

NO PLACE LIKE HOME? POST-DEPLOYMENT REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES FACING SOUTH AFRICAN PEACEKEEPERS

Homecoming is an important event filled with expectations for a deployed soldier. It is the time when the soldiers reconnect with loved ones and hope to recover their positions among family and friends. Yet, for many soldiers returning from peacekeeping missions, homecoming is far more difficult than imagined and for some, it is closer to a new front, than to a safe haven (Basham 2008). Why does this period turn into an anti-climax for so many returning from deployment? What changes in family relations affect this reintegration and how could the soldiers and their families be better prepared for these challenges? This topic has been subject to considerable debate in recent years given the extensive deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Soldiers are often exposed to situations of extreme human suffering and abuse even when they are not part of actual combat missions. Inevitably, the peacekeeper returns home a changed person, which affects their reintegration back into the family (Basham, 2008; Knoblock & Theiss, 2012).

Studies show that virtually all soldiers report some degree of relational turbulence that affects their ability to adapt in the post-deployment reintegration phase (Bolton et al. 2002; Kaplow et al., 2013:323; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Knoblock & Theiss, 2010; Knobloch, et al., 2016; Moelker & van der Kloet, 2003). While there is a considerable amount of research on the effect of military deployment on family relations and the difficulties soldiers face upon homecoming (Adler et al., 2005; Bolton et al., 2001; Danish & Antonides, 2013; Vitzthum et al., 2009) most of the research has focused on Western soldiers returning from peacekeeping missions. Comparatively little research has been done on those returning

from missions in Africa, even from major troop contributing countries like South Africa). Since 2001, South Africa has been involved in 14 peacekeeping missions with around 3000 soldiers deployed at any one time (Heinecken & Ferreira, 2015). The most recent deployments have been to the Democratic Republic of Congo as part of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), and to Darfur/Sudan, to protect civilians, referred to as the world's worst humanitarian crises (Sikainga, 2009). Both of these missions are dangerous and hostile, and soldiers are often caught up in skirmishes, attacked or ambushed (DefenceWeb, 2016a; DefenceWeb, 2016b). Yet, how these deployments affect soldiers and their reintegration back into the home unit and family has received scant attention. The few studies that exist focus mainly on military family resilience, family support and relational stability (Kgosana, 2010; Ntshota, 2002; Pitse, 2009, Van Breda, 1999, 2001), but beyond this it remains a relatively unexplored subject. This exploratory study aims to fill this void by focusing on South African peacekeepers' experiences of homecoming and family reintegration drawing on 50 interviews with South African peacekeepers.

We draw on the Relational Turbulence Model (see Knobloch & Theiss, 2010, 2012, 2014; Knobloch et al., 2017) and analytical concepts such as "relational uncertainty" and "relational ambivalence" (Drummet et al. 2003), as well as "interference of partners" or boundary renegotiation (Knobloch, et al., 2016:743) to analyse and frame our findings. We also look at external and internal factors that affect reintegration. External factors are understood as specific to the nature of the mission as well demographic and socio-economic influences that affect reintegration (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Danish & Antonides, 2012; Drummet et al., 2003; Faber et al., 2008; Hollingsworth, et al., 2016;

Palmer, 2008; van Breda, 1999), while internal factors are those specific to the soldier, such as initial difficulties to unwind, de-stress, feelings of exclusion and relational turbulence and parenting problems (Knobloch & Theiss, 2010; 2012; 2014; Sayers, et al., 2009:167).

We begin this article by situating the debate within the broader analytical literature on the challenges of post-deployment reintegration. Hereafter, we analyse our interview findings against the analytical concepts, dividing them into three main topics which emerged from the data before presenting the key conclusions and areas for further research.

Challenges during Post-Deployment Reintegration

Numerous studies focus on the post-deployment phase and the reintegration of soldiers upon homecoming (Bolton, et al., 2002; Kaplow, et al., 2013:323; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010). Few postulate a specific theory that captures the entire spectrum of challenges soldiers face, as there are many factors that influence reintegration. These relate to family structure, rank, age and gender differences, the actual nature and length of the mission and support available to soldiers and their families (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Danish & Antonides, 2012; Drummet, et al. 2003; Faber, et al., 2008; Palmer, 2008; van Breda, 1999). Others relate to personal and relational issues that influence family relations.

Essentially these influences can be divided into two categories: those linked to 'external' factors such as military rank, financial situation, length of deployment as well as the nature of the missions, and 'internal' factors linked to the individual soldier such as family relations and mental state. These categories overlap and influence each other. In an effort to structure the section, the external factors are discussed first, as these influence the internal factors associated with reintegration.

