). The interview guide employed open-ended interview questions which allowed the subjects to respond in a manner that permitted them to interpret the questions as applied to their own personal setting. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The qualitative research design focuses on the availability, accessibility, and understanding as experienced by the participants themselves. Open coding was employed, identifying the major categories which were revealed during the collection process. These categories were then reviewed in the process of axial coding which reviewed the categories for the conditions

and connections reviewed in the interviews for subcategories. This coding procedure supports the process of assessing the perception of military members and their families in regards to the openness and accessibility of supports in various communities. In addition, the procedure of open coding the data provided the opportunity to identify categories that are unique to military families (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Recruitment Sample**

The participants for this research were recruited using flyers which were distributed at meetings of the local Family Resource Group and posts on social media which described the research. Criteria for the participants included (1) being over the age of 18 and (2) having served in the military or being a spouse, parent or adult child of a soldier who had served in the past fourteen years. There were a total of six participants for this research which took place between June 1, 2015, and September 10, 2015.

## **Data Collection and Interview Procedure**

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews that were scheduled at the participants convenience and participants chose the day, time and location of the interview. Skype and phone interviews were also an option for participants. Participants were advised in advance that some of the questions may be considered sensitive in nature.

At the beginning of each interview, participants and the researcher reviewed the informed consent document (see Appendix C) and the researcher answered any questions, stating that the interview was strictly confidential, that the participant could refuse to answer any questions and that the participant could choose to withdraw from the interview at any time. Participants were given the option to be recorded to assure the accuracy of their response during the interview. Refusal to be recorded did not affect their eligibility to take part in the study. All reflections and consent forms were coded with knowledge of the identifying code known only to the participant and the researcher which was provided at the time of signature along with a copy of the consent form. Each participant was provided with a \$25.00 gift card to a local convenience store as an

incentive for participation. Interviews varied in time from forty-five minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. The researcher maintained a journal that documented the process of scheduling, methodology, and reflections to assist in keeping records of the participants, their reactions, and responses for reference purposes.

### **Data Analysis**

The research questions examined the participant's experiences with support groups and systems in deployment and reintegration through each of the following areas of support: (1) family, (2) friends, (3) military support systems and (4) community support systems. Included in the research guide were questions which helped develop the focus of the study: (a) What challenges have you and your family encountered during the re-entry process? (b) Did you find support in the community for the re-entry process? (c) Was the transition process manageable for you and your spouse? (d) Did you feel as if the support process "went away" after re-entry? (e) Are there any areas which have not been mentioned that you feel need to be considered in encouraging community support?

The process of data analysis was conducted by open coding the data as it was collected and identifying categories that emerged during the participants experiences with support systems during deployment and reintegration (Glaser, 1978: Strauss, 1987). Each interview was transcribed and read multiple times to distinguish concepts and significant statements about the participants' experiences in the re-entry process. Notes were made in a field journal (see Appendix D) and referenced to the categorical data which emerged in the coding process. Additionally, axial coding was used to compile the data in different ways to assist the process of connecting between categories and appreciate the conditions that affect a situation or category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The application of open coding and axial coding assisted in the manageability of the data. After numerous readings of each transcript, reviewing the field journals and applying the axial coding process, the researcher began splitting codes under four identified categories (obstacles in transition, lack of accessibility, marginalization and family support). Each category contains major themes which develop the reflections of the participants' situations and experiences of reintegration.

### **Validity and Reflexivity**

The participants were from diverse family backgrounds. This created a series of challenges with respect to coding and the interpretation of the data. The assistance of a colleague/peer provided an external check of the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the peer reviewer as a “devil’s advocate”; making inquiries about methods, meanings, and interpretations as well as assuring neutrality on the part of the researcher. In addition, the participants of the study were encouraged to participate in “member checking”, examining preliminary analysis of the researcher’s summary of that individual’s interview and providing “critical observations or interpretations” which reinforce the validation process of the research (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Field notes were documented at each meeting, documenting the personal and subjective responses. Qualitative research is strengthened in identifying the researcher’s past experience and discussing how these experiences may shape the results of the study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000). By allowing the participants to respond to the study in

their own words and focusing on their response assures that the data is reflective of those participating in the study (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The use of a reflective field journal--which kept notations on concepts and reflections made by the researcher pertaining to the interview, re-briefing, and reflexivity--strengthened the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Ethical Reflections**

With respect to the culture of military families and the vulnerability of the participants in this study, measures were taken to protect the privacy of the participants and their families. All participants were assured their identity would remain confidential and efforts were made to conceal the identity of the participants throughout the research, assigning an alpha/numeric code known only to the participant and the researcher. This method allows the researcher to quote dialogue from the interviews while maintaining confidentiality for the participant, as the researcher maintains sole access to the codes and the data gathered. All data that was collected during the study (digital recordings, journal notes

transcripts, reflexive entries and consent forms) were kept in a locked file cabinet within a locked office space in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies on the University of Delaware campus. The nature of qualitative research requires a focus on ethical maintenance to preserve an open line of communication and trust (Mauthner, Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002). This approach proved to be essential in securing participants for this study, as secrecy and buffering are typical practices in military culture.

### **Reciprocity**

Maiter, Simish, Jacobson and Wise (2008) argue that the principle and practice of reciprocity contribute to the quality of relationships, outcomes, knowledge, significance, and consequences of participatory research. Each participant in this study received a twenty-five dollar gift certificate to a local convenience store for their participation. It is of note that the participants of this study were unanimous in acknowledging their gratitude for being given an uncensored voice in this study.

## **Chapter 5**

### **RESULTS**

The results of this study cover four main areas of support identified in this research: family, community (church, school, local organizations), media (newspapers, television, and the internet), and institutional (government, military). Each support area is discussed as it pertains to the recurring themes that developed during coding of the interviews. This coding process considered the participants' perception and narrative of their experiences in the re-entry process. Key themes that developed during analysis were: (1) transition from military hierarchical process to civilian process creates obstacles in adaptation, (2) lack of accessibility is a barrier to support, (3) media and attitudes can create feelings of alienation and/or marginalization, (4) the value of family support and (5) the importance of having a voice in reporting concerns.

### **Obstacles in Adaptation from Military to Civilian Life**

The transition from military to civilian systems was a significant marker in the challenges for families during the re-entry process.

Participants in this study identified issues in maintaining marital satisfaction during the re-entry process while reestablishing their role in the family.

### **Reestablishing Roles and Responsibilities**

Participants identified issues in defining the roles assumed upon re-entry. Family members have taken on new roles in the family that the returning soldier may expect to resume; therefore the family members may experience a loss of autonomy after being “in control.” At the same time, the returning family member may be confused, threatened, or even upset about the management of the family issues (financial issues, external supports, etc.) during his or her absence. Changes in routine, discipline or privileges may be upsetting to the nuclear family, as well as in situations where extended family were involved in support during deployment

(Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011). The following participants discussed the complications incurred during their re-entry:

01589: What kind of challenges did you encounter during re-entry?

P01589: Oh man, it was tough. So ok, you're away for a year, so you come back and the kids didn't want to listen to you. I was struggling with asking things to be done, and they were basically ignoring me, not doing what I ask, things like that. I was getting mad and frustrated. Getting angry, you know. We went to Family Counseling.

I01589: Did you do that on your own or was it through a support system?

P01589: We originally went through Army One Source, they just give you so many free sessions and then we continued on our own.

I01589: So they limit the number of sessions you can have?

P01589: Yeah, so, I think it was five (sessions).

The adaptation process for families after deployment has grown as an area of concern with the OEF and OIF conflict due to the increase and length of deployments for military personnel, which creates greater stress and issues for many during reintegration. The military has increased the availability of counseling services provided to veterans and their families;

however, the type and availability vary from site to site (Institute of Medicine, 2010). The inconsistency of service among mental health facilities for veterans and their families creates frustration and discouragement.

