

THE REINTEGRATION OF MILITARY FAMILIES FOLLOWING LONG TERM SEPARATION

by

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## ABSTRACT

The requirements of an effective and modern military force frequently result in military personnel being separated from their families for extended periods of time. Today's specialized work force and dual income family structures also demand family separations. Such separations change family dynamics and functions. Although stressed, most families eventually adjust, only to face even more challenges once the family reunites. Experiencing such new stressors can create negative effects for the family in their long term functioning and integration. In turn, such difficulties present obstacles to corporate and military retention, readiness, and performance rates.

Set within the framework of Hamilton McCubbin's Double ABCX Family Stress Theory, this study replicated earlier findings that stressors, resources and family appraisal interacted to determine the family outcome of reintegration. These findings were based on the analysis of 85 written surveys and six in-depth interviews. Instruments of measurement included the Family Satisfaction Scale which assessed family functioning and the dependent variable reintegration; the Family Changes and Strains Scale which measured stressors; and the Family Coping Scale and a resources scale which measured support. Using correlation co-efficient and regression analysis, stressors were found to be the most significant factor determining the outcomes that families experience. Appraisals, the beliefs that families hold regarding military lifestyle and separations, also were found to be important to family outcomes and improved retention in the military. Data from interviews further explained this phenomenon and confirmed the results of the quantitative data.

While this study's findings may be limited due an over-representation of families who hold positive views of the military, both military and community social workers can use these findings to develop cognitive behavioral interventions to reduce the impact of stressors during separation and reunion. This will ultimately improve the outcome of family reintegration. Further research to identify effective resources that assist families through separation and reunion is required. Military policy must also address the frequency and length of separations to minimize the

stressors that families face. Policy that adds resources or entitlements to assist families during separation may also be helpful.

## DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: [REDACTED] thanks for being my partner and supporting me to fulfill this dream; and to our children [REDACTED], thanks for teaching me to celebrate the small things in life and to live life to its fullest every day. Despite multiple separations and the demands of the military, I am grateful for your patience and for each day that we spend together as a family. Without the love and support of the three of you, I would not be able to continue my military service. Thanks to each of you for keeping the faith and making the best of each situation. I am also thankful to my parents, [REDACTED] who taught me discipline and perseverance in pursuing any goal. And finally, my appreciation extends to Patricia Hiaeshutter and Donald Gober, whose consistent encouragement not only supported me, but also greatly benefited your grandchildren.

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While this dissertation represents the views of the author and not the official view of the United States government or the United States Air Force, this dissertation is dedicated to military families who serve for the freedom of all Americans and others around the world. Although no immediate changes in military culture may result from this work, this dissertation is a small token of appreciation to acknowledge the sacrifices that all military members and their families make.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Problem Statement

The requirements of an effective and modern military force frequently result in military personnel being separated from their families for extended periods of time. Separations not only involve physical distances but also force the family, including spouses and children, to make adjustments that involve changes in family dynamics and family functions. These changes place stress on all members of the family. While most families eventually adjust, they face demands for even more changes once the family reunites. Experiencing such new stressors can create negative effects for the family. These in turn present obstacles to the military's ability to retain highly competent professionals through re-enlistment and to ensure that the military force is prepared and ready to serve the country.

This study attempts to identify the initial impact of separation on family well-being and how this can affect the family when reunification occurs and additional stressors rise. The assumption is that, for many families, reunion problems begin with stressors first experienced in the separation phase and the ways the family dealt with those problems. Other factors such as the family's resources and the family's appraisal of the separation and reunion also contribute to the family's reintegration process. Together this interactive model falls within the scheme of Hamilton McCubbin's T-Double ABCX Family Stress Theory, which provides the framework for this study; the concepts of this theory can be tested by quantitative measures. In-depth interviews with a small number of families will expand understanding of the reintegration process.

#### *The Impact of Separation on Military Members, Spouses, Children and Family Units*

In starting our examination of reintegration, the family faces its first stressor: separation. Military families face the reality that assignments may separate their families frequently, with little warning, and that may result in their loved ones being placed in grave danger (Eastman, Archer & Ball 1990). The military deploys and assigns active duty personnel around the world in support of combat, humanitarian, peacekeeping and training missions. As reported in a study conducted in 1992, half of all Air Force families experience separation in any 12-month period; the average length for enlisted personnel extends over four months (Caliber Associates 1992). Some military

call-ups of units occur involuntarily; the services of the men and women of a particular specialty from a specific location are required to meet the demands of training, combat or other missions. At other times, individuals volunteer for missions to fulfill their duty obligation or to improve their opportunities for rewards in assignment locations, improved control over the mission timing or location, or for other benefits. Families often participate in making such decisions that result in service members applying for assignments or deployment missions that may require separation from the family.

Recently, the need for the number of military family separations has increased due to the war on terrorism and the reduction in active duty forces. For example, the demand for forward deployed Air Force support increased from an average of 11,437 active duty members serving in temporary duty capacities away from their home bases monthly during fiscal year 2001 to an average of 25,178 serving away in fiscal year 2002 (Air Force Personnel Center 2002). This increase of an average of almost 14,000 active Air Force troops represents just a small portion of the total forces currently deployed around the world. Since the end of the Cold War, when the United States changed from being seen by the United Nations as a partisan weight against another super-power, the use of our forces overseas has increased for peacekeeping missions by 300% (Segal & Segal 1999). Despite these international demands, the number of active duty forces decreased by one-third during the same period of history.

In addition to family separations caused by the above described situations of deployments or other short military operations, military members may also be assigned for one-year durations to isolated locations due to the danger or the lack of family facilities at such bases. Such locations include South Korea, Turkey, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and others. The military community defines such assignments as "remotes". Remote assignments differ from deployments because the active duty member no longer administratively belongs to the unit where his or her family remains, but rather he or she is reassigned to an overseas location. For families, this results in the emotional loss of their loved one, as well as their loss of an intermediary attachment force to the military and its services (Caliber Associates 1992). Often

families consider relocating during a remote to gain access to extended family support, however, no financial support exists for families wishing to relocate prior to or during the remote assignment. To further complicate matters, the active duty member is not guaranteed return to that assignment location; in fact, families often relocate following the completion of the remote assignment. Typically, Air Force leadership expects military members to complete a minimum of one remote assignment in their career to progress in rank. However, these long-term remote assignments affect enlisted families more than officer families since officers more readily have the option to bring their families along (Segal & Harris 1993).

This first set of factors impacts how families cope with separation: the type of mission the active duty member serves, whether peace time or war, the expected length of the separation, the rank of the person deploying and the amount of notice given prior to the separation. These circumstances set the tone for the remainder of the separation experience. Next comes the way individual family members respond to separation.

#### *Stressors Associated with Separation as Experienced by the Active Duty Member*

Service members separated from their families face mixed feelings of pride and fulfillment of serving out their military commitment while at the same time feeling guilt, shame and loss over leaving family (Caliber Associates 1992). For some active duty members, separations translate to the opportunity to travel and see the world as promised by their recruiters and as attracted them to join the Air Force originally. However, military missions do not afford luxury world travel arrangements. Whether during peacetime or war, service members cite boredom as a common source of stress when deployed away from home for extended periods of time (Bell, Schumm, Knott, & Ender 1999). Field studies done by army psychologists during peacekeeping missions confirm this finding and identify additional stressors for the separated service member to include: concern for family at home, isolation, loneliness, hazardous environments, long work hours, extreme environmental conditions prohibiting normal physical conditioning and sleeping routine, loss of educational opportunities, and mission ambiguity (Bartone 1996). Mission ambiguity may determine how well the member responds to separation "when the sacrifice (of the separation

from loved ones) cannot be offset by meaningful daily work activities and an associated belief in the importance of the mission, increasing frustration, bitterness and depression can result" (p. 5). Members may report feelings of anger and depression accompanied by worry and guilt of their families back home.

Other studies of deployed service members confirm these findings and demonstrate higher rates of substance use, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of sleep, increased sick days and depressive symptoms (Federman, Bray & Kroutil 2000; Adler, Dolan, Bienvenu & Castro 2000; Castro 1998). Service members, who are exposed to traumatic events despite missions occurring during times of peace, fall prey to such symptoms particularly. For deployed Army troops reporting negative mental health outcomes during deployments, symptoms increased as the length of the deployments extended. Poor mental health outcomes become noteworthy after approximately six months of deployment. Such findings supported Army policy that set deployment tours to Bosnia at 4-6 months.

Gulf War veterans also attributed some of the stress related illnesses that they suffered during separation to lack of contact with home, dissolution of marriages, concerns for sick family members or problems being reported from home (Nisenbaum, Barrett, Reyes, & Reeves 2000). This reiterates that while combat and exposure to traumatic events negatively impacts people, one cannot discount the importance of communication with family and social support to service members while they are separated. Regardless of the environmental conditions, when concerned about factors at home, members feel stress and suffer symptoms related to that stress.

#### *Stressors Associated with Separation as Experienced by Military Spouses*

Although the service members are the ones actually separated from the home, changes also occur amongst family members left behind. Spouses left to manage the household during a military induced separation face many career and child rearing choices. They may experience depression, anxiety, anger, physical symptoms, sexual dysfunction, problems with home and car maintenance, loss of social relationships and loss of personal and family security (Caliber

Associates 1992; Segal & Harris 1993). They may put their personal goals on hold until additional emotional, physical and social support can return. The secrecy of military missions may also compound fears, anxieties and anger of military families during separations (Norwood, Fullerton & Hagen 1996). In some cases, spouses may actually experience the separation by grieving - similar to the process one undergoes following the death of one's spouse (Black 1993). Such a grief reaction may include the stages of 1) shock or denial that happens before separation, 2) anger that occurs at the time of departure, 3) guilt that comes after experiencing the anger and attempts to overcome the anger, 4) depression and loneliness that follows the separation, and 5) the tension, crying, irritability, insomnia, despair and withdrawal that also may occur once the spouse fully realizes that they are alone.

The developmental stages of families affect how families cope, particularly in regards to whether or not couples have children. Although the presence of children often correlates with an increased length of the marital relationship, this is not necessarily true. However, children do often stabilize marital relationships and offer motivation to keep couples together (Medway, Davis, Cafferty, Chappel & O'Hearn 1995). While spouses with children face the disadvantage of managing their own feelings as well as those of their children, spouses without children may experience more separation distress if their attachment to their separated spouse is insecure. Such childless families and often new marital relationships may not have the emotional buffer that children may bring.

During the Gulf War, parents, who were left by their active duty husbands to care for their children, found children to be both a challenge and a positive presence (Caliber Associates 1992). While spouses faced the emotional drain of daily routines in caring for the needs of children, they also enjoyed the companionship of their children and thrived on the purpose they felt from their roles as parents. Mothers who adapted well to past separations offered the greatest resource to children during the separation. In this sense, children brought mothers both hardship and good, while prior positive experience with separations helped mothers better adapt to later times of family separation.

### *Family Stressors of Separation during War*

Although the above example demonstrates the response of parents during separation, it also introduces an additional factor: war. Wartime conditions pose additional stress for families during separation. Such families may not reach stability as suggested in the traditional stages of the deployment cycle, but rather families during war may maintain feelings of disorganization, sadness and despair (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger 1994). This redefines separation as more than a normal stressor; instead it rates at a catastrophic level and requires families to respond differently than during times of peace and routine military separation cycles. During combat, service members face hazardous duties while families can only imagine what dangers their loved ones confront. Danger, destruction, exposure to violence and the possibility of death present realities unfamiliar to normal living conditions. Whether actually experienced or not, the anticipation of trauma forces families to remain at a heightened state of anxiety and fear. With little time to prepare, little or no prior experience, a decreased sense of control and little guidance from others who also experienced such trauma, hostile deployment conditions strain families. Such conditions result in families experiencing residual aggression, manic episodes and confused emotions.

In attempts to stay connected with their loved ones, families attempt communications from many sources. News from rumors, the media or military channels contribute to the intensity of emotions when uncertainty regarding the safety of loved ones is unknown. Such families may not achieve a normal pattern or level of functioning while the service member remains in combat zones. Mothers, who became absorbed in watching the media coverage of military missions such as Operation Just Cause and the Gulf War, not only exposed their children to the images of war, they also removed themselves emotionally from their children (Norwood et al. 1996; Jensen & Shaw 1996). Seeing active bombings, combat and living conditions of military forces in the war zone actually increased their sadness and anxiety. Some parents reported obsessions with getting news accounts; and when viewing missile strikes, spouses often assumed the worst for their loved ones. Due to the rumors and speculation that media coverage brings to warfare,



officials rapidly notified families of war casualties causing some errors and additional undue trauma. Although the impact of media exposure on children is unknown, it has triggered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders in some adults previously exposed to war. Ultimately, accurate and timely information from official military sources about operations and the welfare of troops reduces a great amount of stress for families during war.

*Stressors Associated with Separation as Experienced by Children*

In regards to the consequences of parental separation from children due to military service, many children act out behaviorally, report an increase of their physical symptoms and report an increase of their anxiety and depressive feelings (Applewhite & Mays 1996; Blount, Curry, & Lubin 1992). Up to 41% of families experience moderate troubles with their children due to separations (Segal & Harris 1993). In spite of these potential problems, the gender of the separated parent does not necessarily determine the outcomes for children. Although some argue that women traditionally hold the primary care giving roles in parenting (Kelley et al. 2001a), studies show that mothers being away from their children may not cause any additional hardship for children compared to having fathers absent from their children (Applewhite & Mays 1996; Applewhite 1995). The extent to which children experience negative effects however can be associated with the length of the separation, the amount of communication the child has with the absent parent and the maintenance of a responsive and available parent figure on the home front. Weekly communication with the absent parent may specifically improve the child's ability to express feelings and handle demands. It may also improve the child's physical health and his or her ability to learn. Consistent communication with the absent parent also improves children's ability of self-control, peer relationships, relationships with other adults and the overall global psychosocial functioning. Often, a child's ability to cope directly reflects the adaptation of the remaining parent. Maternal distress over the separation from her spouse predicts child behavior problems during separation in most cases (Medway et al. 1995).

### *Stressors Associated with Separation as Experienced by the Family Unit*

Overall, separations impact the entire family unit and all family members must adjust to the absence regardless of the roles the member held prior to departure (Caliber Associates 1992). The shifting of roles that occurs during separation creates a crisis for many families (McCubbin & McCubbin 1988). However, not all families experience negative effects of separation. Some adapt well.

The attitude of family members toward separation deeply impacts how the family views and experiences the separation. Families that believe their member contributes to national defense in a critical way think more positively about separation; these beliefs about the reasons and support for separation may be more critical to family functioning than the frequency or length of the separations themselves (Caliber Associates 1992). Ultimately, this belief system determines how reunification will be experienced and may determine how long the member serves in the military. Families assess how separations are experienced based as much on perception as behavior. If a family believes in the military member's mission and that they responded well during separation, then family members support the military lifestyle more often.

The family's locus of control and marital functioning levels also positively correlate with post-separation outcomes and can predict the possible success of families re-integrating (Jacobs & Hicks 1987). Such factors may be important to long term separations. Schuum, Bell and Gade found that marital satisfaction, quality and stability did not change permanently due to separations (2000; Schumm, Bell, Knott, & Rice 1996). While this offers hope to military families, the question remains how families overcome their separation distress and successfully reintegrate. Is the length of separation critical to how marriages endure separation or is it more important to successfully manage them to avoid long-term negative affects? In addition, spouses who experience positives of separation must readjust once the reunion takes place within a marriage. Particularly for women, who may enjoy a newfound independence, personal and educational development, self-sufficiency, self-confidence and maturity during separation from one's spouse,

how does she overcome the loss she experiences upon the return of her husband (Caliber Associates 1992)?

As discussed above, numerous factors contribute to the adjustment phase of families as experienced by individuals following the initial stressor of separation. Researchers using family stress theory consider the pile-up of stressors to contribute to a family's vulnerabilities, while the family's appraisal of the separation and the resources available to individual family members impact the family's coping. This leads to the overall research question that seeks to identify what combination of personal, family and environmental variables during separation create vulnerabilities for families resulting in families experiencing crisis as defined by the need for a family to restructure its roles or boundaries. In turn, what important personal or family appraisals of separation offer improved strength to families so that they can effectively identify, engage and utilize personal, family and community resources to better adapt to separation.

#### *The Impact of Reunion on Military Members, Spouses and Family Units*

Military missions demand family separation; reunions require family change (Mateczun & Holmes 1996). Reunions may set off a second state of crisis within the family or they may start the second phase in family reintegration: the phase of family adaptation. Just as in the separation phase, many factors contribute to the family's response to reunification. Changes in personal beliefs and habits impact family routines forcing the entire family unit to respond. Since such changes are so unexpected, reunions may be more difficult than the separation (Caliber Associates 1992). Despite the challenges posed on families during reunification, this phase of deployment receives the least attention from military leadership and mental health providers. Instead, people assume that families will just return to "normal".

#### *Stressors Associated with Reunions as Experienced by Active Duty Members*

The examination of the ramifications of reunion on military families begins with the service member. First, the returnee notes changes that occurred both within him or her self personally and within the family. He or she may be caught off guard by habits that have become part of the daily routines of family members; feeling out of place occurs when such routines do

not include everyone (Caliber Associates 1992). Changes in food preferences and beliefs occurred when separations extended over long periods of time and when the service member experienced new cultures or ways of living. When the service member faced extraordinary combat trauma or harsh living conditions during the separation, reunions pose particularly difficult challenges (Black 1993; Blaisure & Arnold-Mann 1992). Post-traumatic symptoms of nightmares, loss of sleep, changes in appetite, and feelings of increased aggression all may continue to block the path to returning to daily family routines. Feeling alienated from their loved ones and family, rates of substance abuse peak for many upon return from deployment as coping mechanisms for service members elude them and they instead turn to substances for relief from the stress (Adler, Wright, Huffman, Thomas, & Castro 2001).

Although research has not clearly defined the length of separation most detrimental to families during military deployments, exposures to wartime conditions have created issues for returned Gulf War veterans (Ford et al. 1998). They displayed stress reactions and unresolved bereavement issues by manifesting feelings of intense frustration, shock, guilt, loss, betrayal and alienation. Often secrets existed for both active duty members and their spouses; both parties changed. Due to the emotional strain, the members and their families often burned out. Although family members wanted the returnees to take over the tasks of the household, service members just back from hostile and distant places were not prepared to do so. This caused resentment on the part of some family members.

Because of difficulties with communication from the home front, many military members returned from the Gulf War without notice and had little information about how their families had fared during their absence (Ford et al. 1998). With little to no time to prepare emotionally, dealing with strong memories and feelings of what they experienced during their deployment overshadowed the process of reacquainting with loved ones. Service members, who one day sat in the midst of danger and who then returned suddenly to their homes without time to emotionally adjust may withdraw, feel numb or feel overwhelmed with a storm of emotions (Peeble-Kleiger & Kleiger 1994). Having experienced intense and dangerous situations, returnees felt confined

from sharing and revealing their feelings. Such alienating feelings isolated them from loved ones and feelings for the loss of comrades confused their emotions. Service members needed time to transform from being a combat warrior in the field to being a parent, spouse and loved one in the home.

Following separations, people often utilize homecomings to ease the transition from service member to family member. Service members develop expectations of homecomings based on the circumstances when they left, as well as from what they hear about home from letters, command and the media (Yerkes & Holloway 1996). Some veterans of war expect rewards from their service in battle and to be treated as heroes in victory. How service members experience homecoming impacts their adaptation (Bolten, Litz, Glenn, Orsillo, & Roemer 2002). The positive greeting and reception that military members receive from friends, families and communities validates the mission that the service member served. By legitimizing the personal sacrifice and time offered in military service that kept the person away from family, homecoming receptions improve his or her adaptation home.

#### *Reunion Stressors as Experienced by Military Spouses*

Reunions and homecomings impact more than just the service member however. Anticipating that first glimpse of one another, marital partners often fantasize about the moment they will again be together and they only remember the good attributes of their relationship (Blount et al. 1992). Partners create a setting of unrealistic expectations; they assume that things remained the way they were prior to departure and many only remember their marriage as being perfect. Couples forget the problems that existed previously and they expect issues to be resolved just by being together. These "honeymoon" periods may gloss over conflicts that exist within families. The couple agonizes the moment that the first argument dashes their unrealistic hopes of never ending happiness. The realities of homecomings, which families may actually experience as loss, confuse the emotions of all members. Individuals that gained independence and adopted new skills in order to survive separation may let go of these traits with sadness and feelings of not being appreciated. Clinically, difficulties during reunion may be manifested within

the marital relationship by sexual dysfunction and arguments. Ultimately, at the time of reunification, up to one of five couples reports a decline in their marital quality following separation (Caliber Associates 1992). While couples may recover from that decline, the time spent to do so and the characteristics utilized remain unknown.

Couples that do not successfully negotiate family roles and structures during reunification using communication and changes in behavior may engage in violence (Caliber Associates 1992). Although only a few couples report incidents of domestic violence associated with reunification, those that do engage in violence experience the severity of such incidents as significantly increased with the length of separation (McCarroll et al. 2000). While the dynamics of this finding are not clearly understood, this potentially makes some family members who have been separated for over six months particularly vulnerable to violent attacks. Apart from violence, other extreme cases of dissatisfaction with the marital relationship result in divorce. Thirty-eight percent of Vietnam veterans divorced within six months of service members returning to their families (Peeles-Kleiger & Kleiger 1994). Although accurate statistics of divorce rates subsequent to military separations remain unknown currently, marriages most troubled prior to separation present the most risk for dissolution following reunion (Caliber Associates 1992).

#### *Reunion Stressors for Parents and Children*

In addition to difficulties with spousal relationships, parents who were separated from their children feel "out of sync"; they missed developmental milestones of their children during their absence and now they experience a loss of authority (Kelley et al. 2001b). Parents must observe the growth of their children and adjust to the developmental changes that their children experienced. Some parents undergo difficulties maintaining parent-child attachment as children may have felt abandoned during the separation. Children often do not understand nor agree with their parents' decision to participate in the military lifestyle. They do not benefit from any sense of control in the lives of their parents. In addition, children must reacquaint themselves with the returning parent; parental roles of discipline must realign. While children may have missed the absent parent emotionally, they do not want the additional discipline implemented by the returned

parent (Blaisure & Arnold-Mann 1992). Children may fear, resent, act shy, display anxiety and experience difficulties interacting with the returning parent following separation (Yeatman 1981).