External Context: Military and Societal Influences

Different conceptual models attempt to map the external variables that affect post-deployment reintegration (Hollingsworth, et al., 2016). As mentioned above, these factors relate to the nature of the mission and demographic influences that affect military reintegration (Monson, et al., 2009). Earlier research has shown that extensive institutional support facilitates the ability to renegotiate relationships with partners and children, establish new roles and routines and to stabilise relationships (Honing, 1994; Van Breda, 2001).

Institutional support. Soldiers returning from peacekeeping operations often display symptoms of PTSD, which can lead to tense and aggressive behaviour (Litz, et al., 1997; Vitzthum, et al., 2009). This can have a substantial impact on family reintegration, functioning and wellbeing, (Basham, 2008; Doyle & Peterson, 2005; Sayers, et.al, 2009:163) and inhibit the maintenance and development of emotional connections with the family (Faber, 2018:22). While soldiers receive preparation on how to deal with mission-related stress and the challenges of post-deployment reintegration, such support does not always extend to military families. Studies show that social support to the military family (Dhole & Peterson, 2005), both informal support from families and friends, and formal support from the military unit are essential in assisting reintegration back into the home unit (Booth, et al., 2007:10).

When military families live off-base, they can become disconnected from larger military support networks that could promote better family functioning (Wiens & Boss, 2006).

Where military families are not integrated into the military, they have less understanding of military culture, the nature of the mission and the difficulties soldiers face during deployment. Reintegration may also be influenced by the perception of the mission, especially where the soldier is deployed in a publicly controversial mission (Kraustof et al., 2014). Such cases affect not only integration back into the family, but also into the community.

Socio-Economic factors. Other external influences relate to socio-economic factors. The military rank of a soldier is a proxy for socio-economic status. Research shows that lower-ranking soldiers receive less pay and experience greater personal stress due to financial pressures (Hollingsworth et al., 2016:604). Finances are often a point of contention when soldiers return home, especially where this relates to issues of family debt, or where the money earned during deployment has been squandered by a spouse (Faber, et al., 2008:227). Gender relations in broader society also affects family relations, and in particular boundary renegotiation, after homecoming as we will below.

Internal Factors: Family relations

The external factors have a direct influence on family relations and functioning in the post-deployment reintegration phase. These factors relate to the psychological factors that affect relationships and reorganisation of household tasks which often provoke tensions. A useful lens through which to understand these tensions is the *Relationship Turbulence Model*.

Relationship Turbulence Model. The *Relationship Turbulence Model* relates to three core assumptions - first *relational uncertainty*, defined as “the degree of confidence that individuals have in their perceptions of involvement in a relationship and includes questions about self, the partner and the relationship itself” (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012:426). Second is *relational ambivalence* characterised by conflicting emotions in reconnecting physically and emotionally with partners, difficulties communicating, intimacy and coping with everyday life (Drummet, et al., 2003; Riggs, 1990; Rindfuss & Stephen, 1990). The third is *relational interference* where spouses are unwilling to hand over tasks (Knobloch, & Solomon, 2004; Pitse, 2009:38), where there is conflict over newly established routines, or where spouses resent having to return their subservient roles (Faber, et al., 2008:222, Pitse, 2009:38)

Children and homecoming challenges. Within families, one of the key issues that cause relational stress, relate to children’s behaviour and discipline (Palmer, 2008:221, Knobloch, et al., 2016). The *Relationship Turbulence Model* has not been used to understand relations with children, although Knobloch et al., (2017), claim that they undergo similar tensions as observed in adult relationships. A more useful lens to understand uncertainty, instability and unpredictability among children is attachment theory and how this differs from parent to age groups (Stepka & Callahan,2016). Depending on their age, children may express emotions of anxiety and anger (Palmer, 2008: 211, Riggs and Riggs, 2011). For example, lukewarm receptions and crying are typical in younger children, while preschoolers are more inclined to being clingy, display avoidance, or attention seeking behaviour. Junior school children may display greater anxiety over changing family roles, while highschoolers can be more resentful, defiant and exhibit different forms of behavioural

problems (Amen et al., 1988:443; Sayers, et.al., 2009:109; van Breda, 2001:250). Where the returning service member becomes impatient, overreacts to minor issues, snaps at the children unnecessarily and suddenly expects children to follow their orders, this is often a major source of tension (Jordan, 2011:265-6).

Methodology

The site of the research was a South African Army Infantry Battalion located near Cape Town, which has deployed soldiers on various peacekeeping missions. Most of these soldiers had deployed to Burundi in the past, and more recently to the DRC and Darfur/Sudan. The SANDF granted permission to conduct the study and the Officer Commanding of the Infantry Battalion outlined the nature and purpose of the study before the research commenced. A senior officer (Major) assisted with the logistical arrangements and coordination. Prior to the commencement of the study, the purpose of the study explained, that participation was voluntary and anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed.