The exposure to combat combined with the separation from spouse and family threatens the quality of marriage. One participant noted the frustration and sense of isolation he felt when returning home from combat:

I015824: What challenges have you and your family encountered during the re-entry process?

P015824: Re-entry was not easy, especially coming home after the second deployment because I was married then with a kid. I had some issues. It was a rough deployment. I thought I could put the stuff I saw over there in the past, but it sneaks back, you know what I mean? And when I left, my son was a baby and when I came back he was three and scared to death of me. I felt like I didn't belong with the two of them, I mean, we tried. But, man, she was frustrated because I didn't want to talk or go out much and I was frustrated because I felt like they were doing fine without me. We just went our different ways...I don't want to get into all of it. It was bad.

Returning military personnel and their families find it challenging to reorient to their spouse or partner and family members. Two participants spoke openly of the anger and anxiety they experienced:

P015623: The re-entry process was a major challenge. He was used to working 1-2 days and then having down time, playing video games, watching TV --he had access to all those things and coming home, he wasn't used to going to work or having a schedule. There were a lot of arguments. He couldn't adapt to the way we lived, the boys had changed, I had managed things, and he wasn't helping. His argument was, "I was told every day what to do, I want to do what I want to do"...there was no communication or discussion about how he felt.

Adaptation to the changes that take place upon the return upon from deployment is a process that can test family relationships, as evidenced by the story shared by this participant. The changes that evolve in the family and the soldier during deployment may affect the interactions of the family and their communication skills, as evidenced above. The participant went on to describe her feelings of the lack of adaptation:

P015623: You keep hoping it will go back to normal, and you find you are holding your breath waiting for the 'new normal'. It never came. That's one of the hidden things they don't tell people is the amount of divorce after deployment. There are lots of changes in them when they come back, and they have a hard time with the changes that have taken place at home. This and money, it causes problems and my husband just wanted to be left alone. So, we're getting divorced, and now I'm facing new challenges.

Changes which occur in family scheduling, lifestyle, child development, can be stressful for the returning military soldier. Equally stressful are the changes that may occur in the returning soldier to the military family. The lack of preparedness for required adjustments can escalate the issues incurred in reintegration. In the previous participants' discussion, we see that failure to adapt and communicate was accompanied by financial issues. Another participant reiterated similar issues with her husband's re-entry:

P015089: Well, the finance thing hit us hard, and then everyone was pissed and yelling and blaming each other...then it was a long time with the transition of him thinking he didn't have to do

anything; and you can't say "you didn't do anything" then, because that's not true, but I would have to clarify; "What I mean is, I'm not saying you didn't do anything the past year but you didn't take care of the house, you didn't shuttle the children, you didn't take care of sick kids, or get the principal's visit.."

The return of the military member requires reorganization in the family structure to accommodate reintegration. As this restructure process takes place, stress and conflict can result, as noted in the discussions of the previous participants. The confusion in altered roles, resentment, and financial concerns can create issues for military families in reestablishing the family roles and relational intimacy (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Four of the six participants in the study were divorced; attributing a partial cause to military deployment. One participant, a single mother, described her return from deployment:

P15095: Well, I'm not married but for me and my mom and the girls, it was tough. Especially because I thought the girls should be glad I was home and listen to me, but they haven't known me as a 'mom'. They relate more to my mom, their grandmother. So that's been tough. My mom is used to managing everything and she is ready for me to take over. When I returned from deployment that was rough. I wasn't

ready to get back in the routine of taking care of kids and housework. It might be easier when you come home to your wife or husband, but when you come home to your kids and your mom, well, (laughing) your mom doesn't really have a problem telling you to shape up!

It is noteworthy that this participant reflects that it “might be easier” to return home to a spouse as it reflects the diversity that exists in today's armed forces. Single military parents confront unique challenges with deployment in that they must leave their children in the care of individuals outside of their regular household requiring relocation for the child or establishing a new head of household in place of the deployed parent. The challenge for single as well as married service personnel returning home requires reconnecting with a different social support structure as they adjust from a military unit to the household and family (Institute of Medicine, 2010).

The process of reestablishing the roles of the military family requires communication, which is important at all levels in order to reacquaint, renegotiate and restore the roles and routines of the family. Problem-solving and decision-making abilities need to be reestablished

inside the nuclear family as well as with the support networks outside the family. This task requires careful negotiation, as the roles that were established before and during deployment now require further adjustment, disrupting the system that was established prior to the soldier's return home (Drummet, Coleman and Cable., 2003; Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid & Weiss, 2008; Sayers, 2011).

#### *Military culture and security*

Military culture trains soldiers to maintain security and stoicism, a practice that is carried over to the soldier's family. Secrecy or "buffering" may have been practiced during deployment by both the soldier and the family at home. In combat, the soldier often hides emotion or withholds classified information while his or her spouse may "buffer" or withhold information so as not to worry anyone (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011; Joseph & Affifi, 2010). This characteristic was identified in the sample as a barrier to pursuing assistance from community sources during deployment or re-entry. One participant described the hesitation felt in seeking support:

I015623: Were there any groups or forms of support from the community that assisted you during deployment or re-entry?

P015623: There weren't really any community supports that came forward. There is always the fear of "who's safe to talk to?" That is drilled into the family, so I didn't feel I could reach out to outside sources. Social media is frowned upon by the military for fear of security because times and dates could be revealed and it is a security concern.

Unfamiliarity with the military system can be a barrier to involvement in military supports and activities. One individual (a former military wife and military mother) talked about her lack of understanding of military procedure regarding her son's graduation from boot camp:

P01579: So, he signed up and he went off to boot camp, and I didn't realize that the graduation from boot camp, even though his dad, my ex, was in the military, was such a big deal. Nobody but my aunt, who had her husband and son in the military, encouraged me to go and see it. She told me "you need to go and see him, you need to go, you need to go." It was the best decision I could have made. No one but family told me that. No one reached out to me in the community or from the military during my husband and son's deployment. No one at all.

The entry into military service is accompanied with the directive of military culture and values which are to be accepted and understood by both the service member and his or her family members. Considering the lack of

contact and access that families endure during training and deployment, it is understandable that this individual was hesitant to travel to her son's ceremony and fortuitous that she was advised by family members who were cognizant of the importance of the event. As noted earlier, the OEF and OIF conflicts are staffed by volunteers, and it is appropriate to commend those who are willing to serve others even at their personal cost (Cook, 2004).

The issues surrounding the stigma associated with accessing mental health care prevents many service members from seeking help. In many cases, the family member may seek out support in dealing with the challenges of re-entry. This participant described the barriers experienced in seeking assistance after deployment:

P015623: There really wasn't much help with the problems we had with re-entry. The military is very hush-hush-it's like the "don't ask, don't tell" of how you feel about things. I tried to get help from the Army and I was told: "you can't use these services, you're not 'full service'." It's hard to get help about these things, there's a fear of getting into trouble, so lots of people don't bring these things up. I spoke to a JAG (Judge Advocate General) officer and was told, "...we're not here to serve you, we're here to serve them (the soldiers)".

There are multiple definitions of *family* in the DOD, which are bound by specific requirements. Military identification cards are issued to spouses and unmarried children of service members, yet circumstances such as stepchildren, grandparents, siblings and significant others are now taken into account as consideration must be given to the fact that only about half of military members are married in this conflict (US Department of Labor, 2009). Despite the adoption of a more inclusive definition of *family* in military policies, some family members do not receive supportive services or experience difficulty in obtaining support. In 2007, the DOD Task force on Mental Health reported that military family members are experiencing challenges in obtaining treatment for some psychological health problems due to gaps in provider networks (United States Army Medical Department, 2008). The fact that this participant is experiencing obstacles that were identified in a report nine years prior is indicative that issues have existed for a length of time and continue to prevent military members and their families' access to support.