*Reunion Stressors as Experienced by the Family Unit*

In regards to reunion affecting the entire family unit, spouses and children frequently compete for the attention of the returnee. The returning parent or spouse reacquaints him or her self with the daily routines and slowly renegotiates roles. Coping skills, used by everyone for survival during separation, may now interfere with reunification. Personal goals developed during the separation may conflict with family goals. Surprise awaits families who think that members did not change during the separation; resentment results if changes are not negotiated with the input of all. Behavioral and communication patterns may be expressed in more immature means; the family regresses (Matezcun & Holms 1996). Eventually, families renegotiate roles and structures through active communication and then integrate those changes into the workings of the new family. This establishes reintegration; the stabilization of the family unit once again.

Not all changes associated with separations present negatively however, nor does marital satisfaction necessarily decrease due to separation (Schumm et al. 2000). Previously troubled marriages risk dissolution more than others that may experience temporary distress; eventually many marriages seem to return to pre-deployment levels. Personal growth and development of spouses, usually women, who have successfully fulfilled household duties during the absence of the military member, may feel a new sense of independence and self worth (Caliber Associates 1992). Renegotiation for these families may rely on how the service member perceives the accomplishments of his or her spouse.

*Consequences for the Military: The Need for Successful Separation and Reunion of Families to Ensure Military Readiness*

The all volunteer military force, which began in this country in the 1970's after the end of the draft, demands that the Air Force and other branches of service compete for the recruitment and retention of the finest young working professionals (Applewhite & Mays 1996). While historically military leaders only pursued capable, fighting young men, today's recruiters market

positions for both genders persuading many to join based on benefit packages generously supportive to families. Although most young recruits think of the military as a temporary job or, at most a potential career choice, members actually commit to a "total institution" and a culture; they agree to give a portion of one's life to the institution for a contracted period of time (Kohen 1984). For junior enlisted personnel, most join the military single but marry within their first term of enlistment (Dougherty 1999). Those young military spouses must also commit to the institution of the military in order for the family to successfully function. Today's Air Force is currently comprised of 363,787 members; of these, 71% of officers and 56% of enlisted are married (AFPC 2002). Given the numbers of married Air Force personnel, the military must continue to attract and retain families who commit to defend our country. After all, even the most lethal weapons and the most strategic battle plans fail if qualified, trained and emotionally stable personnel cannot execute their use (Kostner 2001).

Combat readiness and the completion of military missions remain the top priority of the Department of Defense; however, families present a vital role in maintaining high quality performance, readiness and retention of our forces (Knox & Price 1995; Daley 1999). Families play such a crucial role because if members worry about the welfare of their loved ones during separations or if practical issues such as medical care or relocations become too great a burden for their families, then members cannot focus on their jobs or their tasks at hand. Personal combat readiness means that the service member demonstrates readiness and preparedness to depart for deployment, that he or she maintains emotional stability and assuredness of the support of his or her family, and that he or she contains the physical strength to face harsh living conditions or hostile work environments. Without being ready to conduct the military mission, the military member risks being ousted from service.

Since the effectiveness of the individual assigned to active duty relies upon the satisfaction he or she has with family life, the military benefits from strengthening families (Norwood et al. 1996). Minimizing stress for military families plays a key role in keeping families strong and content with the military lifestyle. To accomplish such a task, families must



successfully adapt to the military culture. Families must learn to balance their needs with the needs of the military (Segal & Harris 1993). Each family member, to include those not officially serving on active duty, must learn to perform necessary family functions- such as maintaining financial and household standards- that military service demands (Kostner 2001). Although military leadership best defines the role of active duty members, the others also perform important roles. Since the start of the U.S. military, military spouses have performed the roles of uncomplaining helpmate, lover, parent, social butterfly and volunteer extraordinaire (Alt & Stone 1991). "Today, more than ever, the military wife (spouse) is a pioneer who travels to strange lands, rears her (or his) family under nomadic and often inhospitable conditions, and, many times copes with the stress of surviving on her (or his) own" (p. xi).

Military mission comes first; family needs come second. The family must recognize this and prepare to function within the military setting and maintain this commitment in order to remain within the military culture. This calls for adaptation. Some families attempt to push beyond adaptation and strive to achieve well-being; military personnel aiming for excellence recognize how the well-being of their family members intricately interacts with their work performance. For them to excel in their individual job performance, their family members must excel at their functioning levels. Children, while not necessarily performing readiness missions for the military, provide benefits for their families by staying out of trouble, following the rules established on military bases, and relocating with their families with minimal disruption in their academic and social lives. Despite these efforts to adapt to the military, many families suffer "the greatest single stressor (which) is family separation induced by deployment of the military member" (Knox & Price 1995 p. 483).

As already discussed, when families do not manage separations and reunions effectively, reduced marital satisfaction, domestic violence and divorce result. Within a military setting where separations abound, poor marital quality increases the likelihood of extramarital affairs. Trust between partners flounders. Domestic violence within military families places members at risk for physical and emotional harm and demand interventions by social service agencies. If mental

health professionals identify active duty members temporarily or permanently unstable for duty or not prepared to carry weapons, commanders receive recommendations to remove service members from front line military duty. When such recommendations extend over 120 days, service members may find themselves permanently decertified from their position and may risk involuntary separation from service. Finally, although the military may not directly experience negative impact from family divorce, most often persons experiencing divorce are at least temporarily distracted from their tasks at hand and suffer some emotional loss. Each circumstance potentially represents lost man hours, work days and personal readiness. The military must preserve healthy families.

Healthy families are comprised of healthy couples which in turn are derived from healthy individuals (Mateczun & Holmes 1996). Healthy families exhibit characteristics such as trust, mutual respect, and shared goals, paths and values. To enhance family functioning and support healthy families, organizations enact supportive family policies. Research shows that people, who believe that their work places support their spouses and children and who believe their spouses and children adjust well to the demands of that work, commit much more to their employers and to their job performance (Orthner & Pittman 1986). This emphasizes the importance of employer policy toward families and also applies to the military and its families. This leads to the provision of the military family and raises this issue as a major concern for the defense of our country (Knox & Price 1995). Such provisions include the development of child care and youth programs, financial aid, morale call programs for deployed families, relocation assistance, and support for families before, during and after separation. Other policies that may need further evaluation to ensure that they best support families as well as military mission include the frequency of deployments for any given service member, the length of deployments, remote assignment policies, and leave policies following the return of a member from deployment.

*Consequences for the Military: The Need for Successful Separation and Reunion of Families to  
Ensure Military Retention*

Even with the best and most supportive military family policies, military missions always require some family separation. Because family separations and reunifications toll marital stability and family functioning, military deployments also strain people's commitment to military service. Given the needs and issues that families present to military members, single active duty members may be the best candidates for retention in career military positions. However, past research demonstrates that marital status itself does not predict one's intent to stay in the military (Price & Kim 1993; Kirby & Naftel 2000). However, if a military member marries and if the spouse supports a military career, then the member remains on active duty at a rate twice that of those without supportive spouses. The same is true for members with negative spouse attitudes; those members leave the military at a higher rate. One may argue, "Spousal support is the most important predictor of commitment to a military career" (Pierce 1998 p. 210). While single deployments or separations themselves may not determine whether families continue a military lifestyle, studies have shown that if members project family separations to be repetitive into the future, then families may choose to leave the military (Schuum et al. 2000; Daley 1999). Since recruiting and training replacement forces requires enormous time and financial efforts, military planners prioritize investing in the retention of personnel and cannot ignore how frequent and lengthy family separation impact people's decisions to stay or leave the military (Pierce 1998).

Since family satisfaction correlates so strongly with retention, the military reaps economic payoffs for making strong and supportive family policies (Segal & Segal 1999). Attacking the issue of family separation, the military must develop and maintain appropriate support structures for these families while always maintaining preparedness to complete the defense mission (Hammelman 1995). Families voiced their concern for the need for additional support during separation during the 2000 Survey of Air Force Family Needs Assessment. Over half of the respondents reported the need for additional morale calls and e-mail correspondence capabilities during deployments (U.S. General Accounting Office 2001). Since communication aids the

reunification process, families appear justified in requesting this prevention tool. Although this request seems benign, military units must always weigh whether or not electronic or mail communication will risk the security of the unit. Communication can reveal a unit's location, time of arrival or number of troops. If the communication works however, troops lift their morale, families experience less stress, and the commitment to stay in the service may be extended.

Clearly identifying the role that separations and reintegration play in military readiness and in the decision of members to leave the military will assist the AF in preparing families to adapt to the necessary changes that occur due to deployments and reunion. Ultimately this understanding improves family adaptation to the military and improves retention rates for career Air Force families.

#### Implications for Social Work

This proposed study seeks to understand the reintegration process of families following a long term separation. Although this study addresses the issues in the military, separations also occur in families following incarceration, and in other career fields that demand that employees reside apart from their families for long periods of time. Despite the reasons for the separations, the family's response to separation impacts how the family experiences reunion. Ultimately the family regains stability by reintegrating members and any changes into the reestablished family boundaries, roles and structures. By identifying families who successfully manage this transition, social workers can assist families in developing traits that ease them through the separation, reunion and reintegration process. Families at risk for domestic violence or dissolution can be identified along with interventions that may assist such families to plan and coordinate services in the future. The military, concerned with retention and readiness issues, can also identify appropriate interventions that can address the connections between family reintegration and mission requirements. Because this study examines families retrospectively during the separation and reunion phases, the timing for interventions can also be identified. Social work interventions can only be effective when families willingly use them and when they respond to individual needs. This study attempts to address family separation, reunion and reintegration

needs in the hopes of building more healthy and stable military families who commit to serving their country for the full term of their contract and possibly an entire career.

### Study Overview

Given today's world situation and the demand for increased homeland security as well as global defense, the military continues to send troops abroad in response to mission requirements. Therefore, military families will experience separations and reunions long into the future. Following Desert Shield/Storm, Caliber Associates found that military leadership and service providers offered the least attention to the reunion phase of the deployment cycle (1992). However, the problems associated with this phase remained. Couples renegotiated their roles and adjusted to changes with little help or support from outside resources. Since the military relies on mission ready individuals, the military needs the support of families. Ready families make ready professional personnel- the Air Force must secure its families.

Family studies seek to discover the traits and characteristics of families that resist disruption and adapt to crisis situations (McCubbin & McCubbin 1988). Clearly, the reunion of military families following a long-term separation creates just such a crisis. The interaction of the experiences of the family during separation with the expectations and realities of reunion contribute to the family's ability to adapt to their newfound state: reintegration. This proposed family study aims to discover those traits as defined by reintegration. Successfully reintegrated families maintain stability, achieve high relational quality in both marital and parent-child interactions, and create an atmosphere of cohesion and adaptability.

Seeking such family traits, characteristics and dimensions parallels McCubbin's study of resilient families (McCubbin & McCubbin 1988). In an Army study of 1,000 two-parent families located in west Germany, researchers categorized military families by their stage in the life cycle to determine which strengths were the most critical at which stage. Different ethnic groups also could identify which traits best assisted their adaptation. Modeled after such a study, this proposed study seeks to discover what traits are associated with families that renegotiate their

roles, communicate effectively and report satisfactory relational outcomes despite having been separated for an extended period of time. This leads to some proposed research questions.

#### *Proposed Research Questions*

From a broad perspective, this study seeks to discover what relationship exists between the stresses families face during separation and reunion and how that impacts their reintegration. What coping mechanisms during separation and then again during reunion most dramatically lead to successful reintegration and what leads to negative outcomes such as domestic violence or divorce? What roles do factors such as locus of control over assignments and life circumstances, location of deployment, peacetime vs. war conditions, length of separation, preparation prior to deployment or return, rank, communication, and family developmental life stage contribute to the family's ability to achieve reintegration? And finally, how does the outcome of reintegration impact an active duty member's readiness to perform his or her individual duties and ultimately determine the family's intent to continue military service?

Long term goals of this study include discovery of larger organizational factors that contribute to a family's experience of separation, reunion and reintegration. What support can the AF offer to ensure that military families stay intact and healthy? Within the context of current operational levels at bases located around the world, we must prepare our families as best as possible to adapt to separation and reunion. Potentially, programs can be developed that foster traits associated with successful reintegration. Policies affecting families such as those dictating the frequency and length of separations may be re-examined to ensure that the same units or individuals are not deployed more often than necessary. In knowing more about how separation and reunion impacts families, efforts to protect family integrity may be initiated to ensure that families are not unnecessarily separated during assignments; joint active duty spouse assignments would become top priority for all ranks. Families could be allowed to accompany their active duty members when possible to remote locations.

This study contributes to military readiness by examining AF families in the reintegration phase of the deployment cycle following a separation of six or more months. Because

separations will continue to affect the military population and because the experience of the separation itself interacts with how a family reunifies, it must be discovered what successful reintegration is for AF families after they experienced a long-term separation. Since single parenting presents additional consequences and stressors for families, the AF may be invested in keeping marriages together. However supporting special populations such as single parents (both male and female), female headed households, as well as dual active duty couples may also present unique needs that the AF can address to prevent problems from arising during the reintegration process.

#### *Outline of this Study*

Following this introductory chapter, the next chapter reviews the literature on the effects of separation and reunification on military families utilizing the application of Family Stress Theory- the Double ABCX Model in understanding the variables of this study. Chapter three reviews the methodology and instrumentation of measuring the variables as selected for study in the reintegration phase. Finally, in the closing two chapters, the data analysis, findings, limitations and conclusions will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Impact of Separation and Reunification on the Reintegration of Military Members into their Families

Maintaining global security requires that military families physically separate to allow active duty members to fulfill their missions. Such separations force families to adjust their roles and structures as required for surviving the duration of the absence of the member. Upon return, service members shake the stability of this new system of family functioning; and families must once again adapt to living as a whole family unit. One couple described the husband's return from an 11-month separation, "I felt like he was a stranger. He felt so hurt. And I felt so guilty for him feeling hurt" (Zoroya 2003). Without successfully negotiating all these stressors, families suffer and may dissolve; or the military itself suffers in the loss of combat readiness of its individuals or in the loss of commitment of individuals to continue to serve on active duty. Many factors contribute to the success or failure of families achieving reintegration, and ultimately family wellness. The important factors of a family's composition, as well as the resources utilized to combat stress (also known as coping strategies) and how families appraise the stressors must be identified and understood to ensure that military policies and programs support families with appropriate services and interventions in timely ways.

Past studies of families separated by military missions provide background information, concepts and theories of how to approach this topic. Literature identifying the problems affiliated with separation and reunion, the coping methods used in each stage and the outcomes of separation and reunion as they impact families offer research questions and hypotheses that further the knowledge in this area.

#### *Seminal Studies on Family Separation*

Reuben Hill studied the effects of separation on families during World War II (1971). During this study of 135 families located in the state of Iowa, he found that some families thrived during separation instead of being crippled. He speculated that families experienced crisis (the X factor) depending upon the amount of hardship they endured due to the absence of their loved one (the stressor event: the A factor), the resources the family had available to them during the



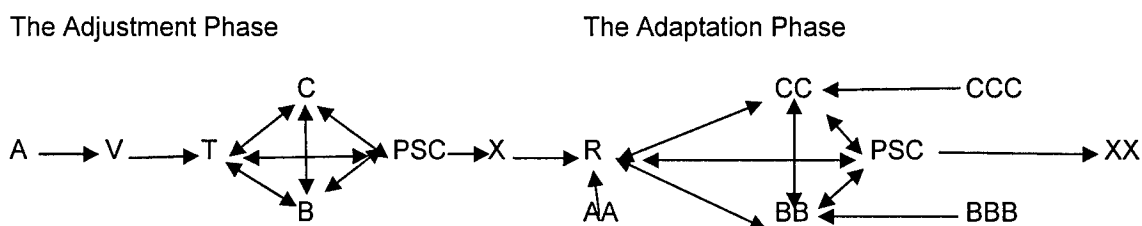
separation (the B factor) and the definition the family placed on the separation (the C factor).

This interaction of factors laid the foundation for the ABC-X model of Family Stress Theory, which provides the basis for this proposed study.

*Application of the ABC-X Family Stress Theory to the Reintegration of Military Families*

Since the original formulation of this theory, researchers have expanded Hill's ideas by doubling all the factors thereby discovering how families go beyond crisis (separation and reunion-the X factor) to reach adaptation (family reintegration- the XX factor) (McCubbin & Patterson 1983; McCubbin & McCubbin 1987). Families experienced the entire cycle, which included an adjustment phase and an adaptation phase. Adjustment to the state of crisis (X) was determined by the severity of stressors during separation (A) interacting with the family's level of vulnerability (V) interacting with the family's typology (T) interacting with the family's resistant resources (B) interacting with the family's appraisal of the stressor (C) interacting with the family's problem solving skills (PSC). Adaptation or family reintegration (XX) was determined by the how the stressors of separation and reunion were dealt with, the family's developmental life stage, and any unresolved issues (AA) interacting with the family's resilience to change (R), interacting with the family's strengths (BB), interacting with the family's appraisal of the stress, transitions and strains (CC), interacting with the family's fit with the community (CCC) interacting with the family's social support network (BBB) interacting with the family's problem solving skills (PSC).

*Figure 1: The Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response: The T-Double ABCX Model of Family Stress Theory*



This visual depiction of this theory provides an outline for how stressors, resources and coping strategies interact and impact the process of family reintegration following a long-term separation.

*The A Factor: Stressors and Vulnerabilities of Families During Separation*

During the Vietnam conflict, many families experienced the loss of loved ones due to prisoner of war or missing in action scenarios (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). Because these members separated indefinitely from the families and their ultimate fate remained unknown, spouses and children faced emotional confusion and legal dilemmas unprecedented by other military families. To study the impact of such conditions, the Center for Prisoner of War Studies conducted a three phase longitudinal study of these families. The first phase addressed the issues of families during separation, the second phase addressed reunion issues, and the third phase addressed the impact of separation on children. While the families during the Vietnam War era faced dramatic changes in society's view of women's roles and volatile sentiments toward military personnel, studies continue to affirm and contribute further understanding of the impact of separations on families.

Although military service members deployed and faced the danger of military training or combat, military spouses actually reported more feelings of distress— especially early in the separation- than their marital counterparts (Zeff, Lewis, & Hirsch 1997). While stress for spouses remaining home may not have reached significantly clinical levels, such distress created problems within the family unit. Researchers identified stressors for military spouses during the first phase of the longitudinal study of family separations caused by the Vietnam War from interviews with 100 families (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). Although today's military leadership strives to keep military separations less than one year in length, the majority of the prisoners of war had been missing five to eight years.

*The stress of role changes for military spouses.* In response to facing indefinite separations from their husbands, the wives of prisoners of war faced their most difficult challenge- to adjust to major role changes within the family (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). Forced to act independently, women made decisions without the benefit of consulting their lifetime partners. Consistent with the cycles of family stress theory, the way wives coped with such adjustments impacted their stress levels and vulnerability (McCubbin & Patterson 1983). If they responded to

stress with healthy coping strategies, they adjusted; however, if they chose unhealthy responses, such as drinking, the consequences of such created more stress. A qualitative study of 35 wives interviewed while their husbands deployed to Sinai also affirmed this phenomenon when they reported that success in meeting the challenges of new responsibilities and routines led to great pride (Wood, Scarville, & Gravino 1995). These wives adjusted better to separation. On the other hand, those who mismanaged finances, lost jobs, suffered illness and engaged in conflicts with neighbors and family members due to difficulties adjusting to role changes increased their stress levels and became more vulnerable. They adjusted poorly to separation.

*The stress of loneliness.* With the loss of their husband's companionship, wives also suffered the loss of social outlets and extreme loneliness (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). Later studies affirmed that loneliness and depression negatively impacted wives of deployed military personnel (Wood et al. 1995). For some wives failing to adjust, separation led to more frequent medical visits for symptomatic relief of physical, psychological or emotional manifestations of stress (Blount et al. 1992). Overloads of stress created lowered tolerance of symptoms, therefore wives presented clinically with depressive symptoms, anger, and intolerance for their children. Some feared for the safety of loved ones or infidelity. Others, unable to cope with stress and anxiety increased their alcohol and nicotine use.

*The stress associated with parenting.* Spouses of prisoners of war also reported stress from disciplining children and from fulfilling both father and mother roles (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). Although parents often took different approaches to raising their children, if one parent left, then the other provided for both. During the Gulf War, half of the parents with children reported that the behavioral problems of their children created a great amount of stress (Caliber Associates 1992). Some mothers undergoing separation from their spouses felt overwhelmed by the responsibility (Wood et al. 1995). At the same time, the presence of children in separated families acted as a resource by providing encouragement for women to stay strong.

Whether caring for a child brought strength or stress, parenting demanded planning. As the structure of families changed in the past few decades to include more single parent homes

and dually employed families, the short notice recalls of the Gulf War presented some particularly difficult challenges for parents in regards to child care and finances (Caliber Associates 1992). Veterans paid a great deal of money for childcare. Some parents worked additional hours to pay these costs while others quit their jobs to be home more; either choice reduced family income. Many single parents hastily arranged care for their children with relatives or guardians just prior to their departure. However, they may have prepared different plans if parents knew how long the deployment was going to last. Children left in the care of adults without attachments to the military community did not receive their military entitlements because their providers remained unaware of such services.