A list of participants was compiled of those willing to participate in the study, based on requirements that the sample was representative in terms of race, gender, rank and age. Thus, a purposive probability sampling method ensured that the participants were reflective of the overall profile of the Battalion. Of the 50 participants interviewed, 68% were men and 32 % women (which was higher than the actual percentage of 15% women in the Battalion). In terms of race, 33 participants were black, 14 coloured (brown) and 3 white, which was representative of the racial profile of the unit. Upon agreement to partake in the study, participants signed an informed consent form and received a copy of the

consent page with the researchers' contact details, in case they required, or wanted to add more information after the interviews.

A qualitative inductive approach was adopted for this research as the aim was to establish how the soldiers who had served on peacekeeping missions experienced their homecoming, reintegration into the family and preparation for the post-deployment period. This approach allowed participants to narrate their own experiences and was considered the most suitable to discover and make sense of the challenges that the post-deployment phase posed (Bryman, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To achieve this, the study used broad questions, rather than a structured interview questionnaire or guide. This helped to facilitate open conversation with the research participants, where prompts were used to encourage more detailed description when issues were raised.

Two methods of data collection were used: individual in-depth interviews and focus groups¹. Eighteen individual in-depth interviews with senior personnel who served in command, logistical and support functions on peacekeeping operations were conducted. They were asked to comment on the experiences of homecoming, family reintegration and how military personnel could be better prepared for post-deployment reintegration. Similar questions were used during the focus groups interviews².

Both the individual interviews and focus groups were recorded and notes were taken during the interviews. After transcribing the data, the various themes and categories that emerged from the data were analysed and grouped in accordance with the broader

literature on post-deployment reintegration³. Codes were created for certain responses which served as a guide according to which information was classified (Table 1)

TABLE 1

There are several limitations to this study, given its exploratory nature. Firstly, no interviews were conducted with military spouses or partners. This means that the views exposed here are not confirmed or contradicted by the other party in the relationships referred to. Secondly, as the study is based on interviews made at one specific point in time, we are unable to observe temporal changes. Despite these limitations, the findings provide a sense of some of the major challenges facing peacekeepers in the post-deployment reintegration period.

Post-Deployment Reintegration Challenges in the SANDF

This section focuses on the experiences of South African Infantry soldiers who served on peacekeeping operations in the DRC, Darfur/Sudan and Burundi. The analysis is divided into three sections corresponding to the three themes brought up most frequently among the interviewees: absence from the children; relational turbulence and institutional family support, yet within these sections, other issues are also brought up, including military related stress and reflections regarding financial aspects.

Absence from the Children

Of all the conversations with soldiers, their relationships with their children was a central concern. Many expressed guilt, anger, resentment and sorrow for having missed out on important events in their children's lives. Concerns revolved around issues of relational uncertainty as children felt detached from their fathers or mothers (Appelwhite & Mays, 1996). This depended on the age and understanding of why their father or mother deployed

(Trautmann et al., 2016). Soldiers reported that younger children often cried or did not recognise them, with the older children being clingier and more fearful that they may leave again. A female rifleman explains:

Your kids tend to forget you. If you leave your baby that is 12 months, when you come back from deployment, your child does not even recognize you and the baby doesn't want to come to you. You have to mend the relationship.

While another female Staff Sergeant told of the reaction of her young son:

He was hiding from me. So, this was very sad, it was like I was a stranger. And when I was on the bus I thought that the first thing I am going to do is go to my son, kiss and hug him, but then he is the one running away.

There was a difference in the concerns expressed by male and female participants. While a clear majority of the peacekeepers voiced the need to reconnect to the children, many of the female peacekeepers were worried about the children's well-being while they were gone. Female riflemen and corporals explained it like this in a focus group:

My child was a bit neglected when I was deployed because she was in a relative's care. They don't look after them the way that you will do it.

When the issue of a longer deployment (of 1 year) arose, one of them said:

I cannot leave my daughters for so long time, here is a high rate of rape and family comes first.

This quote should be put into the specific context of South African society which has one of the highest percentages of rape and sexual coercion in the world (Jewkes & Abrahams 2002).

The question of who was going to take care of the children was also of concern:

The daddies cannot look after the kids, they are busy with other things....I can't trust a 26-year old dad, they will go out clubbing and not look after the kids. What happens if you leave them alone with the kids?

This latter quote also reflects the fact that the South African society is strongly influenced by gender stereotypes, where women's roles traditionally are seen to be at home. It also mirrors a society where many women are single mothers. Most of the female soldiers interviewed were single mothers who left their children in the care of relatives, especially the black African female soldiers. A female staff sergeant explained: "In my case, my sister and aunty looked after my child".