### Lack of Knowledge

Military culture governs how members of the armed forces think, communicate and interact with one another and civilians. Each division of the military has a set of core values that is unique but all are unified in the qualities of honor, courage, loyalty, integrity and commitment (Exum & Coll, 2008; Exum, Coll & Weiss, 2011). The lifestyle of a military family is greatly affected by military culture. There are various programs established in each section of the military to aid families in preparing for deployment and reintegration. Military subjects who participated in the research talked about the connectivity between civilian and military systems in support:

P015824: Well, here's the thing. The military provides all kinds of training for soldiers and their wives and kids. My wife (ex) I don't think she really understood it all, and it was kind of scary...There was training there, but I just don't think she was ready to be a soldier's wife. Then (after they divorce) I got involved with (ex-girlfriend's name) and that all seemed good, but-well, it was part my fault, but I don't know how you get a person ready to face what you'll be dealing with. You have to be committed to it. I'm military. I don't think that the women I've been involved with understand that.

In a survey by SteelFisher, Zaslavsky and Blendon (2008) the most common adverse effects of deployment reported by military spouse and families were self-reported loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Some studies suggest that military spouses experience levels of distress and may develop mental anxiety or trauma as a result of their experienced before, during and after the service member's deployment (Mansfield, Kaufman, Marshall, Gaynes, Morrissey and Engel, 2010). Support systems for military families prior to, during and after the service members' deployment need to be acknowledged with the same emphasis as the military culture to strengthen the adaptive qualities of military families.

Understanding the bonds which develop during deployment between fellow service members is important to help service and family members reorient themselves to one another as their primary attachment partner. This participant describes the alliance he formed with fellow soldiers:

P01589: For me, when I was overseas...we (the soldiers) were all together, going through the same thing. We (soldiers) all had each other; talked to each other...basically we were all family. I still feel that way.

The military emphasizes the formation of trusting bonds between members of the same team; establishing a camaraderie that is cohesive and private in order to succeed in battle. This culture which fosters such strong camaraderie among soldiers can create a society that is psychologically detached from the civilian world.

P015095: I think that in the military you have two families, your family back home and then your military family. You get support from both families, and sometimes, you just get more involved in one than the other. I don't know, that's just how it seems with us.

Bowling and Sherman (2008) report that service members develop strong relationships with fellow service members while family members cope with deployment by relying on members of the community, other families who are experiencing deployment and children. After deployment, the inability to reconnect with one another often increases anxiety and stress at re-entry. Resources to assist family and the service member's adaptation from deployment to re-entry to civilian life are necessary and should be prioritized in importance as well as accessibility to avoid the confusion and frustration expressed by the participants.

### *Inefficacy in Formal Support Systems*

The structure of the military family has transitioned with the changes in society. Blended families and single parents encountered challenges with formal systems that were inefficient and created a barrier for families support.

I015089: Were there any organizations that were not helpful during deployment?

P015089: The Division of Child Support and Enforcement, which I have a major (expletive) bone to pick. I need to write a letter to (name of a political figure) about this. My husband was deploying that Monday, and we were to have his daughter that weekend. It was Mother's Day, and we would have dropped her off that Sunday. She (ex-wife) called the cops and, of course, it was a big scene, and the first thing she did was file for an increase in child support. I've been on both sides of child support, and I do not believe that Guard pay should be included in child support. It's not a second job, it is a duty to country.

Blended military families face complications involving child custody and financial support. Comprehending as well as navigating the processes of formal support systems is crucial to the function of military families. A 2009 study in the military community of Watertown, New York revealed a need for more caseworkers to address divorce and

custody issues in family court (Institute for Medicine, 2010). Although this study did not find research identifying a specific need for additional support in dealing with custody issues for military families in the state of Delaware it is evident by this participant that such support is necessary. In addition to determining custody issues, this participant went on to describe their issues regarding child support:

I05089: So, um, you feel that the Division of Child Support and Enforcement worked against the situation.

P015089: Yes, and because they supplemented my husband's income at work they 'double-dipped' on the child support. They were taking the same amount from both salaries (the Guard salary and the private employment salary), and Child Enforcement would not recognize my power of attorney. I had guardianship of my son (stepson, husband's son with another woman) so it was my husband and the birth mother who they (child enforcement) would recognize. The birth mother continued to receive child support from both checks. So my household income went down. I can't remember exactly how we fixed it. I may have called the JAG's (Judge Advocate General) office, I just don't remember.

The reduction of this military family's income is an example of the social and economic effects of deployment on families. Each branch of the armed forces provides support

programs that cover “family readiness” which includes counseling, trainings, and media on personal management. The case described in the above narrative is indicative of the increase in the number of blended family structures in the armed forces. This participant also related the custody issues encountered during her husband’s deployment:

I015089: So, you had your child and guardianship of your husband’s son and visitation with his daughter?

P015089: Yes, that was another ‘court’ thing when I filed for emergency custody of (son’s name) because the mother was in a substance abuse situation as well as a domestic abuse situation that involved (son’s name)...Because I am not (son’s name) biological parent I had to file for guardianship. ...So I had to file against my husband and his ex-girlfriend (child’s mother)...Because my husband was deployed, one of the laws that protects my husband protected him against being filed against, so we had to wait to have a court hearing....I realize its rules that protect the soldier, but it worked against us, and Delaware wasn’t prepared for those kind of things.

Divorced and blended families interact with agencies that oversee the laws of guardianship and child support. For military families, issues involving these matters are compounded when the parent/service member is deployed. The experiences described by participants illustrate the

inefficacy of support systems and the vulnerability felt by the participants. The OEF and OIF conflicts were entered with such acceleration it can be hypothesized that many support systems and agencies were not prepared for the issues they would face. Society's increase in blended families and child custody arrangements is represented in the composition of military families (Bowling & Sherman, 2008) and military and civilian supports were not prepared for how these societal changes would affect the armed forces in wartime. Another example of the lack of relevance in existing supports and agencies is identified in the reflection of this soldier (female) who talked about feeling as though courses and supports were not applicable to her as a single parent.

I01595: Were there any courses, resources or materials available that helped prepare you for this transition (to re-entry)?

P01595: My situation is different, but there really wasn't anything to help me prepare for the transition other than the basic stuff. It was couples oriented. I felt like it didn't apply to me. Looking back, I guess I should have looked at it differently. But for me anyway, going through the required re-entry courses and meetings, I just wanted to get them over with.

All service members returning from deployment are required to attend meetings and programs through their branch of service to transition

back to family life and living in their communities. As identified in the previous reflection, support processes that are generic do not always address the needs and concerns of the various family structures that make up military families, complicating the re-entry process and contributing to the obstacles in transitioning from military to civilian life. There has been little research conducted on the effects of combat operations and deployment on single parents and females. This participant's response indicates that there is a need for research in this area as well as amendments made to the current supports for this population serving in the armed forces.

### **Lack of Accessibility Creates Support Barriers**

A second theme that emerged in this study was the lack of accessibility the participants experienced in the process of obtaining support. Issues identified ranged from demographic accessibility to lack of understanding of training and the support process. One participant spoke of barriers that exist in the support process which inhibit involvement in identified supports such as the Family Readiness Group (FRG):

P015809: We tried and there were a whole lot of problems with that, because we couldn't make meetings down there (Sussex County), they couldn't make meetings up here (New

Castle County) so we tried it with two units and then there was this 'division', so it made it a little awkward, so we started having meetings in Smyrna (DE) and there were like, ten people.

Geographic distance is an issue for service members and their families in accessing supports and programs, particularly in rural areas. Research indicates that family members benefit from the camaraderie of others who understand military life (Saltzman, Beardslee, Woodward & Nash, 2011; Institute of Medicine, 2010). Distance and time away from home may prohibit participation in such support groups. This also applied to the participants' attempts to obtain mental health care:

P015809: I reached out to Military One Source (for counseling), and they gave me six free visits to a counselor that wasn't associated through them and it was a workplace counselor, so I wasn't even seeing someone who was associated with the military and knew what I was going through.