*Stressors of separation as experienced by children.* The second phase of the longitudinal study conducted on families of prisoners of war described the impact of separation on children. As the time of separation progressed, many children developed improved relationships with other family members and they became more self-reliant (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). However, problems still existed. Mothers endured minor problems in regards to the physical care of their children due to typical childhood illnesses or injuries; but behavioral issues created bigger problems. Half of the mothers reported that their children displayed significant emotional difficulties with such symptoms as crying, fear of the dark, nightmares, nail biting, shyness and rebelliousness. These children also reported less of a sense of personal freedom, more withdrawal symptoms, more antisocial tendencies and poorer relations with school, family and the community. The clinically experienced interviewers assessed that approximately 20% of the children could have benefited from mental health interventions.

Later military family studies confirmed these findings that children with a deployed parent experienced some increase in behavioral difficulties, but that these symptoms did not exceed clinical cut-offs (Jensen, Martin & Watanabe 1996). Such children presented to medical clinics with sadness, loneliness, depression and anxiety (Rosen, Teitelbaum, & Westhuis 1993; Blount et al. 1992). Instead of verbalizing their emotions, they described symptoms of abdominal pain, sleep problems, headaches, lessened motor activity, withdrawal, moodiness, school phobia,

behavioral problems, and regression. Children most at risk for developing problems during separation reported having mothers with a history of psychopathology, were boys, were between the ages of five and ten, and were separated during wartime. Religious beliefs, prior relationships with parents, the length of time to prepare for the separation, the amount of support from family or friends and the extent to which the child displays an adaptive personality also contributed to the separation experience. While most children did not need counseling to address their problems, those who previously received counseling or poor grades in school most likely needed counseling during the separation.

*The impact of separation on spouse emotional stability.* Another critical factor for wives during prisoner of war scenarios involved their emotional stability, which played a critical role in the maintenance of the home during the separation (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). Wives that remained in control of their feelings coped better with everyday occurrences and with extraordinary difficulties. However, poor emotional health increased stress. During their separation, over half of the respondents reported the following emotional symptoms: feeling depressed, feeling jumpy or uptight, difficulties sleeping and boredom. Half of the women took tranquilizers; 40% experienced weight fluctuations of at least 15 pounds. Smoking, drinking, feeling like life was meaningless and feeling suicidal also increased for many of the women. While only 37% of the wives engaged in professional counseling to deal with emotional problems, the interviewers assessed that 75% of the families would have benefited from such counseling or would have benefited from counseling at reunification.

Recent studies have also connected the impact of the mother's emotional difficulties on the rest of the family. Mothers who displayed depressive symptoms experienced more behavioral difficulties with their children (Jensen et al. 1996). Although researchers could not determine which factor caused which, children reflected the emotional state of the remaining parent. Another study demonstrated that the longer the separation lingered and parental strain increased, parents withdrew their display of intimacy with their children; at the same time, parents described the behavior of their children to be the worst (Zeff et al. 1997).

*The Stress of Anticipating Reunion.* The final stressor identified in McCubbin and Dahl's study of the impact of separation on families occurred when wives anticipated homecoming; they reported many concerns about their husbands' returns (1976). For them, notification about reunion would confirm whether or not their spouses survived the prisons of war. Others worried they would have to account for their actions during separation. Some wives felt threatened by the return of their husbands since they would potentially lose some of the rewards they gained during separation such as independence, control of finances and household management. Although social gains of women during this historical time period supported the gains made by wives, they worried about how their husbands would assess their handling of finances and child rearing practices. Some, who had not thought their husbands would return, had to disclose that they had dated other men. Many also feared how they would cope with their husbands' physical and emotional status and wondered how their husbands would once again manage family life as well as their military careers. Many believed that they would need occupational, educational and psychological counseling upon the return of their husbands.

Recent studies discuss similar anxieties over reunions (Wood et al. 1995). Near the end of the separation, communication slackened between family members. Wives expressed feelings of exhaustion and impatience for having to wait so long for their husbands' returns. Many also felt pride, relief and excitement having survived the separation; they now looked forward to their husbands coming home. Wives anticipated reunions as highly romantic, ideally set and filled with passion. Many wives also felt vulnerable prior to reunion remembering their relationships with their husbands as fragile, disappointed that they failed to meet some of their personal goals and that their lives of freedom and autonomy may be curtailed. They sadly withdrew from relationships that played critical roles during separation as they returned their attention to family.

*The B and the PSC Factors: Family Resources, Problem-Solving and Coping Skills during Separation*

Studies that addressed coping mechanisms used by military families during separation also identified family resources. Some wives that experienced separation from their husbands

adjusted more quickly by staying busy (Wood et al. 1995). They actively involved themselves in work, community, family, church, support groups, and other organizations. Needing services such as childcare, car repair and home maintenance, many wives extended their support networks with new friends and acquaintances. The wives best able to cope during separation described themselves as having high support levels and decreased stress (Rosen, Westhuis & Teitelbaum 1994). They were also those with the most military experience; their military sponsors ranked higher in both the officer and enlisted corps.

*The importance of communication.* Frequent and positive communication between family members during separation played an important role in maintaining a connection, offered the opportunity to keep members involved in the others lives, minimized boredom and correlated with marital closeness during reunion (Bell et al. 1999; Wood et al. 1995; Rosen, Durand, Westhuis, & Teitelbaum 1995). Historically, mail provided the primary source of communication from home, but recent improvements in telephonic and e-mail transmissions assisted in keeping families intact. Families reduced their stress by sharing their experiences and difficulties with one another. Despite these positives, communication also had downfalls. Families worried about the troubles of the other party, they overspent their budgets with high telephone costs and military units risked their security by revealing their location, time of arrival or number of troops on hand. When communication worked however, troop morale increased, families felt more prepared to reintegrate, and the commitment to stay in the military extended.

*Personal characteristics as a resource.* Other studies of coping mechanisms used by military families during separation involved the identification of personal characteristics of the spouses themselves. Wood, Scarville and Gravino found that women with strong personalities and optimistic outlooks fared better (1995). Other studies examined androgynous characteristics of the wives left behind. Such characteristics included those of high masculinity and femininity; those who exhibited both instrumental and expressive feelings, who communicated as assertive and yielding, and who related with others as agenic and communal (Nice 1978; Patterson & McCubbin 1984). Support for this thinking came from the concept that women performed both

motherly and fatherly roles during the children's separation from fathers. Those mothers who better filled such roles offered more success in the development and adaptation of their children. However, during studies to test this theory against control groups of their peers, children did not display any improvement of behavior or personality due to the androgynous characteristics of their mothers (Nice 1978). In regards to testing the amount of distress for the wives themselves, androgyny again did not demonstrate any lowered distress levels for these wives. Instead, androgyny proved to be a complex concept (Patterson & McCubbin 1984). However, this study demonstrated that wives, who used a balanced coping strategy- one that selected multiple means of coping – who better maintained family integrity, developed strong social support relationships, managed tension, accepted the military lifestyle and remained optimistic, and developed self-reliance and self-esteem- fared the best. Being androgynous related to using the first four of these coping strategies; so overall, it appeared that these characteristics positively correlated with women having more options in regards to how they responded to stress. Such flexibility in coping abilities assisted families to manage stress more successfully.

*Return to home of origin as a means of coping.* Despite these potentially helpful coping strategies, not all wives successfully coped during separation. Research of military families demonstrated that some wives exchanged formal military support, services and benefits for informal support which they received from friends and relatives by relocating (Rosen et al. 1994). To discover who actually made such moves during separation; researchers surveyed 1,445 spouses of soldiers who deployed to Somalia in 1992-1993 (Schumm, Bell, & Knott 2000). Family stress levels caused people to want to move but stress alone did not result in families moving. Instead, even stressed families remained in place because they expected their spouses to separate from the military soon, they hoped to get a job, they feared losing their government housing, they expected their spouse to return in less than three months, they recently moved to the installation or they had small children. Researchers characterized movers as younger, more recently married and less experienced with the military community. During reintegration, families remaining in place during separation better predicted marital closeness (Rosen et al. 1995).



Whether it was the act of relocating or the personal characteristics of the families that moved, these families risked poorer outcomes during reunion.

*The C Factor: Family Appraisal during Separation*

Even during the long separations of the Vietnam War, families adjusted better to separation when wives were independent and confident of their abilities to manage the household (McCubbin & Dahl 1976). Some wives developed independence based on the meaning attached to their husband's role. If the father actively dominated family functioning, the family was devastated by his departure. However, if the family experienced great conflict prior to separation, the family appreciated the relief of his absence; these families may have experienced greater difficulties during reunion. Depending on these viewpoints of the significance of the father, the whole family responded to separation differently. It was these perspectives that shaped how families appraised or assessed how they would manage separation and reunion of their family.

*Perceptions about child birth and parenting.* Because McCubbin and Dahl's study of families separated by captivity following war occurred many years after the initial separation, pregnancies were not a major factor of that study. However, recent research reported that pregnant women anticipated greater difficulties compared to their peers when facing separation (Wood et al. 1995). Despite fears and strong perceptions that their situation would be much worse than their counterparts, researchers discovered that often these families adjusted fine once the baby arrived.

Despite the stress families faced with their children during separation, the way mothers assessed the behavior of children impacted how that behavior was experienced (Kelley, Herzog-Simmer, & Harris 1994). Active duty mothers displayed correlations between their emotional states and the behavior of their children during their own separation/reunion cycle. Overwhelmed by their personal feelings, mothers exaggerated the behavior of the children; but when relieved from their strain, mothers ignored similar difficult behavior. In either scenario, the emotional state of mothers distorted the experience of the behavior of children and raised the question of whether it was the children's behavior that changed or if it was the parent's perception of the behavior that

changed. The appraisal of children's behavior acted as a powerful influence on the mother's response to the child.

*Summary of the Adjustment to Separation:*

*Stressors interacting with Resources interacting with Appraisal*

Families experienced many stressors in regards to separation. While some of the stress depended on the length of the separation itself; changes in roles, the level of loneliness, the amount of problems with children, the emotional health of the stay at home spouse and the amount of anxiety towards reunion all impacted how families adjusted. In response, families utilized their coping skills that they developed through experience and they tapped assistance from the resources of friends and family. Communication between family members and the military member's rank also provided important support. Finally, how families perceived their abilities to manage the difficulties of separation impacted their adjustment. How these three important concepts interacted led to the development of the first set of hypotheses:

1. There will be a negative correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during separation and the family's level of reintegration.
2. There will be a positive correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during separation and the number of resources used.
3. There will be a positive correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during separation and the effectiveness level of the resources used.
4. There will be a negative correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during separation and the spouse's confidence level of his or her abilities to manage the household during separation.
5. There will be a negative correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during separation and the family's coping abilities.
6. There will be a positive correlation between the number of resources used by a family during separation and the family's level of reintegration.

7. There will be a positive correlation between the effectiveness of the resources used by a family during separation and the family's level of reintegration.
8. Independent and intervening variables such as increased rank, whether the active duty member volunteered for the mission, the type of mission, shorter separations, if the mission occurred during peace time, if the family was comprised of a civilian stay at home spouse married to a military member, reduced number of children, increased time prior to separation, increased previous experience with separation, increased level of optimism, no relocation during separation and increased length of marriage will help to explain the variability in stress levels of families and will reduce the level of stress reported.

*Beyond the X Factor: Family Reintegration –the XX Factor*

Coming home after separation should be a joyful experience; families "should" resume normal activities and lives (Caliber Associates 1992). Reports from Air Force personnel following the Gulf War found that base leadership put the least amount of attention on the reunion phase of the deployment cycle. However, as one couple described after a recent 11 month separation, home dinners felt like dating experiences and shyness overshadowed sexual intimacy (Zoroya 2003). The returnee felt like he violated routines and prowled through the home like a visitor; he grew impatient for things to return to the way they were before he left. Meanwhile, his wife forgot to notify her husband of changed plans since she was independent for so long. The couple finally concluded, "The reality is, you're not the same as much as you want to be, and neither is she." Spouses, who stayed home during the separation and who sought relief from doing all the household tasks single-handedly, got frustrated by returned partners who were not emotionally prepared to take over (Caliber Associates 1992). Consequently, reunion and reintegration following a long-term separation was not as easy as presumed.

Due to multiple personal changes and consequences of coping strategies which had long term positive and negative affects, families were forced to not only adapt to living together once again, they had to integrate (Hill 1971). Families that experienced better reunions put the interests of the family above individuals. Couples shared critical roles in adjusting to reunion, as

they negotiated the fulfillment of tasks and roles. Ultimately however, many stressors interfered with the family's success.

*The AA Factor: Stressors and Vulnerabilities of Families during Reunification*

*Stressors experienced by the returning veteran.* Active duty personnel, who worked on military driven missions and who may have even have been exposed to combat, experienced personal factors that prevented them from focusing on the family. Just prior to Hill's study, John F. Cuber conducted a three year study of two hundred college men following World War II finding that veterans suffered many personal adjustments when they returned home which impacted their reintegration into their families and reassimilation into domestic life (1945). While the study dates back fifty years, the issues presented remain true and may continue to impact military members yet today.

First, Cuber found that veterans worried about their economic status above all; after resolving money issues, veterans turned their efforts elsewhere. Second, military veterans idealized the past and maintained nostalgic feelings. Third, although veterans acknowledged that they themselves changed due to their military service, most forgot that their wives and family also changed while they remained home. Fourth, veterans desired escape from obligations of conventional family roles. Gulf War studies confirmed this factor when returnees compared ending their deployments with getting out of prison; they wanted to experience the freedom and mobility (Marlowe 2001). Fifth, returnees felt the loss of the patterns of values, skills, sentiments and activities of domestic life (Cuber 1945). Sixth, trained military men realized they possessed many unusable skills. Recently this played out with the military's reduction in force following the Gulf War (Marlowe 2001). For those who served an extended period of time, deployed, and then felt deserving of a rewarding military career, returned veterans became distraught that the military contracted their jobs to civilian personnel. And finally, returnees experienced the "Rip Van Winkle feeling" that things seemed somewhat familiar and yet so strange (Cuber 1945).

*Stressors due to poor coping.* Forced to cope with personal changes, returning veterans made decisions that impacted their families; specifically, those who used poor coping strategies

created more stress for themselves. In a recent study, Federman, Bray and Kroutil (2000) used data from 16,193 anonymous surveys of military personnel who participated in the 1995 Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors among Military Personnel to help determine how deployments impacted health. Of the participants in this study, women who deployed in the previous 30 days reported significantly higher rates of heavy alcohol use compared to their peers that did not deploy. Deployed men reported higher rates of cigarette smoking, alcohol dependence, alcohol use, and heavy alcohol use. While substance abuse seemed typical following peacetime deployments, combat worsened post-deployment stress.

*Stressors due to combat.* Both during and following the Gulf War, active duty personnel engaged in activities such as the heavy use of alcohol or sex which helped them overcome the fear of the moment or cope with life changes, but such behavior also left long-term negative consequences on health and trust with partners (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger 1994; Marlowe 2001). Returnees that suffered great amounts of stress during the separation experienced immediate relief by returning home, but those who experienced anxiety and depression prior to combat also experienced symptoms post-deployment (Marlowe 2001). Some repeatedly relived disturbing memories of combat that worsened their symptoms of post-traumatic stress (PTSD). Such pre-exposure patterns of coping with stress best predicted how soldiers responded after separation.

In addition to coping with symptoms of PTSD, families experience residual aggression from their returned loved one as well as from themselves due to the heightened fear they experienced from prolonged exposure to danger during combat (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger 1994). Having lived in an environment where the media brought the reality of bombs and death from the battlefield to family rooms, families may never have reached their supposed phase of relative calm and stability during separation. Instead, lingering aggression from the time of separation manifested itself in rage due to repeated exposures of violence or due to the chronic strain of anticipated loss. Even once the danger past, some exploded with emotion in inappropriate ways. Service members who feared death during their deployment may have experienced manic defenses to deny and escape their emotions. The abrupt ending of the Gulf War also forced the

re-entry of veterans to their homes without personal or emotional preparation. Neither veterans nor family members fully understood the emotions overwhelming them during the initial stages of reunion.

*Family Stressors: The Tasks of Reintegration*

*The realignment of power and tasks.* According to Hill, family reintegration required that families realign power and authority and rework labor tasks (1971). Such adjustments following separation took from several hours to several months (Caliber Associates 1992). Many returned Gulf War veterans lacked adequate time off to re-establish their relationships before going back to work; high work demands caused personnel to continue being torn between their obligations to the military and to their families (Marlowe 2001). Practical issues of reunion also presented problems for some (Wood et al. 1995). These included sharing family vehicles, returning to regularly scheduled meal preparations and renegotiating military work hours that often imposed irregularity and unpredictability to home life.

*The renewal of spousal intimacy.* Another of Hill's requirements for family reintegration involved the renewal of spousal intimacy (1971). Couples described this following the Sinai deployment stating that they approached intimacy shyly and that they slowly reacquainted themselves with one another (Wood et al. 1995). However, within six to eight weeks following reunion, couples resumed their "boring" lives- minimal conversations, monotonous evenings in front of the television and predictable sex. Wives withdrew from many of their social activities and friendships that they formed during separation. Some husbands clung to resentments that started during separation and accused their wives out of jealousy. Few couples discussed separation and divorce. Despite encouragement from several wives, husbands refused to attend marital counseling to improve their relationships.

*Balancing marital and parental relationships.* Hill's final indicator of role reintegration included the family's need to balance marital relationships and parent child relationships (1971). Of course, families in different developmental stages faced different challenges. Although non-traditional family types were not studied by Hill nor did they have to juggle the marital connection,

single parents who served in the Gulf War reported that transitions to their role as parents eased in correlation with having received pre-deployment information on what to expect and from receiving frequent updates on the progress of their children while deployed (Caliber Associates 1992). Within the family developmental stage of having pre-school children, parents who left infants needed to bond, redevelop attachment and establish security (Wood et al. 1995). New fathers adapted to the inflexibility of the schedules of infants while mothers struggled to balance between the needs of the baby and the needs of her spouse. All parents, lacking clear expectations in regards to their roles, had to be mindful that their children gained independence when they were gone. Family members revisited their roles and strove to re-establish parent-child bonds. Parents who wanted and needed to spend time alone as individuals and as couples had to consider the feelings of their children who also wanted attention.

*Stressors: the stages of reintegration.* In order to better understand how families made all these changes, Hill interviewed families to describe the process of reintegration (1971). He found that families first encountered brief disorganization. Many filled this period with joy or the experience of a second honeymoon. Families following the Sinai deployment described the first days being filled with physical closeness (Wood et al. 1995). Husbands, wives and children clung to one another and enjoyed spending time together. During the second phase of reunion, families experienced recovery; some families fell back into their old routines but most struggled (Hill 1971). Efforts to reintegrate included the conscious decision of all members to incorporate the father into the decision making process, to consult him on family matters and to redistribute the roles of the family. Overall, Hill found no single formula for successful separation and reunion.

Recent research confirmed the cycles of reunion. Both active duty members as well as their families experienced stress and described in practical terms what each member experienced within estimated time frames (Caliber 1992).

Table 1: Stages of Reunion and Reintegration

STAGE	TIME FRAME	FEELINGS UNDERGONE BY FAMILY	STRESSORS UNDERGONE BY FAMILY	STRESSORS UNDERGONE BY ACTIVE DUTY MEMBER
1. Reunion/ Renegotiation	1-6 Weeks following return	Adjustment, Mixed feelings, Elation Honeymoon	Desire for returning spouse to relieve primary caregiver of responsibilities (at least temporarily) Confusion regarding familial roles	Desire for a "break", wanting to be left alone to process deployment experience Loss of place in familial roles Increased substance abuse
2. Reintegration/ Stabilization	6+ Weeks following return	Normality	Reestablishing familial roles	Tension at work with those who did not serve in geographically separated location Increased domestic violence Reestablishing familial roles

*The BB/BBB Factors: Personal, Family and Community Resources, Problem-Solving Skills and Coping Strategies*

*Length of marriage.* Strengths and resources of families who achieved stabilization during reintegration were found in the study of prisoners of war following Vietnam. Twelve months following reunion, 48 families participated in phase II of the longitudinal study (McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, & Ross 1975). Researchers identified the best predictor of positive reintegration of military members into their families as the length of the marriage. Contradicting earlier studies such as Hill's regarding the importance of this variable, researchers in this study speculated that the unique challenges of POW separations that lasted an average of five years made this study different.

*Quality of marriage.* The wife's assessment of the quality of marriage prior to the casualty presented as the second most important predictor of positive reintegration. This finding remained consistent throughout family research. Pre-deployment marital satisfaction best predicted post-deployment success for the 773 wives whose husbands deployed to Operation Desert Storm (Rosen et al. 1995). In addition, the wives of the soldiers deployed to Sinai attributed their success of reintegration to the strength of their marriage, the love in their



relationships, the maturity of their husbands and their realistic expectations of homecoming (Wood et al. 1995). Without the resource of a good quality marriage, Hill found that couples, who were estranged prior to separation and who dealt with the separation well, divorced (1971). Many veterans of the Gulf War who had troubled marriages prior to separation also dissolved their marriages (Marlowe 2001). In regards to the impact of separation on marital quality however, approximately one in five marriages reported a decline following the Gulf War (Caliber Associates 1992). Though the support of military units seemed to help couples reunify more positively, such decline in the closeness of marital relationships continued even twelve months following reunion and correlated with increased stress during the separation (Rosen et al. 1995).

*Emotional stability.* Finally, spouses who remained emotionally stable throughout separation and reunion critically supported families in their reintegration process; the wife's emotional dysfunction during separation negatively correlated with family reintegration at a significant level (McCubbin et al. 1975). Because wives suffered many dilemmas during separation, they struggled more with reunion. However following the Gulf War, respondents reported that the more stress civilian spouses faced with their children during the separation, the better their relationship with their children became following the return of their spouses (Caliber 1992). These parents thrived from the relief they received from the support of their partners. Despite such relief, mothers, whose emotional states remained unhealthy, contributed to the behavioral difficulties of their children (Medway et al. 1995). Children who demonstrated academic and anxiety problems during separation most likely demonstrated behavioral problems even six months after reunion.