Male participants did not express worries related to the care of the children, but appeared more concerned about how their absence affected household discipline. Many of the male soldiers stated how children 'behaved differently' and did not want to listen to their dad, only to the mom. Or that the discipline of the children had disappeared because they were no longer sticking to the rules that were in place before deployment. A corporal stated that:

The most difficult thing is the handling of the children. The women handle things more softly. When the gate must be closed at eight, this must also be done in my absence. There must be a commitment to the rules.

As with boundary issues, there was a sense that the children should listen to the father when he was back, as he was the head of the household. The extent to which deployed mothers experienced these problems was unclear.

Relational Turbulence

In the initial honeymoon phase soldiers adopted various approaches to facilitate reintegration. Many took their families on holidays, to restaurants, or bought them gifts. Despite this, most said that there was a period of awkwardness in addition to the excitement of homecoming. Others again said that it was like they had to 'start afresh', explaining that they felt like strangers in their own homes and had to caution their reactions. A corporal explains:

It is as if you don't fit in, you have to do a mind switch, just stay quiet for the first two weeks to see how the rules have changed, otherwise I may handle things incorrectly. I may be too aggressive, so I keep quiet and then just ask why it is now like this, or that.

A Sergeant spoke of the tension he felt transitioning from the mission area to the home environment. He explained that for six months he was living with sixteen other people in a tent. When he came home, all he wanted was a bit of space, but instead felt under pressure to meet the demands the family placed upon him:

When you come back, they want to do things with you and they have been waiting for you, looking forward to your return, so it is unfair on them that now you want to be alone. They don't understand it because they are not among a lot of people all day long and can't appreciate that one just wants to be alone or have one's space.

A female corporal confirmed the need to be alone and explained the difficulties of unwinding:

I just could not handle all the noise and I even wanted to give my son a hiding, but I knew this would be the wrong thing to do, so I just went to my room and cried.

Others again wanted to get away from the house and spend time with the people they deployed with. A corporal explained, "you develop a sense of belonging, you become a team ... the deployment brings you closer to one another, this brings you closer together and these relations continue afterwards". This closeness was missed, and they spoke about how they liked to go out without their spouses to unwind and talk about things. As indicated by

Hinojosa & Hinojosa (2011:551), coming back home often means “losing the intimacy of valued friends who shared the unique strains of the combat deployment”.

Relational Uncertainty and Infidelity. Many of the soldiers stated that the biggest contributor to relational uncertainty was infidelity. The female soldiers spoke about how male soldiers regularly have extramarital affairs. A female Staff Sergeant soldier was of the opinion that men deploy to get away from their wives in order to have sexual relations in the mission area, despite this being prohibited according to UN and SANDF policy.

She stated:

Some people deploy because they want to get away from the spouse, because if you see the way that they behave when they are deployed you are wondering what marriage means to them. I have seen how men sleep around during deployment. They don't want to use malaria tablets because they can't perform sexually.

At the same time, the male soldiers were critical of female soldiers for having affairs while on deployment, especially the ‘young ladies’ (see also Wilén & Heinecken 2018). Infidelity had serious effects on trust relations, intimacy and sexual relations, whether male or female. There was a gendered dimensions of these discussions as well. Most of the female participants were critical of men's infidelity, but few of the male soldiers spoke about their own or their wives' infidelity. Yet, almost all female soldiers recalled fears of their male partners being unfaithful during their deployment. In a female focus group, a corporal stated:

At the age of 25, that is the time when you have a boyfriend and then you go out for 6 months and when you come back you have problems. You come back fixing, fixing and trying to patch up relationships.

Another theme, which was a major cause of relational stress was financial issues and spouses spending the allowances while the soldiers were deployed. A Warrant Officer explained that:

The biggest problem is the money, especially when they [the wives] have spent the money and you can't see what they bought. This makes one angry. I hear this a lot.

Money was a major cause of stress due to expectations of how it would be used and spent.

On the one hand the money provided financial relief, but on the other it was often a source of contention that strained relations, given the demands that both immediate and extended families placed on them, especially given the context of a high rate of unemployment in South Africa. A male rifleman explained: "the only change is that I get more responsibilities, I need to cover more fees for school for my siblings". In addition, relations within the unit were also complicated because of the economic inequality that resulted from some having deployed and others staying behind (Wilén and Heinecken 2017).

A few participants brought up the positive aspect of the financial influx and spoke of how the money earned on deployment gave them a start in life, enabled them to put down a deposit on a house and provided them with the means to help their immediate and extended families.