It is important that health care professionals are cognizant of the military culture and expectations that are incurred by service members and their families (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011). Studies with the DOD report an increase in the need for mental health care services for service members, their families, and children. (Institute of Medicine, 2010). There are some mental health services which are provided in the military; however, some individuals may require additional counseling and therapy that is referred to a professional outside the military organization. This individual also identified concerns with the Veteran's Administration and the accessibility of counseling appointments with her husband upon his return from deployment.

P015809: We've only been on one appointment, my husband has to miss a lot of work (for counseling) for those appointments because it is in the middle of the day. The appointment with me is at night...they offer nothing in the evening for my husband to keep his appointments (counseling and PTSD) and the couple's counselor is only there one night a week. You walk in and there is a dead hallway; there's no one there to tell you where to go. It's like a ghost town.

It is evident that the frustration created by this situation impacts the successful reintegration of military families-- disrupting work schedules, creating a reduction in salary, and taking both parents away from the children (which will require a babysitter and additional expense). It is also important to consider the environment provided for the appointment, which provides no direction and may trigger feelings of being “in combat”. The circumstance of military veterans and their families overcoming the stigma of “needing help” only to incur additional barriers is a serious concern. In order for the Veterans Administration to maintain effectiveness, it is critical that the resources and services provided to military veterans and their families be coordinated efficiently to meet their clients’ needs.

#### *Delivery of Information/Training*

Several participants reported feeling disadvantaged by the timing or method of the training and information, commenting on how a more efficient delivery method may have improved their re-entry experience. One participant described the steps taken prior to her husband’s

deployment and how the lack of experience and information affected them:

P015623: When we found out that my husband was being deployed, we paid off everything, closed our credit accounts and put our money toward positive things, like paying off the house. That was a big mistake, but there was no financial advisor to discuss what we should do until the debriefing. There was no financial advisor before deployment. We thought that we were doing the right thing, eliminating our debt, but our credit rating took a huge hit. That's been a big problem for us with the re-entry process. It's caused a lot of arguments.

Several participants identified similar problems in dealing with finances during deployment. The DOD reports that 48% of enlisted service members are under the age of 25 and inexperienced in financial planning and management, attracting payday lenders and other predators of military families. Each branch of the military has programs to assist the service member and his family prior to deployment; however service members and family members are not aware of all the programs available (Institute of Medicine, 2010). This was reflected by participants in the study:

P015824: We kept hearing about programs but I don't know where they were...if they existed we (my ex-wife mainly) didn't have access to them. I'm not saying the programs didn't exist but they sure as hell didn't go out of their way to make you aware that they existed or feel welcome.

Accessibility of support sites for military families is vital to ensure that they may find support and guidance to help them navigate the re-entry process. In 2009, a committee representing a study conducted by the IOM met with members of the Michigan, Indiana and Ohio National Guard to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by those serving in OEF/OIF conflicts. The committee learned that many programs and services offered are not well advertised and that many needing those services were not aware of their existence. The majority of participants in this case study, conducted seven years after the IOM study, noted frustration and difficulty regarding access to support systems, as this former military wife explained:

P015623: (paraphrase) A big problem was that there was no place to get solid info on the "do's and don'ts" for how to manage everyday things...

When considering the implications that exist for military families, the availability, and importance of support systems require effective communication as expressed by this individual:

P015809: There was nothing advertised and nothing (support offerings) that I hear about now...I don't think they're very transparent, and I don't think their (web)sites, like Army One Source, are user-friendly.

If returning military members and their family members do not have access to existing support systems or if they do not understand the importance of the support systems that exist they may be missing valuable resources that exist in community and formal support systems, as well as in the military process.

### **Media and Attitudes Create Marginalization**

A factor affecting public opinion of the OEF/OIF conflicts is the constant delivery of news and information through television and internet. Because of the increase in technology, the public can access an accounting of military activity and matters related to the war from various media

sources. The effects of media reporting were identified as a concern among military families in the study. All of the participants revealed negative experiences when discussing their experiences with the media and the community's attitude toward the military.

P015824: Are they (the media) supportive? Uh-no. There are some stories that really upset me. In Delaware, (pause) I just don't see a lot of support in the media.

Each participant had a strong reaction regarding the media's reporting of the OEF and OIF conflicts. Many elaborated on the direct effects the media had on their personal lives such as this participant:

P015623: It's hard, but he's (husband) still having a hard time adjusting to things (life). Things are really hard now because he's a cop. The media wasn't always positive when he was deployed and now, with everything going on with the police (re Baltimore, St. Louis) it's really bad for all of us...My kids were always worried that he would be killed when he was in the military and now the way things are...it's bad that their dad is a cop. Their friends at school tell them "You're dad's bad, cops are bad" or "Your dad kills people"...The media isn't fair to the military or policemen and their families. It really affects the kids.

For this participant, the media reports of police shootings in St. Louis, Missouri (2014, New York Times) and Baltimore, Maryland (2015, New York Times) negatively impacted family life as well as the husband's professional life. This example of the impact of the media creating additional stressors in military families is concerning considering the extent to which society is exposed to media reports. The reaction of other participants reflected their avoidance of media:

P01589: Well I don't speak to the media. I think the media only reports the bad stuff because that's what sells.

P015709: I had no involvement with the media. My opinion to that is that they exaggerate everything and for people who are sitting here with a kid over there, there are certain things...I realize they have to report this but no one asked me for interviews and I'm not a fan of the media.

Military families experience reintegration complications that are unique to the OEF/OIF conflicts (Sayers, 2011) which are compounded by the impact of the media. When reflecting on the reports of the media and how they were perceived by military service members, this participant

expressed his concerns regarding the media's reporting of the OEF/OIF conflicts:

P015824: Oh, I don't usually watch the news-I don't think they tell the whole story. I was very upset in the beginning-I mean, I'd see these people protesting and being interviewed saying "we don't belong over there." Well, let me tell you, I saw those places and they needed help. I was there.

The influence of the media on society regarding military efforts can be perceived negatively regarding military service members and their families, as the previous participant illustrates, causing them to shut out any reports by the media. This participant shared her perception of the media and how the presentation varies within the state:

P015089: In terms of media in the state of Delaware...the further south you go in Delaware, the more feel good stories there were on the news. So, there were a lot of personal stories in the news about families whose dad was deployed and how the farm is getting along without him. Or, here's some pictures of the guys at Christmas overseas while up here, *The News Journal* had nothing. It seems that the further south (in Delaware) you went, the local media was aware that we had soldiers over there and were supportive of them.

It is evident that the local media sources in Delaware vary among its three counties in public interest stories and reports of its citizens who serve in the military. Positive stories are encouraging to military members and their families, giving them a sense of purpose and affirming their role in society. The experiences and responses of the participants indicate a lack of trust in the media among the military families in this study. There is a perceived lack of concern on the part of the media regarding the military and their families, which can influence the willingness of military families to trust those supports existing outside the inner circle of military processes and their family support system.

#### *Marginalization in the Community*

Some of the participants reported occurrences of marginalization regarding experiences they had during deployment as well as re-entry. These events occurred in various settings in their community:

P015824: My mom and daughter went to an event one time where they were doing Christmas stockings for sending to

soldiers. I guess there were a lot of people there helping, and then (name of a political figure) came in with photographers and all she did was pose and they took her picture pretending to fill a stocking. Boy, were those ladies mad when that happened! Things like that, I mean, we know that a lot of those politicians use us for publicity, but my mama was mad!