Emotional stability may also be tied to a family's sense of coherence. Stemming from the work of Antonovsky, researchers found that families who had a pervasive and enduring confidence that their environments were predictable and that things would most likely work out as reasonably as expected would shield themselves against stress (Lavee, McCubbin, & Olson 1987). Contrary to what they hypothesized in their study, they found that family strain actually increased the family's appraisal of the ability to handle such strain thereby making a family's

sense of coherence a buffer against stress. This may have reflected the concept that the consequences of coping strategies affected the amount of stress the family felt: better management of stress improved the beliefs of the capabilities of the family. Having a strong sense of coherence improved family well-being.

*Social support services.* During the Gulf War, families reported that relatives, friends and neighbors provided the greatest amount and the most likely source of emotional and practical assistance (Caliber Associates 1992). Often spouses experiencing the same type of separation developed extremely close relationships and their bonds improved their coping and survival. In addition, the overall Air Force community received credit for providing support to families with the Family Support Center placed at the hub of coordinating formal services. These included many different services but the most utilized were financial assistance, Desert Storm/Shield activities, support groups, counseling and telephone referrals for such things as child care and home repair. Other base agencies that provided assistance included the chapels, child development centers, mental health and the Red Cross. While such services were also available during reunion, most people did not use the services.

*The CC Factor: The Importance of Family Appraisals during Reunion*

*The impact of homecoming.* As discussed earlier, active duty members faced multiple stressors upon reunion. To ease the transition from separation to reunion, from battlefield to normal life and to overcome their guilt of leaving their families, homecoming celebrations played an important part in honoring veterans for their services and in validating their experience (Caliber Associates 1992; Bolten et al. 2002). Those veterans who received appreciation according to their expectations of what they believed they deserved due to the time and duties they performed overseas adapted better to life after deployment, suffered less distress and experienced less PTSD symptoms. For veterans, the way their families and the community received them following separation critically impacted the way they recalled and understood their experiences of separation. Of course, when received poorly, veterans responded negatively as they perceived that their contributions to national security during the time of separation were not worthy of their

effort. Those failing to receive recognition, which included those military members who did not deploy but remained home and who often worked many additional hours to make up for work of the deployed personnel, felt neglected and resented the others. Such feelings resulted in frustration and reduced the member's commitment to continuing military service.

*Assessment of the management of household roles and accomplishments.* In regards to reunifying with their families, veterans reexamined their beliefs about the importance of their roles. Some service members returned home to wives that successfully managed without them, thus creating the feeling that they were no longer needed as husbands and fathers (Cuber 1945). Experienced differently, some wives following the Sinai deployment reported that their husbands expected things to be the same as they were prior to separation (Wood et al. 1995). When their husbands resumed their former roles, they hurt their wives by making them feel unappreciated and negated the changes that were now established. Those that adjusted well described their husbands as appreciative of their accomplishments during the separation and as more considerate, thoughtful and sensitive towards them since their return. While not all families succeeded in this, the majority felt that if the wives felt contentment with the functioning of the family and the husbands remained ready for duty without concern, the family remained in the military. They gained confidence that they would survive separations in the future. Overall, those families who felt in control of their fate fared better reintegration outcomes than those families who felt that outside forces determined their fate (Jacobs & Hicks 1987).

#### *Summary and Hypotheses*

Successful family reintegration required that members integrate the changes of family roles into the functioning of the family and not that the members just adapt to living together. Indicators of integration as identified by Hill included parental divisions of power, authority and tasks; marital relations of intimacy; and the balance of relationships between the marital dyad and parent-child interactions. Families proceeded from adjustment to integration by going through the initial reunion/honeymoon phase and then on to reintegration/stability phase. Predictors of success included the resources of length and quality of the marriage and the wife's emotional

stability, but the testing of such predictors has been controversial in past research. Finally, how families assessed what occurred during the separation and how they will be needed when incorporated back into the family led to the following hypotheses:

1. There will be a negative correlation between the amount of stress experience by a family during reunion and the level of family reintegration.
2. There will be a positive correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during reunion and the number of resources used.
3. There will be a positive correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during reunion and the effectiveness level of the resources used.
4. There will be a negative correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during reunion and the spouse's appreciation of his or her management of the household during separation.
5. There will be a negative correlation between the amount of stress experienced by the active duty member during reunion and his or her satisfaction with the homecoming activities.
6. There will be a negative correlation between the amount of stress experienced by a family during reunion and the family's coping abilities.
7. There will be a positive correlation between the number of resources used by a family during reunion and the family's level of reintegration.
8. There will be a positive correlation between the effectiveness of the resources used by a family during reunion and the family's level of reintegration.
9. There will be a positive correlation between the family's fit with the military lifestyle and the family's level of reintegration.
10. There will be a negative correlation between the family's amount of stress at separation combined with the amount of stress at reunion and the family's level of reintegration.

11. Independent and intervening variables such as increased rank, whether the active duty member volunteered for the mission, the type of mission, shorter separations, if the mission occurred during peace time, if the family was comprised of a civilian stay at home spouse married to a military member, reduced number of children, increased time of preparation prior to reunion, increased previous experience with reunion, increased level of optimism, no relocation during reunion and increased length of marriage will help to explain the variability in stress levels of families during reunion and will reduce the level of stress reported.

In the next chapter, the plan for measuring and testing these hypotheses will be presented and discussed. Population, sampling, methods and instruments will all be included.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology Overview

Exploring the process of reintegration amongst families following long-term separation used both quantitative data from a large sample that correlated predictive variables with family outcomes, as well as qualitative data from six families to more deeply explore what families undergo. Such mixed methodology strengthened the study since no single "truth" nor does one "conventional" paradigm exist from which scientific inquiry can stem (Lincoln & Guba 2000). This study surveyed couples as representatives of family units via self-administered questionnaires (see Appendix A). The survey included both close-ended questions as well as a few open-ended short answer questions so participants could opt to supplement their answers as needed. Since this study emphasized the marital relationship, the responses of parents spoke for the functioning of children; the family overall presented as the unit of analysis. The cross-sectional survey design described the phenomenon of reintegration as well as determined the relationships between variables (Babbie 1990). In addition, the qualitative interviews offered opportunities for members to verbalize and expound on their individual points of view. Such interviews provided a glimpse into the complexity of the reintegration process (Lincoln & Guba 2000). This pragmatic approach to research, which encourages the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, allowed the researcher to maintain the importance of the research question as well as to better understand how family reintegration occurs. Ultimately this improves the quality of the inferences that are derived from the results of this study (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2003).

The researcher purposefully recruited families from the military populations served by two Air Force bases in Arizona whose service members returned from a deployment in the past twelve months. Only those separated from their families for a period of over 90 days were eligible for the study. Surveys were made available to the populations via mail, e-mail and personal contact. From the survey participants, six families participated in in-depth interviews to discuss the process that occurred since reunion and to retrospectively understand how stressors of separation and reunion impacted the members of the family. Interviews followed a schedule (see Appendix B) as needed to cover all the important aspects with the following used as a starter

statement: "Imagine that I have lived near you in your military community for years. My husband has never deployed however. I come to you now, as your best friend, because I was just notified that my husband is scheduled to leave for a long term assignment to a location that he can not take the kids and I. What would you tell me about the experience?" "How would you have me prepare logistically and emotionally?" "How did the mid-tour visit impact your separation and reunion experiences?" Additional more detailed questions were also prepared and used as appropriate for the circumstances of each family. All interviews lasted from one to two hours.

The stories filled the gaps that the written survey responses could not and clarified how the predictors and correlations found in the statistical analysis provided indicators of real experiences. Such data collection occurred within a concurrent triangulation mixed method design which offered equal priority to both types of collected data, integrated the results in the interpretation phase of data analysis and allowed the researcher to confirm, cross-validate or corroborate the findings between the data sets (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson 2003).

#### Measurement of Concepts

##### *The XXX Factor: Family Reintegration*

To match the operationalization of the dependent variable in the quantitative research data as described in the previous chapters, the XX Factor (Family Reintegration) measured the current functioning levels of the family with predictability and stability. Throughout the first two chapters, the researcher defined family reintegration as the family returning to "normal". This included the establishment of restructured roles and the re-entry of the returned veteran into the family. Hill defined the tasks of reintegration to include the realignment of power and tasks, the renewal of spousal intimacy and the balancing of marital and parental relationships (1971). While McCubbin suggested two short scales of well-being and adaptation to measure reintegration (1987), these measures did not cover the range of concepts, thus reducing the validity of those measures to unacceptable levels.

Instead, this researcher used the Family Satisfaction scale for the dependent variable labeled family reintegration (Olson & Wilson 1982; see Appendix C for permission letter). This 14

item self-report instrument which was condensed from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion scales measured the concepts of cohesion (such as emotional bonding, family boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making and interests and recreation) with a reliability of .82 and adaptability (such as assertiveness, leadership, discipline, negotiation, roles and rules) with a reliability of .86. Together the scale's reliability stood at .90. Previous researchers developed normed data which could be used to compare how military families from the proposed sample responded compared to other families. In addition to this measure, some final added questions addressed overall health and the family's fit with the military community.

Within the qualitative interviews, participants defined family reintegration and their success of reunion in their own words and within their own contexts. These responses typically reflected the overall outcome of the separation and reunion experience in response to the interviewer's initial question.

#### *The A/AA Factor: Family Stressors*

Family stressors as annotated by the A, AA, and Vulnerability Factors were measured on the surveys by the 15 item Family Changes and Strains Scale that reported a reliability of .79 (McCubbin 1987; see Appendix D for permission letter). Although shortened from the Family Inventory of Life Events, its validity remained strong. One change made by this researcher to the scale modified the first question to identify which family member experienced problems with behavioral or emotional difficulties. In addition, the Family Adaptation Check List (reliability .82) provided information regarding potential problems that families experienced. While McCubbin developed this ten item scale theoretically to measure the family's outcome, this scale measured crisis and dysfunction more than positive interactive functioning. Because of some repetition in the questions, items were merged with the above scale to minimize redundancy resulting in a total of 19 items. McCubbin also provided normed data for white and black enlisted families for each of the scales which can be used in the analysis of data collected in this research.

Again to better fit this study, this researcher changed the wording of the overall question of these scales to read: "Did any of the following happen in your family?" Then in the answer



columns the different time periods addressed when families experienced the most risk for particular stressors. A second modification to this scale added items to address if family members were exposed to trauma and if homecoming experiences matched expectations.

During the qualitative interviews, participants described their separation and reunion experiences to include descriptions of the hardest part for each of them to handle. Participants were encouraged to present their stories within their unique family situations to highlight the broad spectrum of issues, events and situations that create crises for some families while others may not experience the same as stress.

#### *The B/BB/BBB Factor: Family Resources*

Resources, the B/BB/BBB Factor, addressed both personal assets as well as family and community support. The Self Reliance Index (see Appendix D for permission) measured the confidence and abilities of the military spouse who stayed at home during the separation. These elements indicated the resources of the family as well as their world-view; increased confidence impacted how a family appraised or assessed stress. This acted as a measure of the C/CC factor. This nine item scale reported a reliability of .88 and norms for enlisted families of both white and black were provided. Additional questions regarding the resource of communication were added to this scale. A second scale, created by this researcher, measured the services available to the family within the local military community. This scale included two elements: the identification of resources that were used by each family and how helpful each resource was.

Finally, for the problem solving/coping factor (PSC Factor), families answered the 26 items from the Family Coping Inventory that specifically addressed strategies for dealing with long term separations. From surveys of a Navy sample of wives, factor analysis resulted in five overall patterns of coping: 1) maintaining family integrity (alpha .84); 2) social support (alpha .82); 3) managing strain (alpha .74); 4) believing in military profession and maintaining optimism (alpha .85) and 5) developing self reliance and self esteem (alpha .71). Only the items with the highest alpha ratings or the best representation of the factor were included in this scale. Multiple coping strategies presented alternative ways of dealing with stress and provided options for families to

manage their situations; the expectation was that those families that used more "helpful" coping strategies should report higher family satisfaction rates.

During the interviews, the researcher explored what helped participants succeed during separation and reunion. Participants discussed both the resources they utilized as well as their own personal strengths to expand on what the military community offered in regards to services, what helped and what remained unavailable.

#### *The C/CC Factor: Family Appraisal*

Family appraisal and world-view were measured in a variety of ways throughout the instrument. The best measure of confidence at handling separation was done through the Self Reliance Index (see Appendix D for permission). In addition, the family's level of optimism which was measured by the coping strategy "believing that things will always work out" also represented the family's perspective.

Within the qualitative interviews, participants expressed this viewpoint not only in their abilities to address the adjustment to separations and reunions, but also in their assessment of military life. Many discussed their family background of military service as well as their intentions regarding their career plans in respect to the demands of military operations.

#### Hypotheses and Proposed Data Analysis

##### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Although specific hypotheses were discussed in chapter two, the researcher outlined how each hypothesis would be tested and analyzed statistically. A similar chart could have been developed for the hypotheses regarding reunion on pages 42-43 of chapter two; however, the concepts remained the same. The scales of the survey instrument that measured the concept listed in the hypotheses could have been substituted. Additional single item variables such as level of independence, optimism, retention and readiness were also examined in the data analysis for their impact on family reintegration.

Table 2: Hypotheses Regarding Separation

Hypotheses regarding separation	Hypotheses translated into scale terminology	Statistical Test
1. Neg correlation between stress and reintegration	There will be a negative correlation between the Family Changes and Strains Scale combined with the Adaptation Check List (FCS Scale) "during separation" and the Family Satisfaction (Fam Sat) score	Pearson r correlation coefficient
2. Pos correlation between stress and # of resources used.	There will be a positive correlation between the FCS Scale "during separation" and the frequencies Service Scale "Before, During or After Separation" score	Pearson r correlation coefficient
3. Pos correlation between stress and resources effectiveness	There will be a positive correlation between the FCS Scale "during separation" and the likert helpful ratings of Services	Spearman rho correlation coefficient
4. Neg correlation between stress and spouse confidence level	There will be a negative correlation between the FCS Scale "during separation" and the Self Reliance Index (SRI) "confidence level before separation" score	Pearson r correlation coefficient
5. Neg correlation between stress and coping	There will be a negative correlation between the FCS Scale "during separation" and the Family Coping Inventory score	Pearson r correlation coefficient
6. Pos correlation between # of resources and reintegration	There will be a positive correlation between the frequencies of Service Scale "Before, During, and After Separation" score and the Fam Sat score	Pearson r correlation coefficient
7. Pos correlation between resource effectiveness and reintegration	There will be a positive correlation between the likert scales of the helpfulness of services and the Fam Sat score	Spearman rho correlation coefficient
8. Intervening variables	Each intervening will be tested separately to determine if correlations exist between the variable and reintegration (Fam Sat score)	Appropriate test (pearson r, t-test, etc.)
9. Intervening variables	Intervening variables can be entered in different controlled equations to determine which stressors of separation interact with which resources with which coping strategies and what appraisals to determine the most positive reintegration score (Fam Sat score)	Multiple/log linear regression analysis

### Qualitative Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by this researcher verbatim. Personal transcription of the data following each interview allowed the researcher to closely examine the data as well as the interview style to ensure that participants were allowed free flowing narrations of their stories. The questions of the interview schedule provided a guide from which the

researcher could ensure that a number of aspects of the separation and reunion process were discussed. Using Nudist 5.0, the researcher coded the interviews line by line according to themes that both emerged from the data and that were originally established based on the quantitative data and the interview schedule. Such things such as the overall separation experience, the reunion, stressors, emotional responses, family appraisal and family composition all provided initial categories in which data was coded.

### Study Population

#### *Sample Selection*

Selecting the population for this study began with purposive identification (Babbie 1990) of military families that endured a separation of at least six months and that reunified in the past twelve months. This was accomplished by accessing a list of such families from the mission support group commander and its services at Luke Air Force Base with the permission of the wing commander (see Appendix E). Two hundred forty six families in two waves of mailings were identified and invited to participate in this study. Each questionnaire included an invitation to families to participate in the in-depth interviews with this researcher.

Due to the low number of responses (16) and numerous surveys returned deemed non-deliverable due to poor mailing addresses (29), the researcher was forced to change recruitment strategies. Base-wide e-mails were sent to two Air Force installations soliciting participation in the survey from couples who experienced a minimum of a 90 day separation. This resulted in 35 additional responses. In addition, eligible participants were sought from snowball and convenience sampling methods; the researcher spent five days at a local installation personally marketing participation in the survey and the interviews. From these efforts and a third mailing, 28 additional surveys were sent out to potential participants. Such later efforts succeeded at a higher rate resulting in 85 returned surveys and six completed interviews. There were no significant differences between these groups of respondents; the results could all be examined together.

Although the original intent of the surveys sought completion from both spouses in a family, surveys were not discarded if only one family member participated. Instead, surveys were matched with their spouses and can be compared to those with only one response per family to ensure accurate family representation. While some authors discuss the dangers in only assessing one person's view of family functioning, studies have demonstrated that on family assessment scales the husband- wife dyad substantially agreed on their answers ( $r=.46$  on FACES-II) (Tutty 1995). These surveys were tested against the sample of two spouse completion families and there were no significant differences in how these groups answered questions. Because of this, the single spouse respondent surveys were utilized in the same manner as the dual household surveys. 68 households were represented in this survey population.

#### *Sample Size*

The number of predictors, effect size, power and the reliabilities of measurement tools (scales) determined the appropriate sample size in quantitative data collection (Aiken & West 1991). With the possibility of up to seven intervening variables best predicting positive family reintegration in a regression equation and striving for a power of .80, a moderate effect size and scales that may range as low as .70 on reliability, a minimum of 139 participants were required for survey data. Due to the smaller response size, regression equations will be less complicated and the number of predictors within the equations will be reduced.

In addition to the survey data, the researcher interviewed six couples who volunteered for the interview from the local area to better understand the full picture of family reintegration and to corroborate the survey findings (Padgett 1998). The number of couples participating in this study was determined by the depth of the data collected; once "saturated" with data, the researcher considered data collection complete. Themes within the data became apparent and a variety of positive (family reunited) and negative (couple separated) outcomes were discussed. Recruitment of the couples occurred through their returned survey instrument in which volunteers provided contact information. The couples represented differing experiences which included

families in different stages of development to include those with and without children, a dual military couple, a female who deployed, a family that did not reunify but rather remained separated due to marital problems, differing lengths of separations and varied military missions that caused the geographic separations.

#### Data Validity and Trustworthiness

According to the standards of the mixed methods research design of this study, the researcher ensured quality and valid data during each stage of this project (ie. Instrument development, data collection and data analysis). By conducting separate quantitative and qualitative research activities while adhering to the guiding literature in the field, the validity of each finding can be examined independently and the descriptive validity of the project tested (Johnson and Turner 2003). Descriptive validity ensured that the researcher accurately portrayed the accounts of the participants. The researcher accomplished this by the timely input of survey data, random checks of the data to ensure accurate input process, peer debriefing of the researcher following each interview, and timely transcription of each interview by the researcher personally.

In addition, data from different sources that corroborated each other also strengthened the findings through the process of methodological triangulation (Padgett 1998). While the above discussions of measurement and sampling addressed issues of validity in quantitative studies and the management of the interviews addressed the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, the combination of the data overcame the weaknesses of the methods and highlighted the strengths of each. Together, the data that corroborated the findings of the other supported the findings even more.

Finally, the mixed methods increased this study's external validity for generalizing its findings (Johnson and Turner 2003). This was accomplished by making multiple means available for participants to respond. For example, while surveys often limit the responses of participants to the answers provided, the short answer comment blocks within the survey allowed participants to include their personal input. In addition, while the title and recruitment strategies of this entire

study biased the respondents to positive experiences (family reintegration), there were some participants willing to write in their difficulties on the surveys, to openly vent their frustrations with the military in an anonymous setting and one interview participant was willing to discuss her family disintegration that resulted from military separations and reunions. Without the variety of data collection techniques, such different findings may not have been captured. These findings, though different for each individual, validated the overall findings of this study as they can now be applied to a greater audience of military family members.

#### Institutional Review Board

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002, this researcher completed the Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams as required. Prior to the initiation of research activities with human subjects, this researcher gained approval from the institutional review board of both Arizona State University and the United States Air Force (see Appendix F). All application forms, surveys, questionnaire schedules and informed consent forms were attached. All participants in this study were assured confidentiality; no demographic information identifying individuals was released or published but instead data was presented in the form of group data. Once recorded and this dissertation published, all actual survey instruments were destroyed; audio recordings of interviews were erased following their transcription.

#### Limitations

Despite the mixed methods strengths of this study, its findings remained limited. Due to the difficulties with sampling, the populations to which these findings can be applied were limited by the inability to engage more Air Force installations, the small numbers of responses, and the failure to achieve a randomized or even a sound purposive sample. Instead, the participants of this study appeared to be positively biased toward the family reintegration experience and toward the military. Some participants were recruited from the physical areas surrounding base services thus making them more likely to participate in them. From four respondents who received the notice regarding the study but who were unwilling to participate, the researcher was faced with the anger and frustration of families whose marriages dissolved due to marital conflict that arose

during or after family separation. Despite attempts made by the researcher to engage such families or to track divorce rates following deployments or remote assignments, these statistics were unable to be found. The title of the study may have produced this negative response from families and instead of responding to the survey with low family satisfaction rates, these families did not participate. In addition, this study focused on active duty families; therefore, applying the findings to reservists or families from other branches of service may be limited. Finally, from the data collected, one must consider that the data was collected following separation and reunion. Such retrospective personal reports result in less reliable data than if this study was conducted longitudinally. However, given the mobile population of the military, the cross-sectional methodology produced the best likely results.



## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

The first chapters of this dissertation reviewed the literature, the theory of Family Stress, and the methodology which led to the conception and the execution of this study. This fourth chapter reviews the statistical and thematic qualitative findings from the survey and interview data which were collected from the sample population of 68 military families and a total of 85 respondents. The sample was identified by contacting families who previously used the morale call program during separation and who resided near Air Force installations in the southwest region of the United States. In addition, a snowball sample was added to the study population by contacting known returnees from remote assignments to Korea. From this data, the statistical relationships between the stressors of separation and reunion were explored, the resources used by families to cope with difficulties were identified, and the appraisals made by families regarding their abilities to deal with separations during deployments of 90 days or more discussed.