Relational Interference and Boundary Renegotiation

In South Africa, especially among the Afrikaans and black African communities which make up the majority of the SANDF (and this study), there is a conservative belief that men are the head of the household and that women should submit to their authority and be good wives and mothers (van Breda, 2010: 66). For the male soldiers in particular, the need

to take 'command' of the household after homecoming surfaced strongly, as reflected in the comment made by a Colonel:

The thing that I don't like is that when I come back, and my wife is still holding on to power after I am back. Then I have to sit her down and tell her: 'sweetie, remember I am back now. I don't want you to talk last, I must be the last one talking here, not you'. And then she says, but we have been doing this like that, and then I have to tell her, but I am back now. She was used to giving orders and directing programmes and nobody opposing her. I had to take the time to let her understand I am back.

The default strategy when confronted with boundary problems was dominance: to resort to patriarchal and military values to assert their authority and control. Boundary negotiation and decision making is a typical problem during reintegration, especially where spouses (in particular wives and female partners) have become more self-assured in running the household and wish to retain their autonomy (Sayers, et al., 2011). A black male corporal confirmed this in his statement:

For me it [homecoming] is easy, but for my wife...she is used to the freedom and must now fall back into being regulated.

These statements confirm Van Breda's finding (2010: 66) that trouble with regard to boundary renegotiation is more frequent in patriarchal societies. Previous studies show that where couples are more accepting of flexible gender roles, boundary negotiation is less of an issue and more conducive to stable and secure marriages (Bowling & Sherman, 2008:453).

Institutional Family Support

All the soldiers' spoke highly of the resilience training the military provided that prepared them for homecoming. A team of military chaplains, psychologists and social workers brief soldiers on post deployment stress, what to expect in terms of the reactions of their

children, financial management, relationship matters and adaptation strategies. In this regard, soldiers spoke about feelings of hyper-vigilance and how they had to watch themselves in order not to react aggressively. Some reported that it took them up to three months to adapt back to the home environment because they were still so full of tension and stress and unable to sleep properly. This can affect family reintegration, functioning and wellbeing, especially where the families do not have an understanding of this (Basham, 2008; Sayers, et al., 2009:163).

There appeared to be a built-up frustration among participants that the family had little understanding of how the soldiers were feeling, and what they were going through. Virtually all soldiers stated that while they were prepared for homecoming, their families were not. A Corporal expressed it as follows:

I think that social workers should be going to our houses and integrate with our children when we are gone. We need professionals, we need counselling. We just need someone who can tell them what is happening when for example our mission is extended, and we cannot reach them to explain it, or when our phones don't work.

Although there is a spouses' forum, wives and partners are often not part of this, as they live off base. Due to the location of military bases, the racially divided nature of communities in South Africa and problems of housing, safety and security in the black townships, many lower ranking male soldiers prefer their wives to remain in their home communities, mostly in the rural areas. This makes it difficult for the spouses to access support from other military wives and for the social workers to reach the families.

Most soldiers felt that the military needs to work harder to keep the families informed and to provide some sort of social support network. Often, the only news the families receive

about the deployment is what they hear in the media, which can be problematic as one soldier explained:

What can help us more when we are deployed, is to know that our country supports us, and that our family supports us. If you look at what happened in the Central African Republic (CAR), those guys they needed the support from us, but if you listen to the talk of the politicians, it was not necessary to speak like that. They said: why are they deployed there? Why did they deploy them to that country? Families are listening to them on the radio, and this affects them negatively.

As indicated by Danish & Antonides (2013:552), soldiers have a strong need for others to see their work as meaningful and important, and South African soldiers did not feel that politicians or society afford them this recognition.

Length of deployment. Another external factor that affected reintegration was the length of deployment and concerns that this was going to be extended from six to twelve months. Even when there was regular communication back home, extended periods away from home was the main reason for relationship breakdown, especially among the younger soldiers who reported having to constantly fix and patch up relationships. A female sergeant major explained:

I think you get used to it, it happened a few times [broken relationship], and... there is basically nothing you can do about it. You just have to accept it and move on. Most of my male friends came back to the same thing, marriages on the rock, divorce.

A male sergeant confirmed this impression, stating that:

I think [deployment] was one of the main reasons for the divorce, those long stretches away. One time we left for 8 months and came back for three weeks and left again for 7 months.

Indeed, research shows that the longer the deployment, the higher the risk of divorce, especially among female soldiers (Negursa & Negrusa, 2014). Because of this, a young female soldier said that now that she was married, she would not deploy because of the

divorce statistics. However, they often have no choice as the additional income provides much need extra money to sustain their families, but this comes at a cost in terms of their relationships, families and even military careers. Often, they missed out on military courses, necessary for promotion, leading to rank-stagnation and an increase in salary (Wilén & Heinecken 2017).

Conclusion

In this article the post-deployment reintegration challenges experienced by South African peacekeepers were analysed in relation to the existing literature on soldiers' homecoming. Whereas the findings confirmed the overall tendencies found in previous research, such as relational turbulence, difficulties to unwind, and the need for institutional support, they also provided important insights into context-specific challenges. Specifically, in South Africa the pressure on soldiers to support extended families financially due to high unemployment rates, the racially divided nature of communities and strong gender roles in a patriarchal society were linked to financial stressors, lack of military community support, relational turbulence and parenting.