P015095: My ex-girlfriend...she tried to get more involved with family groups who did things for us when we were overseas-she went to something that was packing for soldiers for holiday gifts, and she said it was really crowded at the beginning, because there was all these people who were, you know, politicians and big-wigs. They got their photo taken and disappeared. That was a turn off for her. When I heard about it, it made me wonder, is this all we are? I mean, sometimes I think politicians and the media, they just use us. I know that people come up and thank me when they see me in uniform, but when you hear stories like that, it makes you wonder.

The experiences shared by the previous participants exemplify actions which are perceived as ambivalence of politicians and legislators toward military personnel and their families. By employing events designed to support the troops for the purpose of campaign and public appearances, the political figures referenced in this study--whether intentional or not--convey a message of negativity and doubt regarding the

military effort to society. This participant shared her experience in dealing with negativity in organizing a fundraiser for military families:

P015089: When we were having a Beef and Beer for fundraising for military families that needed help, I was trying to get donations. Some people were like, “we’re not doing that!” I mean, these were people who would donate for school or the Brownies, but for our guys who were deployed, they were like-“Humph”...Southern Delaware, almost every store we asked gave us something, and I mean southern Delaware, not Dover, where they have an airbase and you would expect it.

Society’s perception of our armed forces is influenced by politicians and the media which, as exemplified by the previous participant’s response, has an impact on the support of the military and their families. Federal and state policies and programs have a direct effect on the military institution, the personnel, and their families (referenced earlier on page 11). As indicated above, support for service members and their families is perceived to be strongest in the southernmost section of Delaware.

### *Marginalization in School Settings*

Participants described the types of experiences their children have encountered in school as a military family member.

I015095: Can you tell me about the type of support you found in the school setting?

P015095: My “ex” told me that during my last deployment there were kids there telling my son that his dad was killing people in the war and that I might be killed. He was upset. She was upset. It didn’t seem like the school did anything positive to counter that type of talk.

Children are vulnerable to the challenges of deployment, experiencing a myriad of changes in their mental health (depression, anxiety, stress) while dealing with the absence of a parent (Chartrand, White, and Shope, 2008). Yellow Ribbon clubs and School Liaison Programs which are offered in many schools are a valuable support for military children. Another participant reiterated a similar concern:

P01589: It was like it didn’t exist. They didn’t acknowledge that my husband, my son’s father, was deployed. And I don’t know really, whose responsibility is that? Should I have gone to the school and say “Dad’s deployed”? They did know, but there was no extra special

“Yellow Ribbon Club”, which is what some schools have. None of my children’s schools had a support system for their dad’s deployment.

In this circumstance, the lack of the school’s programming for military children creates an environment that is uninformed of the stressors and circumstances the military child is experiencing, which affects the child’s relationship with peers and teachers. Civilian families are unacquainted with the expectations and culture of military families. This participant shared the experience of comments that involved both her and her daughter:

P015824: There have been times I’ve taken my daughter to school and I haven’t really cared for the things people have said or the way they’ve treated me. One day I had my fatigues on cause I was going to Ft. Dix after I dropped her off, and I could hear two of the parents complaining that it wasn’t appropriate for me to be there, that it might scare the kids. And my mom said that (daughter’s name) came home crying because kids told her that her mom was a soldier who kills people. Yes, I’m a soldier and yes, I’ve been involved in combat, but this isn’t the kind of thing schools should allow to happen.

Comments directed to a child or parent regarding the military may not be intentionally harmful, but they increase stress and affect the spirit of individuals who are already experiencing a great deal of pressure. The participants identified marginalization in other areas as well. One female soldier reported:

I015824: Were there any organizations or programs which you felt were not helpful during deployment?

P015824: My mom, she has strong opinions about that. She would take my daughter to events that were set up for military families, and she said that these things were o.k., but that people weren't very social and she thought it was because she was a grandmother taking care of my daughter. ...I guess there weren't too many grandparents taking care of their grandkids.

The composition of the military today includes single parents which require service members entrusting their children to a family member or guardian when the parent is deployed. By disregarding the grandmother and her grandchild, the group not only creates the sense of marginalization but it generates barriers that may prevent the grandmother from seeking out assistance should it be needed in the future.

Another participant reflected on the lack of support during her husband and son's deployment:

P015709: Even when I was married, and my husband at the time was in Desert Storm, they (the media) kept *talking* about help... I was an "at home" mom and when he got deployed, his salary from his job, everything got cut. I remember that they kept advertising on television that if you were really needing gas or whatever that there was help with different stations (directed to families of deployed personnel). So I pulled up to a station and told them my story and they said "sorry". I started to cry and told him, I'm doing this on my own and I don't have a lot of money and the man just said "sorry". So I wasn't aware of any support groups either time that was available, and since I'm kind of independent, I'm not sure that I would have sought one out with my son.

Interestingly, this participant's negative experience in seeking assistance during her husband's deployment was possibly a factor in not seeking any support during her son's deployment. As stated previously, there was no awareness of support groups for military families and all participants experienced feelings of disregard. The impact of marginalization of the military troops and families was echoed by the participants, who interpreted the actions as indifference to the efforts of the military and their families.

### **Military Families and External Supports**

Subjects identified forms of support outside the military, which enabled them to function more effectively in deployment and re-entry. The majority of participants relied on family members for emotional support, as illustrated by this participant:

P015095: I went to my uncle a lot--he was in the Gulf War, and he worried, because he had some bad comments made at him when he came back. It was tough. So, he kind of toughened me up. He was a big help when my wife and I split up.

The ability to communicate with an individual familiar with military protocol enabled this individual to discuss issues and concerns in a safe environment. Another participant's response reiterated this theme:

P015709: Family and friends were helpful. But I'm pretty independent, and I always had to keep busy, so that was part of my therapy...we were just very supportive of him and didn't expect anyone else to help us or support us.

The family was identified as the primary source for support by participants; friends and in one case, an employer (non-military) was identified. As indicated in previous research (Weiss et al, 2010), military culture sets the expectation for military families to be self-reliant and disciplined, which will predispose them to keep close to those with whom they may trust. There were some participants in the study who found support from additional sources:

P015623: (paraphrase) When I looked for support, I went to friends for emotional support and family for emergencies and child care. My employer was supportive. In the community, I only reached out to people who did understand what I was going through. There needed to be a safety factor, the military discourages expressing feelings to outsiders.

As reflected in the previous statement, the ability to reach out to those who understand the lifestyle of military families and maintain security is essential for soldiers and veterans and their families to seek out for a source of support. It is no wonder that military families remain close

knit as they remain true to the military culture, illustrated by this veteran's response:

P015089: My wife handled it all. She was the big support group back home-she handled everything.

One military wife commented on childcare support found through the 4-H Military Partnerships program for after school care.

P01589: I found out about 4-H. Now, my son probably could have come home and been by himself, but because of his ADHD we had an issue there. So he got free aftercare at (name of school) through 4-H.

The 4-H Military Partnership/Operation Military Kids (OMK) was developed by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and 4-H with the DOD, Office of Military Community and Family Policy, Army Child, Youth and School Services, Air Force Airman and Family Services and Navy Family Readiness as a support program for youth whose parents are serving in the military. Each state has a 4-H military liaison who helps

coordinate extension and military partnerships in the state (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016). In Delaware, the 4-H military partnership program provides a safe environment for children after school, as described in the previous comment, enabling military children to be cared for and enabling civilian parents to maintain employment. This program has been recognized as a model program of cooperation between Federal agencies and includes the participation of Land Grant Universities in program planning, implementation, and evaluation (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner 2009).

Support programs are vital for military families during deployment and re-entry. This case study shows that in instances of receiving support, as evidenced in the participant who acquired childcare through OMK, resilience is increased among military families. The study also reveals that obtaining support can be challenging, especially in the areas of health care, guardianship, and finances. The lack of familiarity with military procedure and state and federal regulations create complications that prevent military families from seeking assistance during deployment and in the transition to civilian life. Furthermore, the study cites incidents

which create feelings of alienation and marginalization among members of the military which increase the sense of isolation from society.