### Study Sample Population

#### *Survey Respondents*

Matching the sample population with the general population of the Air Force determined the extent to which the findings could be generalized. Within the design of the survey instrument, the researcher included both numerical data and short answer comment blocks. Eighty-five surveys were returned. From these surveys, all of the short answer comments were analyzed and included in the study. However, eight surveys were excluded from the statistical data analysis due to the information not meeting study parameters. Therefore, 77 surveys were utilized in the analysis of quantitative data. The actual respondents consisted of the following: sixty-one percent were active duty personnel who returned from separation, active duty spouses of returnees completed five percent of the surveys, and spouses of returnees who had no affiliation with active military service other than by marriage completed thirty-four percent.

Unfortunately, the Air Force does not publish detailed information regarding the demographics of military family life; therefore comparisons could not be made between the Air Force and the sample population in some areas. Overall, ethnic differences within this population

did not indicate differences in their success rates with family reintegration. The average length of marriage for the respondents was nine years and the families resided an average of three years at their current duty location. Families comprised of 17% dual active duty couples; 36% dual career couples; and 47% active duty members married to spouses working part time or less outside of the home. In regards to children, 40% of these homes had children age one to five, 51% had children age 6-12, and 23% had children age 13-17.

*Table 3. Demographic Information*

	Air Force Population	Respondent Family Population (77 surveys)	Interview Respondents (6 Families)
Ethnicity	76.5% White  12.5% Black 4.5% Hispanic 6.5% Other	67% White  20% Blended Heritage 8% Black 3% Hispanic 2% Other	66.6% White  33.3% Blended
Gender	80.4% Males  19.6% Females	92% Males  8% Females	5 Couples  1 Separated Wife
Rank	17% Officers (Range 0-1 thru 0-10)  83% Enlisted (Range E-1 thru E-9)	24% Officers (Range 0-1 thru 0-5)  76% Enlisted (Range E-4- E-7)	50% Officers (Range 0-1 thru 0-5)  50% Enlisted (Range E-7-E-8)
Average Length of Military Service	11 years (Officers)  8 years (Enlisted)	Data not collected	10.5 years (Officers)  19 years (Enlisted)
Family Composition	10% Dual Active Duty	17% Dual Active Duty  9 yrs married (avg.)	17% Dual Active Duty  13 yrs married (avg.)

The average time of preparation before separation was three months with the average separation lasting six months. Respondents averaged six months between the time of reunion and completing the survey. Forty percent of respondents classified their reason for the separation as service supporting war efforts; 36% completed one-year assignments to remote locations. The remainder classified their reasons for separation as supporting peacekeeping missions or other missions.

Survey respondents reported that 92% of the homes impacted by separation were those where the male, not the female, was the deployed member. All of the husbands interviewed deployed, as did the one female active duty member; however, the female did not serve a remote assignment as the men did.

#### *Interview Participants*

Five couples and one spouse who was residing apart from her husband due to marital discord agreed to meet with this researcher for an in-depth interview to discuss experiences with separation and reunion caused by military duties. Two of the officers served previously as enlisted resulting in their time in service registering as longer than average for their peer junior officers. The average length of marriage for all the couples was 13 years; the range of their marriages was two years to 21. The average time of active duty service was 15.5 years ranging from seven years to 22. All but two families had children residing in the home. One couple was dual active duty, two families had spouses who worked full time in civilian positions, and three families had spouses who primarily stayed at home to care for the children. Five of the families experienced separation as a result of remote assignments to Korea. This means that the service members left home for the period of one year. The sixth couple anticipated the husband's departure for his remote assignment in the fall; he returned from a six-month deployment in the past year. This resulted in all six families enduring deployments of up to six months in addition to having experience with remote assignments. All interviewees were Caucasian with the exception of one spouse who was of blended heritage.

## Exploring the Concepts: Measurement Validity and Significant Contributing Factors to Family Reintegration

### *The X/XX Factor: Family Reintegration*

#### *Data Validity*

Using the Family Satisfaction scale to measure the XX Factor (Family Reintegration), this scale acted as the primary dependent variable, reported a reliability of score .94 (64 cases), and was used consistent with the original author's intent. Although this researcher modified the scale slightly by adding a few items, the correlation between the total family satisfaction scale and the items in the scale suggested by Dr. Olson was highly significant ( $r .973$   $p < .001$ ). The items indicating cohesion created a scale with the reliability of .90; the mean of the sample population (72 cases) computed as 30.0 as compared to the mean of national data of 26.5. Adaptability was also measured within this scale with a reliability of .86 (74 cases); the sample mean was recorded as 22.9 compared to Dr. Olson's normed data of 19.5. Finally, health and the family's fit with the military community was measured by the last two items within the author's Family Satisfaction Scale resulting in 94% of the families being satisfied with their health and 95% satisfied with staying in the military.

*Table 4. Quantitative Data: Family Satisfaction Scale*

	Sample Population	National Population
Mean Score for Family Cohesion	30.0	26.5
Mean Score for Family Adaptability	22.9	19.5

#### *Overall Views of Family Reintegration*

The overall predictive model of stressors, resources, and appraisal as measured by a family's self reliance scale, predicting family reintegration was supported in this research study (R square .211,  $df$  3,  $F$  5.155,  $p < .01$ ). Because this study replicates earlier findings, this is worth noting despite the small sample size of 77. However, with such a small sample size, caution is required in the interpretation since only one predictor, total stressors, was a significant predictor

( $p < .001$ ) of family reintegration. Given the negative nature of the Beta ( $-.428$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the fewer stressors families faced the better their integration following reunion. The remaining two variables did not significantly predict family reintegration but did contribute to the overall model.

*Table 5. Predictors of Family Reintegration*

( $N = 77$ )

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>b</i>
Coping Scale (Appraisal)	.064	.206	.040
Total Stressors	-.337	.093	-.428*
Total Resources	.055	.084	.085

Note.  $R$  Square = .211. \* $p < .001$

Because of the small sample size, the relationship between the predictors and family reintegration were verified by testing the correlations between each variable and the family outcome. Results showed that stressors and appraisal correlated with outcomes in families at significant levels and in the same direction as the regression analysis; the utilization of resources was the only predictor not verified as impacting family reintegration.

*Table 6. Correlations Impacting Family Reintegration*

Variable	Level of significance
Overall Stressors	$r \text{ } -.473$ , $p < .001$
- Separation	$r \text{ } -.421$ , $p < .001$
- Reunion	$r \text{ } -.479$ , $p < .001$
Overall Resources	$r \text{ } .200$ , $p = \text{ns}$
- Separation	$r \text{ } .146$ , $p = \text{ns}$
- Reunion	$r \text{ } .223$ , $p = \text{ns}$
Overall Appraisal	
- Separation (Confidence Scale)	$r \text{ } .363$ , $p < .001$
- Reunion (Actual Abilities Scale)	$r \text{ } .384$ , $p < .001$

### Testing the Hypotheses

This study focused on the impact of stressors, resources and appraisal on the process of family reintegration – from the time of pre-separation, the separation itself, and the reunion phase. The hypotheses were divided into the two time frames – separation and reunion.

*Table 7. Results of the Hypotheses: Separation Phase*

Hypotheses regarding Separation (p. 32-33)	Findings	Statistical Significance
1. Neg correlation between stress and reintegration	This hypothesis was supported. There was a negative correlation between the stresses during separation and family reintegration. As the stress during separation increased, family reintegration was less successful.	$r = -.421, p < .001$
2. Pos correlation between stress and # of resources used.	This hypothesis was not supported. There was no correlation between the resources used and the amount of stress during separation.	$r = .050, p = ns$
3. Pos correlation between stress and resources effectiveness	Because there was no significant relationship between stressors and the use of resources, the effectiveness was not calculated.	Not applicable.
4. Neg correlation between stress and spouse confidence level	This hypothesis was supported. As the amount of stress during separation increased, the spouses became less confident with their abilities to manage their homes.	$r = -.441, p < .001$
5. Neg correlation between stress and coping	This hypothesis was not supported. There was no significant relationship between stressors occurring during separation and the families use of coping strategies.	$r = .002, p = ns$
6. Pos correlation between # of resources and reintegration	There was no correlation between the use of services/resources during separation and reintegration.	$r = .146, p = ns$
7. Pos correlation between resource effectiveness and reintegration	Because the use of resources during separation and family reintegration was not significantly correlated, this item was not calculated.	Not applicable.
8. Intervening variables	None of the intervening variables significantly correlated with reducing stress or family reintegration.	Not significant.
9. Intervening variables	Due to the small sample size, the multiple regression equation was not able to be calculated.	N too small-equation not possible

### Intervening Variables

Independent and intervening variables such as increased rank, whether the active duty member volunteered for the mission, the type of mission, shorter separations, if the mission occurred during peace time, if the family was comprised of a civilian stay at home spouse married

to a military member, reduced number of children, increased time prior to separation, increased previous experience with separation, increased level of optimism, no relocation during separation and increased length of marriage would help to explain the variability in stress levels of families and would reduce the level of stress reported. However, none of these variables had a significant correlation with reducing stressors during separation or reunion. Nor were any of these intervening variables significantly correlated with family reintegration. Due to the small number of cases, the search for links between variables and family reintegration using regression was not able to be calculated.

*Table 8. Results of the Hypotheses: Reunion Phase*

Hypotheses regarding Reunion (p. 42-43)	Findings	Statistical Significance
1. Neg correlation between stress and reintegration	This hypothesis was supported. As the number of stressors during reunion went down, the better reintegration was experienced.	$r = -.479$ , $p < .001$
2. Pos correlation between stress and # of resources used.	This hypothesis was not supported. There was no correlation between the stressors experienced and the number of resources utilized during reunion. There was also no significant relationship between the total stressors and the use of resources during any time frame combined.	$r = -.210$ $p = ns$ $r = -.153$ $p = ns$
3. Pos correlation between stress and resources effectiveness	Because the resources utilized did not significantly impact the amount of stress, this statistic was not be calculated.	Not applicable.
4. Neg correlation between stress and spouse appreciation level	There was no correlation between the spouses' perceptions of appreciation and stressors during reunion.	$\chi^2 (3, n=22) = 50.875$ , $p = ns$
5. Neg correlation between stress and active duty satisfaction with homecoming	This hypothesis was supported. As the satisfaction with homecoming activities increased, the reunion stressors decreased for active duty respondents.	$\chi^2 (3, n=43) = 76.325$ , $p = .001$
6. Neg correlation between stress and coping	This hypothesis was not supported. There was no significant relationship between stressors occurring during reunion and the coping scale.	$r = -.162$ $p = ns$
7. Pos correlation between # of resources and reintegration	This hypothesis was not supported. There was no correlation between the frequencies services used during reunion and family reintegration.	$r = .223$ $p = ns$
8. Pos correlation between resource effectiveness and reintegration	Because the resources utilized at reunion was not significant, this statistic was not calculated.	Not applicable.
9. Pos correlation between lifestyle and reintegration	This hypothesis was supported. Those families that were satisfied with the family decision to stay in the military also had higher family	$r = .481$ $p < .001$

	satisfaction scale scores.	
10. Neg correlation between overall stress and reintegration	This hypothesis was supported. As the total stressors reduced during both separation and reunion, the better family reintegration was experienced.	$r = -.473$ , $p < .001$
11. Intervening variables	None of the intervening variables correlated with decreased stress or better reintegration outcomes.	$p = ns$
12. Intervening variables	Due to the small sample size, complicated equations using multiple regression were not possible; results were inconclusive.	N too small- equation not possible

#### *Time since Reunion Impacting Reintegration*

Theoretically, families proceeded from adjustment to integration by going through the initial reunion/honeymoon phase and then on to the reintegration/stability phase. However, the time since reunion did not significantly correlate with family satisfaction ( $r = -.119$   $p = ns$ ) or with reducing stressors during the time of reunion ( $r = .160$   $p = ns$ ). Not maintaining the euphoria of reunion frustrated some families who were interviewed in this study; "things are honeymoon-like for maybe the first two weeks. Then everything is back to normal. My husband was deployed 5 1/2 months. You would think the honeymoon feeling would last just as long- NOT!"

#### *The A/AA/AAA Factor: Family Stressors*

##### *Data Validity*

Survey data measured the family stressors, as annotated by the A, AA, AAA and Vulnerability Factors, during two time periods; reliabilities for each scale reported alphas of .87 (stressors during separation) and .90 (stressors during reunion) respectively. Because the reliabilities of the stressor scales remained strong, confidence was increased for the instrument measuring stress during both the separation and reunion time frames. Although the original thought was to compare findings of these stress scales with McCubbin's normed data for white and black enlisted families, the combination of the scales in this study contaminated the results and no true comparisons between results could be made.



### *Separation Stressors Impacting Reintegration*

As a combined scale, separation stressors significantly impacted reintegration; as stressors increased, the family's satisfaction following reunion decreased ( $r = -.421$   $p < .01$ ). However, table nine lists the specific stressors that occurred during separation that negatively impacted reintegration. Of these, difficulties concentrating correlated with all the other stressors. This indicates that stress management activities relating to overcoming such difficulties may be an important prevention tool for the improvement of family outcomes. With the exception of the consideration of divorce, debt was also associated with all the other factors. This may indicate that additional expenses with unexpected stressors such as illness or death to changes in jobs or relocation may cause additional financial and emotional burdens on families, thus reducing the family's overall reintegration.

*Table 9. Significant Separation Factors Impacting Family Reintegration*

Separation Stressors (Combined)	$r = -.421$ $p < .01$
• Debt	$r = -.307$ $p < .01$
• Occupational Changes	$r = -.243$ $p < .05$
• Illness, Injury or Death of Loved One	$r = -.311$ $p < .01$
• Loneliness or Isolation	$r = -.269$ $p < .05$
• Relocation	$r = -.313$ $p < .01$
• Pursuit of Marital Separation or Divorce	$r = -.453$ $p < .001$
• Difficulties Concentrating	$r = -.429$ $p < .001$

*High interest stressors.* Due to the gravity of the consequences, the Air Force specifically targets the prevention and treatment of suicides, alcohol abuse and domestic violence. While the correlations regarding these specific issues were not significantly related to the outcome of reintegration overall, such issues caused great harm to the few that suffered them. Families reporting such stressors were more at risk for severe crisis and may have benefited from preventative steps or intervention. During separation, suicidal ideation significantly correlated

with the following: marital separation and divorce, problems with alcohol, domestic violence, police arrests, exposure to trauma, and the lack of appreciation. Alcohol abuse significantly correlated with all the listed stressors except for "adding" a child to the family. Problems with alcohol also positively correlated with the length of the separation; thus such families were at greater risk for numerous personal and family problems the longer the separation lasted. Finally, problems with anger or domestic violence significantly correlated with all the separation stressors except for difficulties with emotional problems with one's spouse. Since all of these stressors occurred in only a few families in this sample population, these high interest items did not play a predominant role in this research. However, now that the correlated factors have been identified, more can be done in the future to assess and intervene with families who suffer such issues.

*Separation expectations.* Spouses often faced stress during separation related to the rumors about what a particular location was like. Remote assignments to Korea, for example, had long been rumored to be locations of drinking and infidelity. Couples had to successfully overcome such rumors with trust, perseverance, communication and affirmations of promises that committed partners would not participate in acts that would hurt their marital relationship. Visiting one's spouse at the deployed location and the length of marriage were both thought to reduce stress during separation. However, neither variable significantly correlated with the reduction of stress. Instead, as demonstrated by the couples interviewed, all who successfully reunited stated that their commitment to their marriage simply did not include the option of divorce. In addition, none of them reported being big drinkers or partiers.

*Length of separation.* Although the time of the separation did not significantly correlate with family reintegration ( $r = -.181$   $p = ns$ ), theory predicted that stressors depended on the length of time the family remained apart. This research supported this hypothesis since stresses during separation increased with the length of time away ( $r = .319$   $p < .01$ ). Specifically the following stressors increased as the time of separation extended: spouse behavioral problems ( $r = .233$   $p < .05$ ), child behavioral problems ( $r = .305$   $p < .05$ ), alcohol problems ( $r = .245$   $p < .05$ ), debt ( $r = .290$

$p < .05$ ), relocation ( $r .342 p < .01$ ), difficulties concentrating ( $r .250 p < .05$ ), and difficulties sleeping ( $r .347 p < .01$ ).

*Financial difficulties.* Despite the findings that one in five families suffered difficulties with finances during separation and reunion, it was unclear how families overcome this factor. No junior enlisted families responded to this study therefore no information was discovered about that population. In addition, since resources were not significantly correlated with reducing stressors, no information was revealed about how to intervene against financial hardship. Instead, financial stressors must continue to be examined to further understand their impact on reintegration.

#### *Reunion Stressors Impacting Reintegration*

Reunion was theoretically thought of as a time of "honeymoon"; family satisfaction was expected to be high immediately following the service members' return home. However, since there was no correlation found between the time since return and reintegration outcomes, this theory was not supported. Instead, several reunion stressors correlated with family satisfaction in a negative direction. In addition, there was supporting evidence that the total stressors- those of separation combined with those of reunion- significantly decreased the level of family satisfaction. Therefore, it follows that the reduction of stressors during the entire deployment cycle remained important. The inability to effectively manage stressors reduced the satisfaction of family life.

*Table 10. Significant Reunion Factors Impacting Family Reintegration*

Reunion Stressors (Combined)	$r -.479 p < .001$
• Spouse Behavioral Problems	$r -.318 p < .01$
• Debt	$r -.283 p < .05$
• Occupational Changes	$r -.345 p < .01$
• Extreme Anger or Domestic Violence	$r -.335 p < .01$
• Loneliness or Isolation	$r -.443 p < .001$
Total Stressors (Separation and Reunion Combined)	$r -.473 p < .001$

*High interest stressors.* Again, since the Air Force attempts to prevent alcohol abuse, suicide and domestic violence, those items were explored further for the reunion time period as well. None of these factors significantly correlated with family reintegration but the issues are serious and detrimental to families; therefore they were evaluated for the purpose of identifying risk factors. Each of these factors significantly correlated with 15 of the 19 other stress factors mentioned in the surveys. Although small in number, families experiencing substance abuse, violence or suicidal thoughts faced multiple stressors; such families remained at risk.

*Length of separation.* The length of the separation not only impacted the stressors experienced during separation, they also significantly increased the overall stressors experienced by families during reunion ( $r .274 p<.05$ ). Specifically, the stressors most impacted by the length of separation during reunion included: spouse behavioral problems ( $r .468 p<.01$ ), child behavioral problems ( $r .268 p<.05$ ), alcohol problems ( $r .332 p<.01$ ), debt ( $r .284 p<.05$ ), change in occupation ( $r .241 p<.05$ ), relocation ( $r .241 p<.05$ ), and difficulties sleeping ( $r .353 p<.01$ ).

*Homecoming events.* The "bigger" the problems that spouses reported regarding their experience with appreciation for managing the home combined with the active duty members report of appreciation for serving deployments during separation, the more families reported stressors during reunion ( $r .536 p<.01$ ). This was also true of the reunion period; the stressors during reunion increased as the problems with homecoming activities increased ( $r .433 p<.01$ ). In breaking this data down further, it was discovered that active duty personnel contributed to this issue more than spouses. Active duty personnel who reported problems with recognition during homecoming activities also reported greater amounts of reunion stressors ( $X^2 (3, n=43) =76.325, p=.001$ ). In contrast, the spouse's perception of appreciation during separation did not significantly correlate with reunion stressors ( $X^2 (3, n=22) =50.875, p=ns$ ). Although the populations surveyed were small, spouses did not seem to expect appreciation and they did not raise the issue of the need for acknowledgement of their work on the survey. That is not to say that no spouses reported issues with this. Instead, they verbalized their discontent via interview or short answer; in this case, the qualitative themes contradicted the survey data. As the one

interviewee expressed, she had never really thought to ask for acknowledgement from her husband; yet, that was an important part in her resentment toward him. This factor may even have influenced her decision to pursue marital separation.

#### *Frequencies of Stressors*

Previously, the stressors that significantly correlated with reintegration were discussed; however, these stressors were not the most frequently reported. Table eleven presents the stressors that caused problems for the greatest number of individuals during separation and reunion. The factors common to both the tables of significance and frequency include: problems with spousal behavior, occupational changes, and difficulties concentrating. This may indicate that fewer people struggled with the variables found to significantly impact reintegration, but the consequences of those problems significantly changed the outcome of the family. In contrast, those problems listed below may have been experienced by more families, but these stressors were better managed and they did not impact family reintegration to as great an extent.

*Table 11. Stressors during Separation and Reunion*

Problem	<u>Separation</u>		<u>Reunion</u>	
	Small	Big	Small	Big
Spouse Behavior	22.4%	15.8%	17.6%	4.1%
Child Behavior	33.8%	13.0%	13.5%	2.7%
Change in occupation	9.1%	9.1%	13.3%	4.0%
Difficulties concentrating	19.5%	5.2%	12.0%	2.7%
Difficulties sleeping	40.3%	14.3%	25.7%	5.4%
Conflicts regarding roles and tasks	16.9%	2.6%	21.6%	4.1%

#### *The B/BB/BBB Factor: Family Resources*

##### *Combating Stressors*

Since stress is the most significant predictor of reintegration, the reduction of stress is critical to family success. In response to stress during separation and reunion; coping strategies, formal resources, communication, and rank were all hypothesized to assist families. However,

none of these variables significantly correlated with the reduction of stressors. In fact, one resource, confidence, decreased as stressors increased for both the time periods of separation ( $r = -.441$   $p < .001$ ) and of reunion ( $r = -.399$   $p < .001$ ).

*Preparation.* Although it was predicted that families who had time to prepare for separation would do better in the overall experience of separation and reunion, advance warning of deployments did not significantly improve family reintegration nor did it reduce the total stressors that a family faced ( $r = .198$   $p = ns$ ). However, families that experienced problems related to having "time to prepare for what was to come" significantly correlated with total stressors during separation ( $r = .600$   $p < .001$ ) and during reunion ( $r = .615$   $p < .001$ ). In fact, thirty-six percent of survey respondents reported having problems preparing for what was to come during separation while twenty percent had problems during reunion.