This was particularly visible in how male and female peacekeepers experienced the absence from their children, where the women expressed concerns over the well-being of their children related to the need for finding a reliable care-taker. This is consistent with earlier research by Van Breda (2001:251) who found that deployed mothers expressed more concern about the care of the children and experienced more stress about the welfare of the children during deployment than men. Men appeared to be more worried about the lack of discipline in their absence, reflecting the general, conservative view of men as the head of the households in South Africa. These findings are indicative of the fact that

women bear a disproportionately greater responsibility for childcare compared to men. The Human Sciences Research Council estimates that 60% of SA children have an absent father, and 40% of mothers are single parents (Fourie, 2018).

Inflexible gender roles were also visible in aspects of relational turbulence, where many male peacekeepers expressed strong feelings related to the issue of boundary renegotiation and the female partners' new roles in the male's absence. The increased autonomy of women placed strain on relations, where women did not readily fall back into their subservient roles. While both male and female soldiers voiced concern over infidelity, this was more of an implicit issue for the male participants, whereas the female soldiers both discussed male soldiers' infidelity during deployment and their (male) partners' potential infidelity at home. This reflects both the patriarchal culture in the South African society as a whole, but also the double standards related to male soldiers in SANDF, where women are supposed to remain faithful while men may have multiple sexual partners (Mankanyi 2008:632).

Finally, the interview findings confirm the important role that institutional support play in the form of counselling before and after deployment in facing homecoming challenges. Research shows that only 10% of those returning from peacekeeping missions typically seek treatment for PTSD after their tour of duty (Mitchell, 2009:11). Yet, very few soldiers spoke openly of PTSD, although this was evident in their discourse. Where soldiers themselves are unwilling or unable to recognise symptoms of PTSD, this can have long-term consequences for the soldier and the family (Danish & Antonides, 2013). Indeed, all the participants expressed the need for better support to their families before, during and after deployment. In this regard, Rosen, et al., (1993) highlight the importance of a

comprehensive support system that includes military families to facilitate adjustment and emotional wellbeing upon reintegration.

A better public understanding of the aim of the missions was seen as important to facilitate reintegration in both community and the family. Preparing the families for homecoming through counselling as well as providing information on conditions of the deployment were understood as something the military should invest in to alleviate some of the stress of homecoming. The lack of support and the sacrifices they had to make left many feeling that the military was a greedy institution (Segal, 1986) that demanded a lot of them, but then left them with broken relationships. Added to this, the South African soldiers did not feel that politicians or society afford them this recognition. Where this is lacking it invariably influences morale, loyalty and willingness of soldiers to redeploy.

This is an exploratory study and despite these important findings, there are a number of issues that require further research. As indicated, few spoke directly of PTSD, although mission related stress symptoms were brought up repeatedly. The lack of reference to PTSD may be due to the stigma associated with reporting it, but also because it is more typically associated with combat related stress and thus not linked to peace operations in general. Yet, as noted in the introduction, several of today's peace operations are closer to combat missions than to traditional peacekeeping missions, making the distinction between the lived experiences from different missions more difficult to distinguish.

Another topic that requires further research is the issue of HIV/AIDS. While other studies confirm that this is a major cause of divorce in post-deployment period for South African

soldiers (Ntsota, 2001:54; Mabuza, 2010:31, Pitse 2009:37), this topic never surfaced in conversations. The high risk behaviour of soldiers with regard to sexual relations during deployment has raised concerns about soldiers contracting the virus whilst on deployment (DOD, 2016:143, Helfrich, 2014, DefenceWeb 2018; Winsor, 2015), adding an additional stressor to fears of infidelity. Related to this, the effect of infidelity, family care and the specific reintegration challenges facing women in particular warrants more research. As more women deploy on peacekeeping operations, the gendered effects that the deployments have on them, their children and their families, is needed to adapt and make institutional support relevant.

REFERENCES

- Adler, A., Huffman, A., Bliese, P., Castro, C. (2005). The Impact of deployment length and experience on the well-being of male and female Soldiers. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 10* (2), 121-137.
- Amen, D.G., Merves, E., Jellen, L. and Lee, R.E. (1988). Minimizing the impact of deployment separation on military children: Stages, current preventive efforts and system recommendations. *Military Medicine, 153* (9), 441-445.
- Appelwhite, L.W. and Mays, R.A. (1996). Parent-child separation: A comparison of maternally and paternally separated children in military families. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 13* (1), 23-39.
- Basham, K. (2008). Homecoming as Safe haven or the New Front: Attachment and Detachment in Military Couples. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 36*, 83-96.