There are many military service members and their families who experience little--if any--issues with reintegration; however, it is important to remember that the nature of this conflict is unique; it employs sophisticated explosive mechanisms that cause physical, cognitive and psychological injuries. PTSD and post-combat depression are “unseen” injuries which may develop into adjustment issues if not addressed in a timely manner. The effects of PTSD and post-combat depression are attributed to the disruption of marriage and family life as well as creating negative interactions in the community or in employment. This study illuminates the issues of military veterans and families in the state of Delaware, revealing issues with access to health care and counseling.

Historically, society has seen the ramifications of unpreparedness for the return of soldiers, for instance, at the end of the Vietnam War. Suicide, in particular, was a concern, as Vietnam veterans who had PTSD continued to have an increased risk of suicide 30 years after service (Boscarino, 2006). With this in mind, the need for services and support for

service members and their families may be necessary until the year 2046 or longer, a fact that warrants an evaluation of our current state of preparedness.

The unique characteristics of the OEF/OIF conflicts have already made an impact on the service members, their families and communities with national reports of increased need for mental health professionals, increased deployments, and long wait times for health care. In a national study of readjustment needs for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, health related issues (mental health issues, combat injuries, suicide) as well as non-health-related problems (employment, financial hardships, family relationships, and domestic violence) were reported as primary issues for returning service members and their families (Institute of Medicine, 2010). This case study establishes that gaps exist in services that address both health related and non-health related concerns for Delaware military veterans and their families and affirms the need to build the state and community capacity to meet their needs as they acclimate back into society.

## **Chapter 6**

### **DISCUSSION**

The data suggested themes of adaptation, accessibility, marginalization and support during the re-entry process which revealed (a) the struggles of military veterans and their families with the adaptation to life after deployment, (b) the lack of accessibility for support from sources outside the military that is complicated by culture and bureaucracy, (c) military veterans and their family members feel alienated and marginalized, and (d) families are a vital source of support for Delaware military families. These subjects are critical when evaluating the re-entry process to understand the needs of military families and assessing the existing support systems. Military families who have increased access to re-entry support from sources other than the military system are better prepared to transition to civilian life.

### Theoretical Application

Three theories were employed in reviewing the relationship of military families and community support systems in the state of Delaware. The relevance of family systems theory was evident through the study in reflections of all six of the participants who identified a range of experiences identifying stressors that developed during deployment and re-entry. Participants also identified family support as a valuable asset in their ability to cope during deployment and re-entry and assisted in strengthening resilience and coping mechanisms. The interaction of the family members is important for the adaptation of the military family and can affect interaction within the community.

The nature of a community's social organization is critical in the framing of individual and family life. The influence of community on military families can have a strong impact on the success of their adaptation to deployment and re-entry events. Participants in the study affirmed that they were sometimes acknowledged by members of the community but overall, there was not a strong influence from the community in the form of support. The positive influence of community

on military families can foster a bridge to interaction among similar networks, expanding to formal networks and increasing the odds of making positive differences in communities (Mancini & Bowen, 2009). In considering Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems perspective, the bi-directional effects of the various systems are adapted to military families in Figure 1 (see page 24) and shows the importance of having support to assure a positive transition for soldiers and their families.

The lack of support for military families will result in less than favorable outcomes which impact all levels in the ecological model. Positive interactions within the ecological systems increase a military family's ability to adapt to life during and after deployment and transition into productive relationships at multiple levels which benefit community and society. However, the lack of support for military families will result in less than favorable outcomes which impact all levels in the ecological model. Positive interactions within the ecological systems increase a military family's ability to adapt to life during and after deployment and transition into productive relationships at multiple levels which benefit community and society. Nevertheless, the transition process can expose

barriers that exist through lack of knowledge, public perception, and culture, and highlight accessibility which challenges the success of re-entry for military families. One participant, when asked about support received from local organizations or groups responded by saying:

P10595: You know, I don't know of any clubs or groups that try to help or that I could ask for help. If you know of any I'd like a list! I mean, I'm not talking about the things on the website-they're ok but I mean, people who I can go talk to instead of sending an e-mail or calling. Like, I would love to go back to school, 'cause I think I'd be better at it now, but how do I go about it? As a single mom in the military, I think that it would be great to have some organizations in the community that help women in the military with kids. I take responsibility for my kids and my situation but some help would be nice.

The comments of this participant indicate that there is confusion about how to proceed in obtaining support at all levels of the ecological system. By expanding the flow of communication and support each level of the system would benefit by the matriculation of military service members and their families.

### Adaptation

The participants' lack of knowledge about what to expect upon re-entry was found to be a barrier in adapting to civilian life. Five participants identified marital and relationship stress during re-entry related to role establishment, finances, and communication. Three of the participants divorced after OEF/OIF deployment, identifying stress, lack of understanding of military systems, and inability to adapt as causes for the dissolution of their marriage. In a reflective session, one of the participants who had just received the divorce decree described the barriers that affected the marriage:

P-015623R: I never realized until deployment just how many people cheat. I mean, you never think about it before, but when the husband or wife is deployed, who are they going to be with. Knowing how many people it happened to, its mind blowing. When they come home, even though they think they are done with it, they generally go out and find someone else, because they have that pattern. Now that our divorce is final, and looking back I feel like his deployment set us up for divorce, it caused a detachment from us, because he's been trained to detach himself from situations when he is deployed and that is what I blame for this. When I take my sons to the counselor, it's obvious that the detachment has affected them and it started with deployment and it never got better.

Military culture was identified by the participants as an obstacle in adaptation for soldiers and military families. Maintaining confidentiality, secrecy and suppressing emotions during deployment can transfer to the family and was identified as a factor that prevented them from sharing concerns and communicating which subsequently prevents seeking out counseling or assistance. Service members and family members may find it difficult to reorient themselves to their spouse or primary partner and process their deployment experience. (Bowling and Sherman, 2008; Institute of Medicine, 2010).

Participants lacked knowledge in how to maneuver between civilian and military supports which created barriers in the re-entry process and prevented them from seeking assistance in adapting to civilian life. Lack of knowledge and understanding of support programs and procedures created confusion and frustration among the subjects who shared instances of being turned away by representatives of the military and the community. Formal support systems were especially challenging for single parents and blended families. The findings which emerged from this study revealed inefficacy among the support systems, a lack of

transparency for accessibility, and insufficient formats for varied family structures.

### *Accessibility of Support*

This study indicates that barriers exist in the accessibility of support to military families. Demographic accessibility is challenging for Delaware military families because many programs serve all three counties in the state, creating logistical issues for maintaining unity among the counties. Returning soldiers and their families participating in this study reported complications in accessing and scheduling appointments for the Veterans Administration or counseling sessions. Primary concerns revolve around the timing of appointments, which require the veterans and their family members to take time off from work or school in order to attend the medical appointment or counseling session. During a reflective session with one soldier with PTSD, it was shared that after being diagnosed with PTSD he was instructed to follow up with another appointment at a V.A. facility in Aberdeen Maryland, after which he was instructed to go to a V.A. facility in Philadelphia, PA. Requiring multiple

medical visits at locations outside of the state is frustrating and confusing for military families and potentially may generate further stress and anxiety for the re-entry process. Participants needing counseling services reported feelings of frustration regarding their experience with the services provided after being assigned to a workplace counselor who was unfamiliar with military family counseling. Counseling services for returning military and their family is an important provision in the adaptation to civilian life and attention is needed in accommodating the needs of veterans and their families.

Accessibility issues were compounded with inefficient methods of communication and delivery. Two of the participants experienced financial difficulties as a result of lack of financial guidance in the pre-deployment process. Soldiers and families who lack experience in economics would benefit from financial advisement prior to being deployed as well as at re-entry to avoid missteps in financial management.