#### *Resources Impacting Reintegration*

Despite the lack of overall resources impacting reintegration, some individual resources correlated significantly with reintegration. Legal services and on-base social activities positively correlated with reintegration, while the use of mental health counseling and "other" services negatively impacted reintegration. These results however may not have indicated true impact on reintegration, but rather may have reflected the fact that all military members are mandated to seek legal services prior to separation and that those families most dysfunctional sought the use of mental health intervention. The most useful statistic found here was that the use of on-base social activities may have positively impacted family reintegration.

*Table 12. Resources with a Significant Correlation to Family Reintegration*

Resources Utilized Prior to Separation	$r = .190$ $p = ns$
• Use of On-base Legal Services	$r = .294$ $p < .01$
• Use of Off-base Mental Health Services	$r = -.253$ $p < .05$
Resources Utilized During Separation	$r = .146$ $p = ns$
• Use of On-base social activities	$r = .263$ $p < .05$
Resources Utilized After Separation	$r = .223$ $p = ns$

• Use of Off-base mental health counseling	$r = -.291$ $p < .05$
• Use of "other" services	$r = -.249$ $p < .05$
Total Resources Utilized	$r = .200$ $p = ns$

### *Frequencies of Resource Utilization*

Resources, the B/BB/BBB Factor, addressed both personal assets as well as family and community support as measured by the services utilized by families prior to separation, during separation and after reunion. Although not statistically significantly changing the outcome for families, some services were reported as "helpful" during each of the phases of deployment for at least twenty percent of respondents (see Table 13). These services that were provided both on-base and within the civilian community should not be taken for granted; many families utilized them. If such resources would not have been available, the outcomes remain unknown. In fact, despite the number and variety of services offered, respondents still reported unmet needs in each deployment phase. The lack of resources was reported by thirteen percent of respondents during pre-separation, twenty-one percent during separation, and twelve percent during reunion.

*Table 13. Resource Utilization*

Deployment Stage	Resources Utilized by a Minimum of 20% of Respondents	Unmet needs as Reported in Short Answer Comment Blocks
Pre-Separation	Childcare services, youth services, chaplain services, legal services	Difficulties with finances or military pay services, conflicts of assignments due to special needs, need for spouses to become aware of available services, and the request for additional support from chaplains.
During Separation	Military sponsored social activities, mid-tours, childcare services, youth activities,	Financial hardship, lack of childcare services, lack of unit support, lack of awareness or access to military services, restrictions on

	chaplain services, legal services, chapel sponsored activities, travel to the deployed location, and car care maintenance	number and times of morale calls, inability to afford plane tickets for mid-tour visit, and emergency support services for such things as death in the family.
Reunion	Youth activities and leave	Lack of awareness of services; lack of information or preparation for starting new relationship with spouse; and residing excess distance from base that precluded the use of services during any phase of separation.

*Difficulties asking for help.* In addition to services not being available which resulted in unmet needs during the deployment cycle, families themselves may not have been willing to ask for help or to participate in services. This was discovered by examining resource utilization prior to, during and after separation; these statistics all correlated with one another at the  $p < .001$  level. This may have indicated that the same individuals used the needed services throughout the deployment cycle while others did not use any services at all. This fact was also supported by the qualitative data. At least three of the couples who were interviewed reported difficulties asking for help.

#### *Coping Strategies*

As another measure of resources, the survey assessed the coping strategies utilized by families ( $\alpha .71$ ). None of the individual coping strategies were significantly correlated with family reintegration, except for those that indicated the use of "other" coping strategies. Surprisingly, the more they used "other" strategies, the less successful their reintegration was experienced ( $r -.232$   $p < .05$ ). Although not significantly impacting reintegration, the most commonly used "helpful" coping strategies included: staying in shape (92%), engaging in meaningful relationships (90%), believing that things will work out (89%), telling self that I have things to be thankful for (88%), believing in God (81%), and becoming more independent (80%).



### *The C/CC/CCC Factor: Family Appraisal*

#### *Data Validities and Norms*

Although personal confidence in one's ability to manage the home was also considered a resource, the self-reliance index primarily measured the family's appraisal of one's readiness to handle military separations. Its reliability measured with an alpha of .64 due to the author's addition of a question regarding the couple's confidence to be able to communicate. Without this added question, the scale's alpha raised to .87, which was closer to the original author's reliability alpha of .88. In order to compare this survey's self reliance or confidence scores with normed data, first the researcher created a single variable of the spouse's confidence to access military and community stores and services by averaging the two scores. Then the remaining scale items with the exception of the question regarding communication were summed. These scores then compared with McCubbin's normed data for enlisted black and white families. The sample population's mean score recorded as 32.76 compared to the larger sample completed by McCubbin which recorded black respondent's mean of self-reliance as 20.59 and white's as 20.83.

#### *Family Appraisal Impacting Reintegration*

The family's level of optimism, as measured by the coping strategy "believing that things will always work out", was one measurement of the family's worldview. However, this single variable did not significantly impact the family's level of family reintegration ( $r = .116$   $p = ns$ ) or the level of stressors ( $r = -.205$   $p = ns$ ). Another factor contributing to the family's appraisal about military separation and reunion was the family's fit with the military lifestyle. Consistent with the hypothesis, this study found that respondents that were satisfied with the decision to stay in the military, also had higher family satisfaction scale scores ( $r = .481$   $p < .001$ ). However, since this variable was taken from the family satisfaction scale itself, this concept was further explored.

"Fit with military community" involved such issues as retention, access to military services, positive attitudes toward the demands of military operations, and the perception of what the military's intentions were toward serving its families. There was no significant correlation

between a family's conflict regarding whether or not to stay in the military during separation ( $r = .136$   $p = ns$ ) or during reunion ( $r = -.159$   $p = ns$ ) and family reintegration. There was a significant positive correlation between the confidence ( $r = .391$   $p < .001$ ) and the ability ( $r = .388$   $p < .001$ ) to use military services and the overall family satisfaction scale. There was a significant positive relationship between family reintegration and the confidence ( $r = .444$   $p < .001$ ) and the ability ( $r = .520$   $p < .001$ ) to "maintain a positive attitude toward the military member being away". Finally, there was no significant relationship between family satisfaction and the coping strategy "believing that the military has my family's best interest in mind" ( $r = .173$   $p = ns$ ).

#### Exploring the Concepts: Contributing Factors to Family Reintegration as Discovered through Qualitative Data

##### *The X/XX Factor: Family Reintegration*

According to the Hill's theory, successful family reintegration required that members integrate the changes of family roles into the functioning of the family; families were not to just adapt to living together. Hill discussed the importance of renegotiating authority, tasks, intimacy and balancing relations between spouses and children. Through interviews and open-ended questions on the survey, respondents told their own stories about their successes and failures to achieve reintegration.

##### *Personal Definitions of Reintegration*

Within the interviews, participants defined family reintegration and their process of reunion in their own words and within their own contexts. These responses typically reflected the overall outcome of the separation and reunion experience in response to the interviewer's initial question as worded in the interview guide. Overall, the five couples believed themselves to be successful despite their difficulties; each of them had their own set of circumstances that led to their particular outcome. However, one spouse discussed her marital separation. She believed that military separations compounded her marital issues. Although she did not believe her problems were the result of the separations themselves, she believed that repeated separations contributed to her current problems.

Survey respondents also defined family reintegration by responding to the question: "Do you think your satisfaction with family life changed due to your separation and reunion experience?" Forty-eight out of 85 total respondents commented on this question. Twenty of the responses were coded as negative with comments ranging from extreme dissatisfaction with marital or military life which they experienced so poorly that couples considered divorce or departure from the military; to the less extreme of negative with couples dissatisfied with marital life and stating that they needed to reacquaint themselves with one another due to the military imposed absence. Six responses were coded as "mixed" due to some negative and some positive overtones; eleven were neutral. The final eleven were coded as positive; families stated that their experience taught them to appreciate their spouses more and to value their time together.

*Negative family outcomes.* Some families discussed their difficulties with reunion. These were reflected by the following: "(it) does take a couple months to feel comfortable and to feel that you 'fit in' again". Many did not expect this, "I expected it to get better...stronger, and it got worse...it feels like we don't even know each other anymore, even though we talked daily while he was gone." Changes within relationships were confusing as stated by another, "when my husband came home our relationship was different. The normal day-to-day physical contact we had before he left, stopped. I'm not sure why". Relationships drifted apart:

Before my husband left for the year we did everything together and talked about everything. Now we talk about some things and not others. We've grown apart on our likes and dislikes. Our love for each other is strong but intimacy has changed too.

Parenting also changed as one mother stated, "the military is an awful way of life for a family. No child answers their parents (who have been) out of their lives for 5 1/2 months at a time."

*Positive outcomes.* Not all changes in relationships were negative however, "I think the amount of separations and reunions we have done has caused us to work harder than normal to maintain a healthy marriage". Several respondents commented on an increased appreciation of time spent with family that was best stated, "we have learned to respect one another a lot more.

We tend not to worry about the little stuff like we used to. We've grown so much closer and no longer take one another for granted."

*The A/AA/AAA Factor: Family Stressors*

Being separated created many stressors for families. Short answer survey comments highlighted the following as being particularly difficult: alcohol, behavioral problems with children, relocation, sleeping, concentration, finances, depression, selfishness, being alone, lack of phone calls to spouse, feeling "let down" by homecoming, marital separation, renegotiating tasks, death of friends, and failure of units to support families. Several couples discussed the overall experience or prospect of separations as "the most challenging thing you will face in your marriage". While couples reported such things as finances and home maintenance as important factors, it was the "being alone and not wanting to be- I think that's the biggest problem. Being alone I know I need to be independent." Another spouse described:

When you are married, you are meant to be together. You're meant to be living in a house together and doing things together. And when you go into a military life you know that that's going to be difficult, but the hardest thing is you stay together as a couple when you don't see each other for six months. For me the hardest thing was wondering what was happening to him and feeling bad for what he was going through and having to be mom and dad on my own. And not have that support person. And I think that any one of us is capable of doing it. Anyone can be a single parent- but it's the not wanting to be. The hardest part of the separation of a remote is being separated. You can't just pick up the phone and call him whenever you want. You can't make plans to see each other on the weekends... And to maintain a marriage without seeing your partner at all- that's the hardest thing. I mean, it's not just dealing with all the finances and all that- anyone can do that. It's difficult, but anyone can do that. The hardest thing is to maintain a personal relationship with someone that you're unable to see for months.

### *Preparation*

Because of the difficulties they knew they would face, families made attempts to prepare for separations. Although multiple separations or short notice departures made preparation difficult, couples found it important to be able to review finances and to plan who and how bills were to be paid. A few families told how they were not prepared for the difficulties involved in saying farewells and recommended that others consider this. One family found it important to purchase holiday gifts in advance to ensure that celebrations would be personalized even though loved ones were deployed.

### *Emotional Responses to Separation*

Negative emotions caused problems for many during the cycle of deployment. Forty-eight percent of survey respondents reported problems with loneliness and isolation during separation; twenty-one percent reported the same during reunion. Qualitatively, the themes of loneliness and anger ran through most interviews supporting this quantitative data. While the deployed husbands complained of being bored, their spouses busied themselves caring for the household duties. As one spouse stated, "one reason why I was so mad, was again, the Air Force was first and I was last." At least three of the wives openly admitted that they took their anger out, at least verbally, on their husbands. However, these same wives faced the separations with success by stating:

(separation is the) hardest thing that you will do... You'll make decisions that you don't want to make...It was the worst year of my life... It's very difficult, but you change... and you grow through it. And you don't want to do that, you don't want to change, you don't want to grow. You're mad because he'll be gone. But you know what? It's going to be OK. And when you get mad, talk about it. Get mad. And then move through it.

*Tougher for spouses.* Several active duty members acknowledged that their families suffered more difficulties than they did during the period of separation both in the work that they needed to do, but also in regards to the lack of readily available resources:

It's harder on the folks here (at home) than on the other person... You get over there and...everyone is in the same boat. You know, you're all there- you're all so focused on your job... There are a lot of programs over there to keep you entertained...but there's not a lot for the family back at home. They're the ones that are kind of left- unattended if you will.

Another military member stated the emotional consequences of this to include feelings of guilt and helplessness on behalf of military husbands:

Your family is going to have a lot tougher time than you will. Where you are going... the government's going to clothe you, they're going to feed you, and they are going to put you up... All the jobs that the military member did while they were home, now falls to the spouse- as well as all the spouse's jobs. And so the Air Force spouse, your spouse, is going to be shouldering double the responsibility; and your responsibility toward the family is going to be almost nil. Yet, you may want to almost think that you have some responsibility to the family, but I got news... communicating even via e-mail or what we did while we were apart, even over internet where we could see each other's face- DID NOT DO ANYTHING- because I could not physically lift the garbage and take it out to the curb, fix the garage door when it broke, fix flat tires and the rest. So all those responsibilities that I used to take, now fell to my spouse and that is one of the hardest things that I saw, is that all the responsibilities that I used to (have) fell to her.

*The need to feel appreciated.* Failure to receive appreciation for what they were contributing during separation caused problems for eleven percent of survey respondents; twelve percent of families during reunion had problems feeling like they did not receive appropriate homecoming appreciation. Both of these situations created problems for families. Interviewees also experienced the real or perceived incongruence between the lifestyles of the deployed member and their spouses during their separation. This led to resentment and the possible divorce of one family as exemplified by this statement:

You feel bad for your spouse because they are going to be lonely and that you're home. That they are in some horrible place – you know- because if it was such a great place, it wouldn't be a remote. You know, they would be able to bring their families. You have every reason to think that it's undesirable. You feel like its bad for them, you feel sorry for the situation that they're in and you want to be supportive and give them everything they need. And then you hear, they're having the time of their life it sounds like. Sure they miss their families; but they come and go as they please, they go to clubs, they're living the single life like a single person would. And here you are back home taking care of all the responsibilities and the kids and fixing the cars and the house and everything else that needs to be done... And you begin to resent that they are out there totally in this terrible situation having a great time. And you got the comfort of staying home and you're working hard and having all the stress. And you resent that they are over there- you should look forward to hearing from them but if the phone rings late you start to think- oh, he's been out clubbing again and I don't want to hear about...

*Rumors.* Another problem in regards to stress during separation relates to the perceptions about deployments; it is the "the rumor mill about location". "There is a perception out there because there have been enough people who have been stung by what's happened..." The experience of a female going to the Middle Eastern regions of deployed locations presented different fears than males going to Korea for a year;

In any environment there are a lot of immoral things and temptations because obviously in Korea there's a lot there because of the prostitutes right outside the base. And in Qatar it was- there were a lot of – I'm sure there were a lot of liaisons going on in the tents and out in the deserts and the vans and stuff. I just heard stories about it. So there are a lot of opportunities there too- even in tent city.

Overcoming perceptions and rumors regarding locations was a difficult task for some interviewees. This item was not well addressed on the surveys making it difficult to compare how families dealing with such problems managed. However, since those interviewed who

successfully reintegrated all made a particular point that they did not participate in heavy drinking activities, this may be a large factor. Correlations between alcohol abuse and stressors reflected the challenges and consequences of this problem in families. However, since the Air Force strongly discourages alcohol abuse, and yet incorporates its use in military culture, the reports of drinking problems may have been underreported in the survey data. Exploration of drinking problems and marital separation may need to be furthered in future studies.

*Financial difficulties.* From the survey data, thirty percent of respondents experienced problems with debt during separation while twenty percent experienced problems financially during reunion. These complaints continued into the qualitative data as well. All the interviewed families expressed concerns regarding the financial burden of separations. While three families actually benefited from the tax exemptions and increased pay of the hazardous duty zones of the Middle East, all the families separated by year long tours to Korea lost money due to the separation. One couple's estimation of financial burden of the year was 15-20 thousand dollars due to the cost of airfare to visit, the decrease in pay and the cost of two households. The costs of mid-tours and visits to Korea were too great for some of those interviewed and all knew of junior ranking families who could not afford them at all. Although lower ranking enlisted families were not interviewed, the senior enlisted spoke for them:

Staff sergeants and below in Korea lose their BAS (their Basic Allowance for Substances). They get a meal card and have to eat on base. Out of their family budget every month, they lose \$240. They don't gain anything. They lose \$240 a month out of their family budget. They have to end up buying a phone for themselves over in Korea- there's another - in Kunsan it was about \$14. Yeah, \$14 a month doesn't sound like much (but) to a SSgt and below, that's a lot of money. You end up supporting two households- the one in Korea and the one back in the states. Whereas the husband and wife would go out to eat and would spend X amount, separately though they will be spending more for their entertainment because they will want to go out with a friend or a buddy and so they spend more separately. Besides that, most Staffs and below live



payday to payday before they go over to Korea. The government does not subsidize anything for mid-tours. So you tell me how a SSgt and below – most of them- are going to afford the between 7-15 hundred dollars to come back to the states. Yes, they can take the rotator back to Seattle but they still have to pay for the ticket to and from Seattle and they can't depend on the rotator. You still have to have the money in case the rotator can't get you to and from. Even then, try to buy a ticket at...

Interviewer: at same day cost

Participant: at same day cost. That ain't going to happen. So most SSgt's and below in my squadron, that I had, did not go home on mid-tour.

### *Length of the Separation*

One interviewee faced another challenge; she did not know the predicted length of her separation from her deployed spouse. This drove her "crazy". She was depressed and miserable not knowing where her husband was or when he would return. Only one family reported the attitude that remote assignments were "only a year." This couple minimized the length of separation and focused on the rest of the time of their married life and military careers. For the others however, they felt that a year's time was just too long:

I had done three months in the desert... I went thinking- you know- this is just going to be a couple 90 days strung together. But it really wasn't. It was a lot tougher than that. It was a lot tougher because the end was not in sight at all. It was a long year.

### *Mid-tours*

Visits between spouses in the midst of a long term separation were seen as invaluable to most couples. In fact, the military believes such visits are so important that it incorporates "mid-tours" into their year long remote tours. A mid-tour is a block of 30 days of leave that active duty members are allowed to take at some point during their year long remote tour. However, not all respondents experienced mid-tours positively. Some stated that they returned home to do many household tasks. One comment summed up some of the difficulties to include the timing and the adjustments of this leave:

It's right around the six-month point that things really start to get bad. When they've been gone long enough that you get fed up with hearing about all the stuff they've been doing when you are tied down with the kids. It's at that point that it's getting too long. And it's usually when they have their mid-tour- during the mid-tour it was very uncomfortable and a lot of arguing and you're just starting to get readjusted and they leave again. So the mid-tour makes it harder.

### *Multiple separations*

Almost all of the families interviewed, experienced multiple long-term separations. For most families, they proceeded through each one while maintaining the family structure; however, for some the issues only compounded:

Everyone in their married life goes through hard times and fights and go through a period- but you always work things out. ...But after that one-year remote and the six months out of one year not knowing if we were going to be a family again- and then him coming home in that two year period that he was back, we went from struggling and starting to work through that- then having him gone again- that pretty much sealed it that we're separated now.

### *Reunion Stressors*

During separations, life changed for couples; circumstances changed; people changed. "You automatically become a stronger person. You are dealing with everything on your own. But they remember you as you were." From daily life to relationships to attitudes toward the Air Force, families redefined themselves during reunion:

It felt like I was invading her territory. Because she had already set things up the way that she wanted them and so there is no going back to where things were before. You have to find out where things are now. And coming back after a long period, everything from where do your clothes go to sleeping patterns to sex- there are so many things that change; and they all have to be rediscovered upon coming back together after a long separation like that.

*Lack of freedom.* Several of the active duty members discovered the need for time to themselves following reunions to just have quiet. At the same time, spouses wanted relief from their duties. Two mothers actively strived to quiet or redirect children away from their fathers following reunion due to them irritating the members who previously lived alone. While most stated that return was the happy part of separations, several couples stated that adjusting to this co-habitation was difficult- if not the most- difficult part of the process: "getting back sucks... it takes about three months... You get used to that – for lack of a better word- freedom." Re-establishing the routines of meal times and coordinating work schedules challenged families to re-examine the needs of everyone not just individuals. Couples expressed the need to start fresh routines and act less selfishly. One couple explained further:

The first two weeks is fine and then you get to the point where all the little things start bothering you. Like me- having to get up whenever people wanted me to get up. Having to haul the kids somewhere. Not being able to have the freedom to just get up and go whenever I wanted to go.

*Physical household changes.* Physical household changes occurred as well. Most couples managed well, but one couple physically chose to live apart from one another; another couple struggled to share the same bed. Televisions moved into bedrooms; remotes had to be shared. Another couple stated:

When he came home and there was an empty room, he jumped to having his own study area. We had talked about it for years. And he wanted a bed in it. And that pissed me off. Because I saw what his little apartment was (when he was deployed), and it was really cute and all nice and all clean and everything was in its place and then he came home and wanted his own little place. I wanted too, like, OK, this is your dorm, the rest of the house is mine. I was pissed. Then when he came home, he brought another place with him, and some of it is still out in boxes in the garage because I don't want it in here.

*Renegotiation of roles and tasks.* While couples reported an increase in their value of time spent together, the renegotiation of tasks presented problems. Since one wife felt that her

husband's deployments were vacations for him, she no longer would assist in doing any household tasks once he was home. Another spouse was frustrated that her husband did not participate in making everyday family or financial decisions because of the husband's frequent separations. Another spouse, feeling like her husband wanted to take over too much as soon as he got home carried this anger for six months after his return stating, "he didn't have to go through (all the stressors), and I felt he forced me to do it. And then he wanted to come home and be the big cheese again. And I said the big poop on that." For other's, reunion forced couples to incorporate personal adjustments into their lives:

Our marriage was different because we were two separate people. We were married but we became separate people in that time- during the time of separation- and it took us eight months to get to place where we were both pretty satisfied.