Bolton, E., Litz, B; Gleen, D.M; Orisillo, S and Roemer, L. (2002). The impact of homecoming Reception on the adaptation of peacekeepers following deployment. *Military Psychology*, 14 (3), 241-251.

Booth, B., Segal, M. & Bell, D. (2007). What we Know About Military Families: 2007 Update. *Report* prepared for the Family, and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command. USA: ICF International.

Bowling, U.B. and Sherman, M.D. (2008). Welcoming them home: Supporting service members and their families in navigating the tasks of reintegration. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39 (4), 451-458.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles CA: Sage Publications. Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Danish, S.J. and Antonides, B.J. (2013). The challenges of reintegration for service members and their families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 83 (4), 550-558.

DefenceWeb, (2016a). South African Soldier killed in DRC fire-fight. *DefenceWeb*, 20 December,

http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46315:south-african-soldier-killed-in-drc-fire-fight&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&Itemid=111,

accessed 14/04/2017.

DefenceWeb, (2016b). Sudan government forced South African withdrawal from UNAMID,

http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43473:s

[udan-government-forced-south-african-withdrawal-from-unamid&catid=111:sa-defence&Itemid=242](#), accessed 20/08/2018.

DefenceWeb. (2018). SANDF investigating sexual misconduct by SA soldiers in the DRC, DefenceWeb, 22 March,

http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51118, accessed 19/05/2018

Department of Defence (DOD).(2016). *Department of Defence Annual Report FY 2015/16*. Pretoria: Department of Defence.

Doyle, E. and Peterson K. (2005). Re-entry and Reintegration: Returning home after combat. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 76 (4), 361-370.

Drummet, A.R., Coleman, M. and Cable, S. (2003). Military Families Under stress: Implications for Family Life Education. *Family Relations*, July 2003, 52 (3), 279-287.

Faber, A.J., Willerton, E.' Clymer, S.R.' MacDermid, S.M. and Weiss, H.M. (2008). Ambiguous presence: A qualitative study of military reserve families in wartime. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22 (2), 222-230.

Heinecken, L. and Ferreira, R. (2012) Fighting for peace: South Africa's role in peace operations in Africa (part I), *African Security Review*, 21 (2), 20-35.

Fourie, J. (2018). Why are there so many single mothers. Finweek, 26 September, <https://www.fin24.com/Finweek/Opinion/why-are-there-so-many-single-mothers-20180926>, accessed, 24/07/2019/

Heleta, S. (2017). South Africa's army is in steady decline and nothing is being done to fix it. *The Conversation*, 5 April.

Helfrich, K. 2014. Surgeon General confident HIV/AIDS can be beaten in the SANDF. *DefenceWeb*, 04 February 2014.

Hinojosa, R. and Hinojosa, M.S. (2011). Using military friendships to optimize post-deployment reintegration for male Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 48 (10), 1145-1158.

Hinojosa, R., Hinojosa, M.S., & R.S. Högnäs. 2012. Problems with Veteran-Family Communication during Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Military Deployment. *Military Medicine*, 177 (2), 191-197.

Hollingsworth, W-G. L, Dolbin-MacNab, M.L. & Marek, L.I. (2016) Boundary ambiguity and ambivalence in Family Reintegration, *Family Relations*, 65 (4), 603-615.

Honing, S. (1994). *The Army family readiness handbook: Family deployment readiness for the active Army, The Army National Guard and the Army Reserve*. USA: Operation READY.

Jewkes, R., & Abrahams, N. (2002), "The Epidemiology of rape and sexual coercion in South Africa: an overview", *Social Science & Medicine*, 55, 1231-1244.

Jordan, K. (2011). Counsellors helping service veterans re-enter their couple relationship after combat and military services: A comprehensive overview. *The Family Journal: Counselling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 19 (3), 263-273.

Kaplow, J.B., Layne, C.M., Saltzman, W.R., Cozza, S.J. and Pynoos, R.S. (2013). Using multidimensional grief theory to explore the effects of deployment, reintegration, and death on military youth and families. *Clinical Child Family Psychological Review*, 16 (3), 322-340.

Kgosana, M.C. (2010). *An Explanatory Study of Family Stability under Conditions of Deployment*. Masters Dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

Knobloch, L.K. & Solomon, D.H. (2004). Interference and facilitation from partners in the development of interdependence within romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 11 (1) 115-130).