The lack of knowledge of support systems combined with accessibility created frustration among all the participants who reported:

- 1) a need for websites that were easier to navigate, 2) more transparency

and communication regarding programs available, (3) programs which were offered at times that were convenient to a working family's schedule and (4) programs which applied to all family structures.

### *Respect and Marginalization*

The majority of participants in the study expressed concerns that the media negatively portrayed the activity of the United States military. Participants felt that the reports regarding military effort focused on negative and controversial stories and did not promote the positive and humanitarian efforts achieved during their deployment. One participant spoke of the humanitarian efforts that took place in Afghanistan which was not reported in the media:

P01589: They didn't report all the humanity type stuff we did. All the food, candy, clothes and toys we gave to the kids. We would go on missions, and we had 100 soccer balls sent over, we'd blow them up and throw them out to the kids. You never heard about that.

The media has a strong influence on the perception society has of the military; possessing ‘gatekeeping’ characteristics of the information it may provide. The subjects interviewed reported that they filtered their interaction with media sources to protect themselves from negativity. While filtering may protect military families from negativity, the researcher questions the effect that avoiding media sources could have in obstructing communication regarding available support groups, activities or legislation that will affect their lives.

Participants of the study also reported encounters in which they experienced feelings of marginalization in the community. Incidents involving politicians who used a “Stockings for Soldiers” drive as an opportunity for a photo shoot with the media affected veterans and their families with the impression that they were being “used” and expressed how these incidents made them feel unappreciated. Another example of the media and marginalization was given by participants who had school age children who experienced inadequate support in the school setting. Participants who reported these incidents resided in New Castle County. The overall account from participants was that media and community

support in Delaware was strongest in the southern part of the state. The sentiment of the participants in this study was that the media was a contributing factor in creating this behavior and that the local and national media were not balanced in the reports made about the activities of the war. This perception transferred to military families; particularly the children who encountered disturbing comments from their peers, as reported in the results section of this study.

Returning soldiers and their family members reported negative interaction with school and community support systems that did not acknowledge grandparents or uniformed female soldiers, which they perceived as indicating a lack of appreciation for those family structures existing in the military.

Family structure is a factor that provides unique challenges to all systems in society. In the case of military families, the participants in this study question the support process that currently exist in regards to adapting to the myriad of family structures that exist today. The composition of military families is not limited to nuclear family structure and may include single parents, divorced and blended family structures.

Participants commented on the training and events provided, with some indicating that their transition to civilian life may have been smoother had the training and support programs been applicable to their unique family. Special attention must be given in future military studies to adequately address the needs of the changing structure of military families.

Another area that must be considered for future support processes is that of gender. In 2013, the DOD reported that the total number of women serving in active duty (all branches) was 14.6%; the total number of women in the reserves was 19.5% and 15.5% of the National Guard was represented by women (DOD, 2013). Currently, women are barred from serving in combat specialties but they do serve in support positions which place them in positions alongside combat soldiers. Women in the military face unique stressors; military-related sexual harassment, assault and the resulting mental health outcomes; unique health care needs; pregnancy and post-partum period and family role configuration. (Nayback, 2008). This study revealed that military support programs were generic and “didn’t really apply” to single female parents. Consideration must be given to this growing population in the military for support.

### *The Value of Family Support*

The demands of the military system have a strong effect on the family system, bringing a strong level of influence on behavior and expectation of the military family members. Participants identified the family as their primary source of support during deployment and re-entry, citing examples of assistance with childcare, household maintenance, financial and emotional support which provided them with the resilience to maintain their lives during and after deployment. The results of this study indicate that family support was the strongest form of support for the participants in maintaining a sense of “normalcy” during the transitions during and after deployment. In consideration of the changing structure of the military family, it is important that support processes be studied and revised to include all family structures. Furthermore, it is important that military veterans and families are accommodated in programs that they feel are secure and help with the transition to reintegration to civilian life. As one participant commented:

P015623: We all feel like our hands are tied, in different ways. I mean, our life is not normal to other people, and so, people don't really know how to react and if you don't find someone who is military then you can't talk about what's going on, people can't relate to it because it's not normal to them but it is to us.

This is a strong statement that reflects the community's lack of knowledge of military families as well as the lack of access to supports that exist in the Delaware community and the impact it has on our society.

## **Chapter 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this project indicate the following: (a) military veterans and their families may lack knowledge about available support and assistance; (b) unfamiliarity of military culture creates problems at multiple levels of the micro-system (c) military veterans and family members are dissatisfied with the availability and access to support processes, and with state and local bureaucracies that have not adapted to the needs of military families; (d) military families and veterans feel marginalized by political figures and the media (particularly in New Castle County); and (e) military families and veterans need different types of support (e.g. emotional, financial, career, procedural) that apply to varying family structures.

Overall, the findings indicate a need to improve the types of resources that are provided to soldiers and their families in Delaware's military and community setting. In conjunction with this is the need to expand the methods of communicating as well as making accessible the

resources available for veterans and their families. The combination of effective outreach with coordinated publicity may succeed in opening doors for the military and civilian culture to work together in reintegration.

Media networks and personnel need to be thoughtful in statements made regarding military personnel and review their approach in reporting military activities, to ensure that soldiers and their families are treated fairly. Politicians and legislators should be equally sensitive in their actions and comments when participating in military outreach events and focus on spending more time assimilating with military members and their families. The actions of media and political figures have an impact on the perception that local, state and federal organizations may form of military activities. It is important to understand how perceived negativity or ambivalence transfer to soldiers and military families, particularly in school settings, where it is evident that training is needed to improve the relationship with military families.

The range of support structures provided for returning soldiers and their families need to be reviewed and enhanced to meet the challenges of the changing structure of military families. Single and divorced parents

and blended family members reported that the military support training offered were not applicable to their particular family structures. Married couples reported issues in the timing and topics of support training offered by the military. With respect to resources outside of the military, improvement is needed in this area, with the understanding that the resources made available to returning soldiers and their families will impact their re-entry process as well as their assimilation into society through the interrelation of the family, community, and ecological systems. Areas of concern are school and community programs that provide a safe space for military children as well as training for teachers and administrators regarding the intervention of any behavior that alienates or downgrades military families.

Delaware has an active extension office that supports military programs as revealed in one participant's interview, however, the breadth of the program was not revealed in the study, which indicates that it may possibly need an improved campaign to make families and the public aware of its mission.

It is worth noting that each branch of the military provides support to service members and their families that address preparation for deployment and reintegration including legal (preparing wills, establishing power of attorney) and financial matters, healthcare and insurance (life, home and auto), as well as emergency preparedness and addressing family matters, such as notifying school or daycare about deployments (Institute of Medicine, 2010). Despite the training programs of the various military branches, some participants indicated that trainings did not apply to their family situation while other participants felt that timing and delivery of the trainings were not effective. The Department of Defense reported that approximately 48% of enlisted service members are under the age of 25 (Department of Defense, 2007), which suggests that lack of experience in matters of finance or family may inhibit the attention given such programs. This may warrant a revision in future trainings for service members and their families, with focus given to family structure as well as age and experience of the individuals to assure that the information conveyed is not deterred by inexperience. Consideration should be given to the secrecy and stoicism of military culture which may impede service members and their families in seeking help in these situations. In

consideration of the age of military forces combined with the influence of military culture, it may be worthwhile to modify the established trainings and tailor the message to the experience, knowledge and structure of military personnel and their families.

### **Limitations**

The results of this study are applicable to returning soldiers and military families living in the state of Delaware. Eight participants responded to the request for participants and six completed the consent process and interviews. Each of Delaware's three counties is evenly represented in the study with 2 participants from each county.

### **Areas for Future Studies**

An interesting aspect of this research was the positive reaction of the subjects upon learning that they would be participating in a qualitative survey and responding in their own words. Previous surveys they had participated in were typically quantitative and in the form of grid sheets.