*Risk of divorce.* Such a happy reunion was not always true and all the couples interviewed knew of families that dissolved due to separation. Possible factors for this included a variety of examples, the primary of which was infidelity. Couples blamed this on the lack of thinking of consequences, lack of trust, immaturity, new marriages, and loneliness that drove some to find someone else:

If you don't have a strong marriage going over there, you divorce when you get back. And I see it all the time... You realize, I can live without her. You know, you're over there going- It's not that bad. I kind of enjoyed the freedom. And she's back here saying the same thing... A lot of them think it's fine without the other.

#### *Homecoming- Not just for the Service Member*

Traditionally, military service members celebrated homecomings with a variety of fanfare. They sacrificed personally to serve their country and suffered away from their families. However, several spouses also voiced their need for recognition due to their sacrifices and hard work done during the separation. Resentment from spouses resulted from husbands changing everything back to "their" way of doing things following separation; wives felt taken for granted that they

shouldered the household responsibilities alone. Several spouses thought, "there should be some thought given to that person left at home:"

My husband seems to think that he was the only one to think that he went through an ordeal. He was the one who left their family, he was the one that went on the remote, he was the one that was coming home...I think for me personally, I need to have some recognition about – a thank you for- thanks for holding down the fort- thanks for taking care of everything- thanks for welcoming me home.

#### *The B/BB/BBB Factor: Family Resources*

Of the families interviewed, all relied heavily on the support of friends and family to make them successful. None used formal Hearts Apart or other military support services regularly but most thought that these were good ideas and should be offered. Three spouses were unaware of any services offered; none had consistent support or contact from their units. While all those interviewed felt they knew how to access services if needed due to their personal active duty service time or their long time associations with the military, all the spouses were concerned about wives who were not aware of resources due to their inexperience or their living off base away from the community.

#### *Importance of Military Traditions*

One consistent theme in the qualitative data that brought strength to successful military families was the importance of military heritage and pride which served families well through the difficulties of deployment. All the families interviewed presented themselves as long-term military families who were proud of their service. Many had family backgrounds of at least one generation of military service; others attended military schools. This familiarity and dedication to the military culture provided the background to understanding the need for and the acceptance of military separations. One also found resolve from the fact that he had a choice in serving.

#### *Needed Resources*

To reconnect with one's spouse and to adjust to change, almost every couple discussed the importance for families to spend time together. Specifically, couples needed to spend time

alone without children- time for intimate conversations, "dates", and sexual encounters. Several couples took trips together to celebrate homecoming, went to dinner or had the children cared for by babysitters. Several also acknowledged the need to be sensitive regarding the possibility of jetlag. The experience of reunion surprised at least one couple. While the husband assumed that things would remain the same, his wife struggled with her feelings of being forced into acting more independent and single. He stated:

I was expecting to walk back in, put my clothes on my side of the closet, sleep on my side of the bed, and return to where things were a year prior. Maybe, I figured that there would be some adjustments, but I was... I had us time froze someplace else.

At least one couple sought marital counseling following reunion. "We needed a place to bring back the separation, separate lifestyles and bring them to a place that they could be combined and learn how to talk to one another again." Although they attempted to access services through the mental health clinic and the chapel, neither agency provided consistent available personnel. Only one service member attended a mandatory pre-separation briefing regarding family issues prior to deployment; none were offered post-deployment family reintegration briefings. Suggestions for such briefings included having mandatory meetings for families at least two weeks after reunification to discuss some of the family changes, to prepare for changes, and to vent feelings and thoughts about the experience.

#### *Difficulties of Family Members to Ask for Help*

One spouse stated that she alienated herself from her community, not wanting to socialize or even attend church while her husband was not with her. Another's pride made it difficult to ask for help with such things as hanging ceiling fans or mowing the lawn. Building a support structure before the active duty member left was seen as the responsibility of both parties by most families while the use of the resources was the responsibility of those remaining. This was stated best:

The military member that is leaving need not leave it up to the person staying behind to build the support structure. The thing they need to do is to ensure that they have some

help and support for that person too. Because we do have a hard time accepting help, they need to try to find out and make sure what help that person has available. Making sure that they have someone that they know well enough and that they can rely on, checking up on the family... I think it would make things easier for them because they're not going to be worried about what's happening back home.

#### *Base and Unit Responses to Needs*

The way helping agencies responded to spouses requesting assistance created long lasting impressions. One spouse was still very angry about the way an agency representative failed to hear her needs or tend to her stage in life. While she then turned to her work center for support, she maintained the anger regarding the incident and would no longer refer others to military support agencies. The lack of communication from the military unit was particularly difficult for another family who was separated within three days of the 9/11 attacks. Because of the short notice departure, the family had no time to prepare for this separation. The media portrayal of the incident kept the anxiety of the dangers faced high. The deployed unit could not contact personal family members but instead used secure communication to contact their unit back home; the unit had the responsibility to relay the messages of safety to the families. However, because units were concerned that any disclosure regarding the unit's departure would leak to the press, no families could be notified for eight days. This waiting period was incredibly difficult for families to manage.

#### *Coping Strategies*

Coping strategies varied for respondents. Some spouses worked, some relied on faith, some involved themselves with the lives of their children, some became more independent, some relied on extended family, some traveled, some got more involved in hobbies such as writing and reading, but most of all- all of them stayed busy. For the deployed members, they also strove to stay busy. Most worked long hours, traveled when they could, participated in volunteer opportunities and engaged in chapel activities.

### *Importance of Communication*

All the couples discussed the importance of communication in keeping their relationships strong. Despite the costs of phone cards or long distance, the investment in communication was highly recommended by all. Two of the service members preferred letters and packages from home stating that they felt that this demonstrated extra dedication from their wives, but the receipt of these was rare. Instead, families relied on morale calls and the Internet for communication. Many stated that contacts were sometimes very short and that problems were not necessarily solved, but the frequency and the effort of making them played an essential part in keeping marriages together:

I talked to a lot of other guys that didn't get it that their wives really did need to hear from them... Even though she was angry at me (for being gone and her increased responsibilities at home), it didn't destroy our marriage, and it could have- without some sort of contact between us, it could have destroyed our marriage. Knowing that I had the ability to contact her and didn't, could have destroyed our marriage.

### *The C/CC/CCC Factor: Family Appraisal*

Participants demonstrated their self-reliance and confidence, not only in their abilities to address the adjustment to separations and reunions, but also in their assessment of military life. All this determined how separations and reunions were experienced.

### *Confidence to Maintain the Home Front*

Throughout the short answer survey responses, the active duty returnees spontaneously commented on the success of their spouses. Examples of this included: "my spouse handled things slightly better than expected", "it was tough to have these surprises (unexpected stressors) but she did fine", "she did very well", "I'm lucky to have a strong willed wife", and " (my) spouse was initially upset...but- handled everything at home flawlessly".

### *Retention Issues*

Many who reported generations of military service knew they must expect and endure separations. However, after repeated separations due to military service, some questioned their



career plans and considered alternatives. In fact, even amongst the pro-military families that were interviewed, three couples stated that if forced to serve additional long-term separations, they would separate from the military. The other three couples also stated that the repeated endurance of separations lasting over six months might make them opt to get out. As one career military member stated, "my wife went from a supportive AF wife to somebody that really does not like the AF, as much... because of the separation that we have endured."

#### Summary

This study supports the overall predictive model that stressors, resources and appraisal impact family reintegration. However, this study did not support this as clearly as previous studies have since the use of resources and family appraisal did not significantly correlate with improved family outcomes. Reasons for this may include instrumentation that did not measure the concepts appropriately; such things as informal resources may not have been measured appropriately. In addition, the sample population may have been positively biased with a more healthy and pro-military inclination; very few reported that they were considering divorce which seems very far from the experience of the general population. Another possibility is that the sample population responded positively due to their desire to please and to "look good" for a military survey. Finally, it is possible that this research did not look far enough into the factors of personality traits or family typology as the original theory suggested. Such characteristics may contribute to the family's resiliency and determine how families succeed. The next chapter will interpret these findings even further and discuss the applications of this study on future military families.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The methodology of this study included a mixed methods design; the data analysis and interpretation of the findings continues with the writing and discussion portion of the study (Sandelowski 2003). The goal is to attain a fuller understanding of reintegration and to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. The implementation of concurrent mixed methods design added validity to the results via triangulation (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). This was achieved through multiple methods of data collection, to include surveys and interviews, which targeted the same phenomenon. The counting of qualitative themes allowed the data to "document, verify and test interpretations or conclusions" (Sandelowski, 2003 p. 341) that remain consistent with or contradict the statistical analysis; quotations also authenticated the findings. Within this chapter, the findings of the study are reviewed and results are interpreted for meaning. Using this information, the limitations and applications of this study will be reviewed. Finally, this dissertation concludes with implications for social work practice, recommendations for military family policy, and suggestions for future research.

#### *The Sample Population*

Based on the planning stage of this research, surveys were sent to both husbands and wives of those households who were known to have returned from a minimum 90 day separation. Originally, data was to be compared between spouses to see if there were differences, however good comparisons between groups were unable to be conducted due to the small sample population. With 61% of the respondents' active duty and 39% spouses, it is possible however those respondents were more inclined to support the active duty perspective than the perspective of spouses. Much of the remaining population comparisons between the Air Force population and the sample were similar except that male sponsored and dual active duty families were more prevalent within the sample population.

Overall, respondents to this study seemed to belong to three categories in regard to their relationships; these categories also fell along the lines of the means of their participation in the study. The first group of respondents seemed exceptionally positively skewed toward the military

lifestyle and toward staying together as a family. For the most part, qualitative interviewees fell into this category because they believed they were successful in their goal to reintegrate in their families and in their match with living the military lifestyle. The enlisted interviewees had twice the time in service compared to the AF population and all the couples planned to serve in the military until retirement. Couples agreed to be interviewed because they believed that they had learned from their military experiences and that others could benefit from the lessons they learned.

The additional two categories of the sample speak not only to who participated in the study, but also to those that did not. The researcher's struggle to recruit participants may reflect a population that is often forced to complete surveys but who often do not see results. This is due to the bureaucratic nature of the military. Change is slow to come. Military members, spouses in particular, are disheartened by promises from military leaders that promise change for their good but that never comes.

The second category of respondents was more negative toward the military. These respondents commented by short answer on their surveys. They were more willing to state negative outcomes regarding separation and reunions; they were also more willing to state their disagreements with military culture and family separation. Some of the study sample was so negative toward the military that they refused to participate in the study. This group of respondents called the researcher to proclaim their displeasure with the military and family separations. They threatened to complain to the Inspector General because the installation commander gave out their personal addresses and that they were even contacted about this survey.

Finally, the third category of respondents was neutral; they did not complete the surveys. This group of families believed that the survey did not apply to them. Some called or returned the surveys blank and stated that since they immediately separated from the military or they divorced following separation that they did not "reintegrate"; in their opinion, the study did not apply to them. The title of this dissertation, "Family Reintegration", may have influenced some people to

not participate. The name itself skewed the population to think this research was only discussing positively reunified families. Unfortunately, their voice was not heard and it remains impossible to determine how many families permanently separate from the military or divorce due to military separations.

### *Gender Issues*

The AF population reflects that women comprise almost 20 percent of the total active duty force. However, of the survey respondents, only eight percent of the families represented had females as the active duty members who deployed. This difference of the representation of lowered numbers of females experiencing separations and reunions may be due to the career choices that women make; they may be in positions that are less deployable or they may choose less often to serve long-term separations such as remotes. In the long term, this may mean that women will not be as competitive to make rank as their male peers. Alternatively, females may not have participated in the survey because they experience a lowered "success" rate of family reintegration. This would be consistent with the Air Force statistics that reflect divorce rates for female active duty members considerably higher than for men. Finally, another explanation may be that the male spouses of active duty deployed women may have been less likely to ask for help and therefore they may not have been listed on the "morale call" list from which the sample was pulled. This may also reflect a higher percentage of dual active duty couples in which the men would have the capability of making calls at work through the world wide communication capabilities of the military. Regardless of these possible answers, it is clear that more must be learned about the consequences of military service on the lifestyles of career female Airmen.

### *The X/XX Factor: Family Reintegration*

Family reintegration has been discussed throughout this dissertation as occurring in two phases: separation and reunion; adjustment and adaptation. The dependent measure "reintegration" for this study proved to be valid and consistent with previous research and was used to determine how families adjusted to separation and adapted to reunion. However, the sample population's data of family satisfaction scores that were higher compared to national

norms may contribute to the study's limitations. Although the slight increases in averages of cohesion and adaptability may or not represent real differences from the average population, it may support evidence that the sample population was positively biased or that it was uniquely resilient. In addition, having only five to six percent of families struggle with health issues or wanting to separate from the military may be a second indicator that study participants were unusually healthy and content with the military as a lifestyle. Finally, those who participated in interviews were strongly biased to being successful at reintegration and within the military lifestyle. Only one family of six reported experiencing significant marital struggles due to multiple military separations. Despite this, all of the families struggled with loneliness and isolation; all faced the fact that being separated from one's partner is counter to the concept of spousal relationships. It seems that this factor may be the most important factor of all; that overcoming stress is one thing, but, if families were totally committed to marriage, they could succeed through anything.

#### *The Predictive Model*

The regression model that included stressors, resources and appraisal to predict reintegration was supported in this study; it seems that families most successful at balancing these three variables are most successful at reintegration. However, of the three, stress was the only significant predictor of reintegration. In comparison, when using correlations to test the relationships of these variables with reintegration, stressors and appraisal had significant relationships. Overall, the reduction of stress appears to be the most critical factor for families; consistently, stress negatively impacted family outcomes.

#### *Findings from the Hypotheses*

Beyond testing the overall predictive model of Family Stress, several other ideas were tested in this study for the time periods of separation and then reunion. During the time periods of separation and reunion, stress significantly negatively impacted reintegration. Although theoretically, resources and coping strategies would have assisted families, there were no significant findings to support that stress was reduced by the use of resources or coping

strategies during either time period. Stress did however negatively impact confidence levels during separation making spouses feel less capable of taking care of things at home. During reunion, the perceptions of how one was appreciated were mixed. For the active duty member, the appreciation of homecoming significantly impacted his or her reunion experience; validation that his or her service was appreciated resulted in the reduction in stress during reunion. The findings were not supported however for the spouse whose level of appreciation during reunion was not correlated with improved reunion outcomes. This was somewhat contradictory to the qualitative data that reflected the importance for spouses to receive a "thank you" for their care of the home and children while the member was away.

One final contributor to improved family reintegration is that families who are in agreement to stay in the military achieve better reintegration. This highlights the importance of congruence between the family's adaptations to the military lifestyle; families who agree to stay in the military may be more likely to accept and adapt to the stress of separations and reunion.

#### *Intervening Variables*

Interviewees described family separation as "one of the most difficult things you will face in your marriage." Family characteristics such as rank, ethnicity, the presence of children, and family composition surprisingly did not significantly impact family reintegration. Although this may be due to the small sample size, further study regarding this may be needed. Issues regarding the separation such as length of time, location, and circumstances were also surprisingly not correlated with outcomes of family reintegration. Further research to discover more intrinsic factors of family dynamics to understand how families survive is required. Such things such as commitment to the marriage, beliefs about divorce, family history regarding military service and divorce may also contribute a far larger influence on families staying together than previously thought. These themes emerged from the qualitative interviews and may need to be quantitatively assessed in later research.

Finally, this study does not reflect results consistent with "timing". Family satisfaction in this study did not seem to differ in correlation with their reunion date or their report of having

some kind of "honeymoon" stage. For many couples hoping to cling to "happiness ever-after", this may be unreasonable.

#### *The A/AA/AAA Factor: Family Stressors*

Since stress proved to be such a strong predictor of the family's success during reintegration, reducing stress may need to be the primary focus for prevention programs or policy changes to ensure military families experience smooth transitions through the entire deployment process. Although the length of separation itself did not impact reintegration, the length of the separation did increase the separation and reunion stressors experienced by families. However, as couples increased their expression of appreciation for one another, their experience with stressors improved. Although the AF identified suicide, alcohol abuse and domestic violence as high interest, high risk factors, these were not statistically significant predictors to family reintegration. However, for the few families that experienced any one of these factors, nearly all other stressors were also present. Because of this and the severe consequences of any one of these factors, this study supports the AF's efforts to identify these families early and to engage them in effective intervention in order to prevent negative events from occurring.

#### *Stressors Associated with Separation and Reunion*

Families suffering stressors reported less satisfaction with their family life. For the most part, stressors decreased at the time of reunion as compared to the stressors experienced during separation. Most stressors of separation were related to unexpected events such as relocation, illness, injury or death of a loved one, and the pursuit of divorce. Behavioral problems, alcohol abuse, relocation, and difficulties concentrating and sleeping all worsened the longer the separation continued. Stressors during reunion were more related to the renegotiation of roles and tasks such as spouse behavioral problems and extreme anger or domestic violence. In fact, those families reporting spouse behavioral problems also reported increased feelings of anger with their spouse, they were more likely to act violently, and they felt more isolated. Occupational changes, debt, and loneliness were difficult for families during both time periods.

Fortunately however, only a small number of families that reunited reported experiencing "big" problems with any particular stressor.

In addition to these findings, the qualitative data revealed that couples experienced the following reunion stressors: multiple separations- preparing for departure again soon; sharing bedrooms and other living space; lack of counseling or reunification services; and adjusting to living with family members. Many couples became aware that people changed during separation and that it would impact their reunion, but it remained unclear how they adjusted. Families reported difficulties with losing their sense of freedom, household physical changes, and changes in routines. How roles and tasks realigned themselves seemed to occur individually depending on the couple and their previous dynamics. Since the survey data reflected that coping strategies and resources did not significantly correlate with the outcome measure, it seemed that families incorporated such adjustments into their lives with acceptance. Not even time reflected how this occurred for families. But according to the families that were interviewed, it seemed that divorce was not an option; families just dealt with the changes. Without such a commitment, families risked divorce. Since divorced families were not represented in this study and discussion of them was reliant upon second hand information, the true information regarding what separates families or causes divorce, also remains questionable.

#### *Dispelling Rumors*

Overall qualitatively, respondents viewed separation as negatively impacting the family. Much of this was due to the lack of understanding or knowledge of what their partner was doing in the other location. Although the survey respondents did not reflect a correlation between visits to the deployed location and better success with reintegration, the qualitative information seemed to indicate that understanding the deployed environment was important to quieting suspicion and frustration regarding what the other was undergoing. Failure to find a correlation between either visits to the location or from the active duty member home may again have to do with a smaller number of respondents who would have been eligible for such a visit. Since not all members would even have an opportunity to do so, this measure was insufficient. In addition, those



families who did have the opportunity to visit their loved one experienced difficulty since they were forced to separate afterwards; others reported that they did not experience "everyday" life during the visit. They stated that instead the visit resembled a "holiday vacation". These factors indicate that further research is required to better understand the impact of visitation on reunification following long term separation.

#### *The B/BB/BBB Factor: Family Resources*

As previously discussed, the use of resources did not significantly correlate with reintegration. Those who used mental health resources actually did worse during reintegration than those families that did not. While this seems counterintuitive to the hypothesis that resources reduce stress therefore improve reintegration, it is assumed that the families experiencing the worst symptoms of distress were those who sought these services. We cannot assume that the use of resources caused poorer outcomes but rather reflect the state of the families that used the services. Regardless of this finding, this researcher continues to explore why the utilization of resources did not impact reintegration or reduce stress. Possible reasons may include: failure of the survey to identify and measure effective resources, failure of the military to provide adequate resources, failure of families to seek services, real or perceived stigma attached to the utilization of resources, and the failure to measure informal resources.

#### *Preparation*

Although theoretically, preparation for separation and reunion seemed to be important to reintegration, it seemed that what families did to prepare was more important than the time they had to prepare. From the survey data, time to prepare was not significantly correlated with family reintegration. However, in the interviews, it was apparent that people needed to accomplish some things to prepare to separate and reunify. Such things included the discussion of important documents, finances, childcare issues and the like. Although the one family experienced deployment within 48 hours of notification, they still did their best to accommodate the separation. Another couple "prepared" their relationship by going to counseling at the chapel. This preparation encouraged the couple to discuss their commitment to the marriage and to

communication. They also agreed to steer away from environments that would tempt them to fall into drinking or infidelity. Such actions may help families minimize the problems associated with separation. Study participants recommended that preparation for reunion come in the form of reintegration briefings, which would prepare family members for the changes that occur in individuals and children during the duration of the separation.

#### *Formal Resources*

From the survey results, separation demanded the greatest amount of resource utilization. Childcare services seem to be a constant need for the military community with youth programs also in demand. On-base sponsored social activities positively correlated with family satisfaction, which is one finding that supports that military social functions assist families and do indeed successfully fulfill a preventative service for the improvement of family functioning. On the other hand, those families who utilize military sponsored functions may also be those most comfortable in and supportive of the military lifestyle; this fact may have also improved family reintegration. People also utilized military sponsored social activities supporting the military's efforts to offer and expand these programs. Although not directly impacting the outcomes of family reintegration, they may help develop community spirit and expand those informal resources that so many relied on during separation and reunion. Specific programs however may need evaluation to determine effectiveness.

#### *Resource Utilization- The Stigma*

The military's emphasis on independence and excellence may contribute to families being unwilling to seek assistance. Since the same families utilized services during both stages, not all families may be getting the services they need. Those more comfortable in the military setting may also be more comfortable seeking assistance. This may result in the neediest families not getting support. Spouses at home also expressed difficulties asking for help during separation, therefore it is also possible that families did not want to ask for help during reunion. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Caliber 1992). In order to address this, some families recommended in the qualitative data that families should attend reunification

informational seminars. Making such sessions open, available and possibly even mandatory for all families would provide preventive services to families without identifying a negative stigma attached to any one given family. The potential benefits for helping seem to outweigh the risk of harm to any.

#### *Unmet Needs*

In contrast to those unwilling to seek services due to fear of stigma, some families were unable to receive the help they needed because the resources were not available. They reported the following unmet needs: financial assistance, chaplain support, care for special needs, unit support, increased morale calls, transportation to deployment location, information to prepare for reunification, access to on-base military services, and marital counseling. Some families may not have received such services because they were not aware of military services or entitlements. To address this, active duty members must take a larger responsibility in ensuring that their families receive adequate access and knowledge of support services. Units must also take a more active role in following up with family members to ensure that families are cared for. Respondents who were forced to use emergency services stated that connections to the military members' units were critical. The response that was provided to the families left lasting impressions which could impact the retention and appraisal of the family.

Finally, financial assistance programs are needed to ensure that families do not gain exceedingly high debt due to the separation. Simple ways to alleviate debt include making sure that couples have access to means of low cost communication. Military communities also seem to rely heavily on volunteer support networks that may include spouses trading babysitting or other household services to minimize financial costs. Such creative solutions may help families stay connected with one another, minimize stress and reduce financial burdens.

#### *Coping Strategies*

Although the use of coping strategies did not significantly correlate with family reintegration, it seems that high percentages of people utilized strategies and incorporated them into their lifestyle. With over ninety percent of families stating that they stay in shape and engage

in meaningful relationships, these lifestyle choices may support the belief that this study sampled an unusually healthy population. In addition, at least 80% remained very optimistic and grateful for the good in their life and they exercised independence. From all respondents- survey, short answer and interview- many emphasized the importance of faith or a belief in God that not only strengthened their marital relationships but also helped them cope with stress. Another common theme was that of keeping busy. All these characteristics fit with a population that would successfully manage stress due to their healthy lifestyles.

*Consequences of coping strategies.* Because of the difficulties in measuring the impact of change or the use of coping strategies, more could be done to evaluate their affect on families. Although not captured by the quantitative data, some coping strategies created positive and negative consequences. One couple argued the week just prior to separation and then again before reunion. Such a pattern helped them to ventilate their anger over the departure but also pushed away the other person. Others reported overcoming loneliness by forming new relationships. While this helped them through the separation, issues of infidelity and trust also surfaced if those relationships interfered with family or marital ties.

#### *Importance of Communication*

The lack of a significant correlation between the frequency of communication and family reintegration in the survey data was surprising compared to how crucial the interviewees spoke about this element. All the couples discussed the importance of communication in keeping their relationships strong and yet survey findings did not reflect the same finding. One explanation of this was that almost all families communicated frequently; almost 30% of families communicated daily, 70% at least 3-5 times per week, and 95% at least once per week. It's possible that since such communication was readily available, the major stressors and relationship issues were managed effectively during that time.

#### *The C/CC/CCC Factor: Family Appraisal*

The quantitative measure of family appraisal was developed and tested previously, thus increasing the confidence of use of this scale and its findings. It may not however measure the

full concept of family beliefs and worldview as implied in family appraisal posing some problems with external validity. Despite this debate, the sample population's mean of Self Reliance far exceeded the normal means for enlisted personnel as collected by McCubbin. It seems that military families today may be more accustomed to deployments, that they feel confident in their spouses' abilities to manage their homes and that families are confident that they will do well despite separation. In addition, the qualitative data also reflected confidence in spouses who maintained homes. Again, it may be possible that this reflects a positively biased sample and those families that did not successfully fulfill such duties did not stay together and therefore did not participate in this study.

#### *Retention Issues*

Multiple separations seemed to have both personal consequences for families as well as career consequences. While most families participating in this study remained intact, the number of families that dissolve because of multiple separations remains unclear; very few participated in this study. The same is true for families that may have separated from the military due to frustration with the on-going threat of or the reality of repeated separations. "Fit with military community" involved such issues as retention, access to military services, positive attitudes toward the demands of military operations, and the perception of what the military's intentions are toward serving its families. Surprisingly, there was no correlation between any of these factors and family satisfaction. Because the researcher suspects that the participants in this study were positively biased toward military culture, those dissatisfied with the military may have already separated from the military and therefore did not participate in the study. Even in the "career" families interviewed, all seemed to consider the risk of separation in their continued commitment to service in the military. Such factors need to be constantly studied by military leaders to ensure that all efforts are made to help families support military service and that families do not unnecessarily depart the military due to retention concerns related to family separation.

### Implications for Social Work Practice

This study found that the interaction of stress, resources and appraisal impacted reintegration. This means that the frequency and intensity of stressors interacting with a family's resources to respond to stressors interacting with the confidence of one's abilities and the perception one has about the military result in reintegration. Now although this study did not identify specifically what the effective resources consisted of, or specifically what beliefs families held; this study upholds the previous findings that all these components are important. For social workers, this means that assisting families through separation and reunion may include several phases. These include: 1) identifying stressors, 2) identifying resources that would be helpful to manage that stress, and 3) identifying a family's beliefs about the military lifestyle, family separation, and one's abilities to manage the separation.

In addition to the primary predictive formula, the following important hypotheses were supported: 1) increased stressors during the entire stage of deployment negatively impacted reintegration; 2) as the length of separation extended, stressors experienced during separation and reunion also increased; 3) as spouses faced increased stressors during separation, their confidence of their abilities to manage such stressors went down; 4) the experience of homecoming activities which make the active duty members feel appreciated is important to the reduction of reunion stressors for active duty members; and 5) those families satisfied with staying in the military were more successful at reintegration. These findings lead to recommendations regarding military family clinical intervention and policies.

### *Clinical Interventions*

Given the above findings, two primary social work theories are utilized when approaching interventions with families: cognitive theory and crisis theory. First, cognitive theory is important in working with families since "the cognitive model proposes that cognitions have a causal relationship between emotional state and behavior" (Calvert and Palmer 2003, pp. 31). As a whole, this entire study emphasizes the importance of how a person's beliefs- appraisal- impacts the outcome of reintegration. For instance, beliefs impacted the final significant finding: families

satisfied with military life were more successful at reintegration. Based on this finding and cognitive theory, clinicians should focus on keeping the family's appraisal regarding military life positive for the purpose of improving the outcome of reintegration. Cognitive theory can also be applied to families based on the significant finding: as stressors increased or continued for greater periods of time, confidence regarding abilities was reduced as was the overall reintegration success. Cognitive-behavioral techniques should ensure that the beliefs regarding success continue despite the duration of the separation; confidence must be maintained. For spouses who remained at home, it was critical that they succeeded in overcoming stress to maintain their confidence; when their confidence went down, so did their success in managing stress. Cognitive theory is also proven useful in regard to the significant finding that appreciation at the time of homecoming reduces stress for active duty members. Active duty members may benefit from cognitive-behavioral interventions which help them maintain a sense of importance and appreciation for their duty. This may help to overcome any negative beliefs or feelings they have about being separated from their families.

Second, cognitive interventions may target the appraisals or beliefs about the military culture as a whole, long before the family undergoes separation. The purpose of these interventions would be to minimize the impact family separations have on retention rates. During this study, several families stated during their interviews, that if the military continued to ask their families to be separated, that they would consider separating from the military. As military missions increase globally and more missions are conducted by deployed active duty forces, families need to understand that deployments will be expected of them. These expectations should be made clear by military leaders and military policy to all members, especially those just entering the military organization, to prepare families for dealing with the difficulties associated with separations.

Finally, crisis theory is important for reducing the stigma associated with problems during separation and reunion and to encourage families to seek assistance. This study found that even "normal" families experienced the "abnormal" feelings of stress and loneliness which were caused

by military separations. Families facing such crisis need support and focused interventions that eliminate stigma associated with reporting problems and accessing resources. Regardless of how strong the family started or how committed they were to the military or to each other; they all experienced difficulties. This became the new "normal". To manage stressors according to crisis theory, clinicians can connect families who are experiencing deployments with one another to allow them to see similarities in their situations. Clinicians can also assist families in developing a network of informal resources that are comprised of family and friends. These informal networks strengthen the overall military community which is critical to the success of separated families. Lastly, crisis theory is important to helping families deal with separation and reunion as a temporary event in their life. Couples committed to a lifetime together will have greater success in overcoming the trials of separation when clinicians remind them of the temporary nature of separation and reunion. The adjustment period ends in reintegration.

#### *Application to Social Work Curriculum*

ABC-X Family Theory does not only apply to military families but also to those who may face similar circumstances; the interaction of stress, resources and appraisal can be applied to understanding family separation in general. While this study emphasized the importance of stressors- that the more frequent and prolonged exposure to stress negatively impacted the overall outcome of family reintegration- this is likely to be true of other scenarios as well. Individuals, families and groups can easily be overwhelmed by stress. How people manage this stress depends on the resources available to them and the beliefs they have of the situation. When completing bio-psycho-social assessments, these three components should be addressed and the assistance offered should also address each of these components. Utilizing the client's perspective, clinicians first encourage the client to define the problem. This includes each of these steps: First, can the stress be minimized? Second, are there resources available to assist? And third, what are the beliefs about the stress as well as about the resources that would impact how the individuals would respond. Understanding how a person identifies the stressors, resources and appraisals in his or her life is critical to understanding how to assist that person. In



applying ABC-X theory to social work application, clinical interventions should be presented from both cognitive theory as well as crisis theory. Depending on the circumstances, both theories could be applied as described above.

### *Policy Implications*

As a "force multiplier", preserving the military family should be a top concern for military leaders. While it is true that the military only requires its active duty assets to complete its missions, active duty members that are distracted due to family member stress are not as focused or productive as others. Because of this, military family policy should also address the stressors, which can be identified as separations; the resources, which are frequently discussed in terms of the costs associated with standard military benefits; and appraisal, which demonstrate and define how the military views the importance of family and quality of life issues.

First, military policy should address the frequency and length of military deployments. As the Air Force is currently undergoing the process of reducing its forces, military leaders must consider the impact this will have on the deployment requirements for the remainder of the force. Currently, the Air Force trend is to keep military deployments to 180 days, but these continually seem to get longer as the conflicts throughout the world continue. For the past several years, the Army extended its deployments to 365 days; in March 2005, the Air Force followed suit by initiating the same for its deployments to Iraq. In correspondence, military family policy must stay current with these mission requirements and military family research should continue to guide policy and establish the maximum strain that families can manage.

Second, military policies should address resources available to families during separation and reunion. Resources that manage and minimize stress- especially during times of separation and reunion- must be identified and supported to ensure that they are funded and marketed to all eligible participants. Morale calls and internet capabilities in deployed locations are examples of these resources; and military policy and funding should be expanded to extend these services even further. However, while long distance communication is considered helpful, it was not found to significantly improve reintegration- thus remains the delicate balance of policy and research.

In addition to policies that expand resources for separated families, families must be reassured that stress during separation and reunion is normal. Stigma associated with asking for help must be minimized. This requires a change in military culture that associates stress with weakness, asking for help with failure. Many military members fear that if they receive assistance from military service providers, that their military records will be negatively flagged. There are potentially two routes for overcoming the issue of stigma. First, the military could mandate interventions to everyone facing deployments, during separation and during reunion, thus making it "normal" for all families to receive assistance. Second, the military could add entitlements to reduce stress during deployments or family separations. Since debt was a recurring theme throughout the list of stressors, financial stipends is one solution. However, with limited defense budgets, this may not be a viable solution. Instead, other options could include increasing the leave time for military members returning from separation for either the mid-tour during a separation or upon its completion, thus ensuring that families have time to spend together. Travel arrangements could also help families visit more easily if a separation is scheduled to extend beyond six months. Of course, war torn locations preclude family members from visiting so military members would have to be allowed home more frequently instead. Finally, the military should increase the access to and availability of mental health care benefits- marital counseling must be included as a military benefit. For those families receiving mental health care, multiple providers or sources of care should also be allowed. This would provide military members options for care in the civilian community and could minimize entries in their medical records.

Finally, military policy must also ensure that all military families receive education and intervention when undergoing extended separations or when deployments require exposure to traumatic environments. Family Support Centers, whose mandate is to ensure family readiness, must offer interventions to both military members and their family members during each stage of deployment (prior to separation, during separation, prior to reunion and after reunion). These interventions should include education about the available resources that may be helpful to families and about what may occur to families during the deployment process. These

interventions must also include components such as medical assessments, screening for post-traumatic symptoms, and family functioning assessments which should occur after the member's return. While such mandates are just now being introduced by the Air Force Community Action Information Board, research should be done on the effectiveness of such interventions. If proved successful, such interventions should be mandated for all branches of the military worldwide.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

The difficulties that military families face during separation and reunion continue to change based on the missions that the military pursues and the expectations military families hold regarding the length and frequencies of the separations they are willing to face. As this study confirmed, even the healthiest military families face difficulties and the need for support. With the current conflict in Iraq and the changing global environment of terrorism, military families will experience an increased demand for deployments. Such deployments are likely to expose military members to combat and to traumatic experiences. Many of our troops returning from combat are permanently injured, suffering physical and emotional scars that need to be understood and managed within the context of their families. These additional difficulties reiterate the need for available and even mandatory interventions to educate families regarding the risk factors of separation and reunion, the services available to all families undergoing deployment, and information about the culture in which they live. Because the policies regarding deployments are ever changing, discovering how families succeed and developing effective social work interventions is more critical than ever.

Using mixed methods design, this research confirmed previous results that stressors, resources and appraisal contribute to reintegration. However, the way the three main variables of this study interact remains somewhat of a mystery; families overcame stress without the identification of key resources or world views that could be linked with such success. Since the military commits finances and manpower to serve families during separation and reunion with the purpose of assisting families to better succeed with reintegration or at minimum to help reduce the stress of military families, it is important to identify and measure the effectiveness of such

resources. One potential but unsuccessful goal of this current study was to do just that. This finding however could lead to the recommendation that the military commit even greater resources to families and to encourage the military to develop new resources. Instead, further research is required to determine what specifically helps families reunify effectively. Informal resources may also need to be studied to determine their impact to family reintegration. Despite its limitations, the exploratory, qualitative portion of this study found some families successful in reintegration due to their commitment to marriage, their faith in God and their loyalty toward service in the military; these strengths carried them through separation and reunification regardless of the stress they faced. Because these findings are not universal however, several alternative studies should be proposed.

First, to alleviate the limitations of the small sample size presented in this study, the personnel records data of the Air Force should be examined. Using only the statistics themselves, the records of career military members who did not divorce could be compared to those who did divorce; those members that stayed in for a career compared to those who separated from the military. Based on the number of family separations indicated by performance reports describing service of short tours or deployments, the following questions could be explored: Does divorce occur more frequently in families who are separated? Are separation rates the same for divorced families compared to families that stay together? If divorce occurred, was the timing of that divorce within 24 months of a military separation? Do repeated separations correlate with higher divorce rates? Retention rates could be examined using similar methodology. Do military members that separate from active duty service experience a higher rate of family separations? Do military personnel who suffer significant medical injury resulting in medical retirement suffer greater family consequences such as divorce? While such an extensive data study could reflect some indications of relationships between separations and family outcomes, the causal relationships of the separation causing the divorce or the separation from the military could not be surmised. Instead, further exploration is required.

With more extensive qualitative research, the complexities of family dynamics could be better analyzed and understood. By interviewing numerous military families, groups could be compared according to the following circumstances: 1) career, married families; 2) career, divorced military members; 3) married, military families separating from the military; and 4) divorced, military members separating the military. Such a comparison study could offer insight into what circumstances led to the personal and professional decisions that were made. Did military separations contribute to personal relationship decisions or to retention in the military? What were the significant circumstances that led to divorce or to separation from the military common to multiple families? What role did deployments or combat play in decision making processes? However, despite this research design, the study would be limited just as this dissertation was, in that families would be offering retrospective data. Data based on recall can be skewed due to the circumstances that have arisen since the time you seek to explore. This research design, though plausible and full of rich data, may not result in the most reliable data findings.

Given all the factors listed above, the best research design for determining how families successfully progress through separation, reunion and reintegration would be a longitudinal panel mixed methods study. Ideally, this study would be piloted at three different bases and recruitment of participants would occur during the mandatory pre- and post- separation briefings for active duty members. Spouses would also be invited to attend the briefings and to participate. While all families would be asked to complete a pre- and post- separation assessment similar to the one used in this study to determine their stressors, need and utilization of resources and their beliefs during each of these time periods, an optional intervention plan would also be offered on a monthly basis throughout the entire deployment process. Participation in the interventions would have to be supported by the commanders of the active duty members to ensure the member has support to commit to such a program. Interventions would be called "social gatherings for families undergoing the deployment process" but would include such activities as professional counseling as well as educational seminars, which could be received in-person or on-line. At the

social gatherings, the helping agencies such as the chapel, medical services, and Family Support Centers would offer their services and host entertaining activities. During these gatherings, participants could complete the appropriate surveys, receive the proposed interventions, socialize with other families, video-teleconference their loved one, or enjoy a break from their children if they allowed their children to participate in the childcare or youth activities.

During the recruitment of families to encourage them to participate in the optional intervention plan portion of this study, researchers would personally reach out to families who have received notification of a remote assignment. As an introduction, potential participants would be educated about the "normal" stressors they will face during separation as well as the importance of this study; and they would be invited to participate in monthly social events with other families who are experiencing similar situations. All families would complete a pre-separation survey similar to the one used in this study (modifications based on lessons learned) and participate in a brief interview (if not during a monthly gathering, then by telephone or on-line) which allows participants to report their biggest stressors, their appraisal of the situation, the resources utilized, and the resources needed. Families who do not wish to be part of the optional intervention plan will be excused from further activities and would be part of a control group; only to return for assessment at the mandatory post-separation briefing. However, for those families that agree to the intervention portion, they would then participate in an educational seminar, preferably in person but which could also be available on-line for families to review independently. The seminar would cover the following topics: recommendations to prepare them for separation, education about the common stressors families face during separation, invitations to take advantage of the available resources, discussions about healthy coping strategies, and information about their beliefs that may impact how they experience separation and reunion. Brief marital or family counseling would also be offered on-site for families desiring direct services or consultation. Because this counseling directly addresses normal adjustments of deployments, it would not be considered a medical appointment nor be documented in the active duty

member's medical record as an official appointment. This would reduce the stigma associated with receiving mental health services.

Although the families may participate monthly in the social gatherings and take advantage of the services, the next formal session of the research project would not occur until four weeks after separation. At this time, families enrolled in the optional intervention plan would be requested to attend the gathering session to complete the post-separation survey and qualitative interview, which would also be offered by mail, on-line or telephone if attendance was not possible. Interventions during this period would include educational seminars (also available on-line) focused on normalizing the stressors associated with adjustment, resources, identifying at-risk behaviors, and preparing families for reunification. Such formal research assessments would be repeated for both the active duty member (surveys taken on-line, by video-teleconference, by mail or by telephone) as well as the spouse, at quarterly intervals thereafter until the fifth survey. Following a twelve month schedule, this fifth survey should occur approximately one month following reunion and could take place concurrent with the mandatory post-separation briefing. During this session, families would complete a reunification survey and interview (also offered by mail or telephone) which would focus on their home-coming and reunification experiences. Finally, the couple would participate in six, twelve and twenty-four month follow-ups after reunification. They would be invited to continue to participate in the gathering sessions for deployed families for as long as they desired.

This proposed study would be limited by the financial requirements associated with monthly gatherings which would be offered for "drop-in" between the hours of 12 and 8 pm to cover the range of time zones and family member availability. Costs would include the payments of day care providers and mental health counselors who would need to be on-call to assist families during this time frame. Equipment for teleconferencing as well as telephonic and on-line assessments would also be required. In addition, the social activities planned for such gatherings would require creativity to capture the attention of the diverse family populations. In addition, the

study would be limited by the attrition that occurs with military families due to frequent relocations and by the enormous amount of data that would be collected.

However, the importance of evaluating the long term effects of separations on families- such as those discovered up to two years after reunification- would be invaluable in understanding how families adjust. The currency of the data collected would eliminate problems associated with retrospective data collection; and the consistency of the sample population in the panel would allow for an increase in identifying causal relationships between events. The results of reintegration of the families who participated in this study could also be examined to determine the effectiveness of this intervention by separating them into categories: 1) families who participated in the assessments, interviews, social gatherings, in-person educational services and counseling; 2) families who participated in the assessments, interviews, in-person educational seminars and some social gatherings; and 3) families who participated in the assessments, interviews and on-line services. These outcomes could also be compared with the outcomes of the control group, who only completed assessments at the time of pre- and post- separation. With these results, the effectiveness of such interventions would be validated. In addition to how families participated in the study, a special focus would be on families whose active duty member was assigned to a combat zone or on those families whose active duty member returned home with a permanent disability. Comparing the data between populations would help understand the unique challenges associated with the hazards of trauma, the fear of bodily injury or even death, the exposure to violence, and the impact of disability on families.

#### Conclusion

This study confirmed earlier findings according to ABC-X Family Theory that stressors, resources and appraisal impact family reintegration following long term separations. Because the focus of this study was to examine factors associated with successful reintegration and because recruitment of participants reflected this perspective, the data collected may have been positively skewed. However, because the data was triangulated with quantitative and qualitative sources, the findings, although limited, were determined reliable. In the end, the focus for military families



facing separation and reunion is to assist families in coping with the crisis of separation and in keeping stressors to a minimum. During the time of separation, military families need to feel "normal" despite their "abnormal" circumstances and to access formal and informal resources that may assist their success. Appraisals or beliefs about the military and their family also have significant impact in reducing stressors as well as the outcome of reintegration. Given the importance of these beliefs, cognitive-behavioral techniques may assist families to think positively about their choices regarding the military lifestyle, accessing resources and family reintegration. Families that do not have positive beliefs about the military may function better outside the military system; they were not represented in this study. Because military family policy sets the tone for deployments, military culture itself impacts family reintegration; the concept of family separations should be introduced to the military spouses at initial introduction to military lifestyle. At minimum, military policy should minimize repeated long term family separations and allow for as much communication between family members as possible during separation. In addition, efforts should be supported to ensure that military members as well as their families adapt successfully to separation and reunion. This may be delivered to military members in the form of mandatory interventions at the time of separation as well as reunion. Future research is proposed to continue to seek the understanding of separation and reunification and to validate the success of interventions that can support the reintegration of military families.

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