Quoting one participant; "...how do you get this across when you're given a paper with circles to fill in?" To quote another participant: "It's so nice to be able to say what I really think instead of filling out a grid sheet". Such comments give an indication that the concerns of military families may not be adequately expressed in quantitative surveys.

In order to address the concerns of reintegration in society, further research is needed to approach the issues of re-entry in greater depth to determine how we can successfully support the range of needs that exist in today's military family structure. Future qualitative research would be beneficial in expanding the reach of the study to other qualified subjects for insight into the areas of concern identified in this study with the OEF/OIF conflict such as assessing physical and mental health needs, evaluating the effects of multiple deployments, examining the scope of psychiatric and psychological effects on veterans and their families, assessing gender specific needs and concerns of service members and veterans, and evaluating the needs and concerns of children of members of the armed forces.

Future follow-up studies with the subjects of this study may be beneficial, evaluating their progress in reintegration as well as the support systems, both military and community, to see if improvements in accessibility and adaptation are being made: Are returning military veterans and their families provided health care and counseling in a timely and efficient manner? Are military children provided resources for support in schools? Are school personnel sensitive to the stressors of military families? Do higher education institutions provide support for military veterans? Does marginalization occur at support gatherings or in the media? Have the current support programs adapted to the needs of military family structure?

Interacting with the participants of this study through a qualitative approach formed a strong connection that was based on trust, empathy, and understanding. In giving these service members and military family members an opportunity to be heard, they have provided insight into the issues military veterans and their families have dealt with in the OEF/OIF conflict which, at this writing, has not ended. The participants in this study furthered the understanding of the effects of the OEF/OIF conflict; the

impact of multiple deployments; the effects on marriage and family relationships, and how the media, politicians, and members of the community marginalize and diminish their role in different ways. As a result, their responses provide insights that may enlighten the Delaware community and policy makers regarding support systems needed to assist Delaware military veterans and their families.

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## **Appendix A**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Hello. Thank you for making time to meet and talk with me today. My name is Tammy Salzbrenner and I am interviewing military families who have experienced deployment and reintegration. I am gathering this data to identify areas where our communities are supportive as well as detect areas that need improvement in supporting returning military and their families. I want to know about the experiences you and your family has had during re-entry. In particular, I would like to discuss the assistance you received from members and organizations of your community; how you feel you were accepted and assisted by people or groups you encounter as well as support systems in your area which you find helpful. Let me begin by sharing some of my experiences and why I am interested in this study. As a young girl I recall my grandfather re-telling of his grandfather's stories from serving in the Civil War. Five of my six uncles served in the military, one was shot down in WWII and killed, and my father served in Korea. Many of my cousins served in Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Iraq. At 12 years old, I experienced the joy and relief when my cousin Bill returned from Vietnam, and I remember all too well the change in the older boys in the neighborhood who were able to return home from that war. Over the years, I learned from my grandmother and aunts about the changes that took place in my father after his return from Korea (probable PTSD or post-war anxiety) as well as the despair that my grandmother experienced on losing her son in WWII and how it affected the dynamics and experiences of the entire family, particularly my mother who was 6 at the time of his death. My family history, along with personal observations and involvement with military families has increased my awareness of the importance of community support in conjunction with the organized support of the military organization and family support. I recognize that there are varying needs and experiences for military

families, and I want to learn from you what your experiences have been in order to better comprehend the support systems that you have employed in the re-entry process.

### **Demographic Questions**

1. Would you tell me about yourself?
2. How many people are in your household that you and your spouse/partner are responsible for or can be considered dependents?
3. How long have you or your spouse/significant other, been involved with the military?

### **Deployment Support Questions**

1. Tell me about any support groups you found helpful during deployment.
2. Were there any organizations or programs which you felt were not helpful during deployment?
3. When you found times that you needed support or advice, who did you turn to first?
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Military support systems (Family Resource Center, Military One Source, etc.)
  - Community Supports

### **Reintegration Support Questions**

1. What challenges have you and your family encountered during the re-entry process?

2. Did you find support in the community for the re-entry process?
  - a. Were there any community groups or individuals that reached out to assist you in the re-entry transition?
3. Was the transition process manageable for you and your spouse?
  - a. Were any courses, resources or materials available that helped prepare you for this transition?
4. Did you feel as if the support process “went away” after re-entry?
5. Tell me about the support or lack of support you have found in the following areas:
  - Schools
  - Churches
  - Youth athletic programs
  - After school activities
  - Employment
  - Media
  - Local organizations or groups
6. Are there any areas which have not been mentioned that you feel need to be considered in encouraging community support?
7. Do you know of any other military families who would like to participate?

Thank you for your time and participation in this study. I appreciate your sharing your experiences as I believe your participation will be valuable to this research.

## Appendix B

### IRB Letter



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hulihan Hall  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551  
Ph: 302/831-2136  
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: May 11, 2015

TO: Tamara Salzbrenner, MS  
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [751947-1] Military Families Perception of Community Support Systems in Delaware: A Case Study

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: May 11, 2015  
EXPIRATION DATE: May 10, 2016  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (6,7)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or [nicolefm@udel.edu](mailto:nicolefm@udel.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Halliher Hall  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551  
Ph: 302/831-2136  
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: April 13, 2016

TO: Tamara Salzbrenner, MS  
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [751947-2] Military Families Perception of Community Support Systems in Delaware: A Case Study

SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: Approved for Data Analysis Only

APPROVAL DATE: April 13, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: May 10, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (6,7)

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

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## **Appendix C**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

**Title of study:** Military Families Perception of Community Support in Delaware: A Case Study

**Principal investigator:** Tamara Salzbrenner.

**Institute:** Department of Human Development and Family Studies,  
University of Delaware

#### **Introduction:**

I am Tamara Salzbrenner from the Department of Human Development and Family Studies and I am researching military families and how they feel about the effectiveness and accessibility of community support systems in the State of Delaware. I invite you to join in this study.

#### **Purpose of this research study**

This study will provide input to the community organizers and policy makers regarding military families' perception of the supports that exist in the state of Delaware. The study will provide an evaluation of existing supports and identify areas that require improvement.

#### **Procedures**

In this study you will be asked questions about your families reintegration experiences, the changes that you have experienced, organizations or support systems you have used to assist in the re-entry process, and what you think is/or would be helpful. It is estimated that the interview will take approximately an hour of your time.

**Possible risks or benefits**

There are no perceived risks to this study. A direct benefit of this study is having the opportunity to share your experiences and have your voice heard. The results of this study will contribute to academic literature regarding military families after their enlisted family member has returned home from service.

**Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal**

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate without any repercussions. You may also withdraw any time from the study, and you may also opt to not be contacted in the future. You may refuse to answer some or all of the questions asked. Audio recording equipment will be available to record the interview (for research purposes only, all recordings will be destroyed after the study is complete). You may refuse to be recorded and still participate in the interview process.

**Confidentiality**

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Nobody except the principal investigator will have an access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time. The data collected from the interviews may be published in an academic journal and elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your identity.

**Contact Information:**

If you have any further questions you may contact:  
Tamara Salzbrenner  
Department of Human Development and Family Studies  
University of Delaware  
tsalz@udel.edu 302-831-1011

**AUTHORIZATION**

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away from my ability to stop participating at any point in time.

Participant's Name:

Date:

Participant's Signature :

Date:

Principal Investigator's Signature:

Date

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree \_\_\_\_\_ refuse to have the interview recorded on audio tape.

Participants Initial and Date : \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**REFLECTIVE/FIELD JOURNAL TEMPLATE**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Concepts:**

Acceptance in the community
Bureaucracy
Daily life and re-entry
Education
Empathy
Family relations
Hopes/future goals
Media

Policies and their effect
Social support: able to relate/trust others outside of military?
Transparency of support
Value of community support vs. Intent
<b>Reflections:</b>