- Knobloch, L.K., and Theiss, J.A. (2010). An actor-partner interdependence model of relational turbulence: Cognitions and emotions. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27 (5), 595-619.
- Knobloch, L.K. and Theiss, J.A. (2012). Experiences of U.S. military couples during the post-deployment transition: Applying the relational turbulence model. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 29 (4), 423-450.
- Knobloch, L.K, and Theiss, J.A. (2014) .Relational turbulence within military couples during reintegration following deployment. In Wadsworth S. M & Riggs, D.S. (Eds). *Military deployment and its consequences for families*. New York, Springer, 37-59.
- Knobloch, L.K., Mchninch, K.G., Abendschein, B., Ebata, A.T. and McGlaughlin, P.C. 2016. Relational turbulence among young military couples after reunion following deployment. *Personal Relationships*, 23, XX, 742-758.
- Knobloch, L.K., Knobloch-Fedders, L.M., Yorganson, J.B. Ebata, A.T & McGlaughlin, P.C. (2017). Military Children's difficulty with reintegration after deployment: A relational Turbulence Model Perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 31 (5), 542-552.
- Krastof, K. Armour C., Anderson, S. Bertelsen, T. (2014). Community integration after deployment to Afganistan" A longnitudinal investigation of Danish Soldiers. *Soc Psychiatry Psychaitr Edimiol*, 50, 653-660.
- Litz, B, Orsillo, S. Friedman, M., Ehlich, P. Bartes, A. (1997). Posttraumatic stress disorder associated with peacekeeping duty in Somalia for US military Personnel. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 154 (2), 178-184.
- Mabuzu, P. (2010). *The impact of HIV Serodiscordancy on married couples attending the infectious disease clinic at 1 Military Hospital*. Masters Degree in Social Work, Dept of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

- Mankayi, N (2008). "Morality and sexual rights: Constructions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality among a group of South African soldiers", *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 10(6), 625-634.
- Moelker, R. and van der Kloet, I. (2003). Military families and the armed forces, in G. Caforio (Ed). *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 201-224.
- Monson, C.M., Taft, C.T. and Friedman, S.J. (2009). Military related PTSD and Intimate Relationships: A description to theory driven research and intervention development. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 707-714.
- Negrusa, B and Negrusa, S. (2014). Home front: Post –deployment mental health and divorces. *Demography*, 51, 895-916.
- Ntshota, N. (2002). *Challenges facing Married couples in the deploying units of South African National Defence Force*, Masters Theses, Department of Social Work, University of Cape Town, Cape Town.
- Palmer, C. (2008). A theory of risk and resilience factors in military families. *Military Psychology*, 20, 205-217.
- Pitse, C. (2009). *Spousal support in the South African National Defence Force during external military deployment: A model for social support services*. Doctorate Dissertation, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Riggs, B. (1990). Routine work related absence: The effects on families. *Marriage and Family Review*, 15, 147-160.
- Riggs, S.A, and Riggs, D.S, (2011). Risk and resilience in Military Families Experiencing Deployment: The Role of the Family Attachment Network. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25 (3), 675-687)

- Rindfuss, R.R. and Stephen, E.H. (1990). Marital Non-cohabitation: Separations does not make the heart grow fonder. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 52 (February), 259-270.
- Rosen, L.N., Westhuis, D.J. and Teitelbaum, J.M. (1993). Stressors, stress mediators and emotional well-being among spouses of soldiers deployed on the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Shield/Storm. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 23, 1587-1593)
- Sayers, S. L.; Farrow, V; Ross, J. and Oslin D. (2009). Family problems among recently returned military veterans referred for a mental health evaluation. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 70 (2), 163-170.
- Sayers, S.L. (2011). Family Reintegration Difficulties and Couples Therapy for Military Veterans and their Spouses. *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 18, 108-119.
- Stepka, P. & Callahan, K. 2016. The Impact of Military Life on Young Children and Their Parents. In Gewirtz, A. & Youssef, A (eds). *Parenting and Children's resilience in Military Families*. New York: Springer. 11-26.
- Sikainga, A. (2009). The world's worst humanitarian crises: Understanding the Darfur Conflict. *Origins*, 2 (95), <http://origins.osu.edu/article/worlds-worst-humanitarian-crisis-understanding-darfur-conflict>, accessed 11/06/2018.
- Segal, M. (1986). The military and the family as greedy institutions. *Armed Forces and Society*, 13 (1), 9-38.
- Trautmann, J., Alhusen, J. gross, D., and Faan, R. (2015) Impact of deployment on military families with young children: A systematic Review. *Nursing Outlook*, 63, 656-678
- Van Breda, A. (1999). Developing Resilience to Routine Separations: An Occupational Social Work Intervention. *Families in Society*, 80 (6), 597-605
- Van Breda, A. (2001). *Resilience Theory: A Literature Review*. Pretoria: South African Military Health Service, Military Psychological Institute, Social Work Research and Development,

https://www.google.co.za/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=qNTxWOP9N4qp8we39ovYAg&gws_rd=ssl#q=resilience+theory+a+literature+review+pdf&spf=68, accessed 03/04/2017.

Van Breda, A. (2010). *Status of Women in the DOD: A Review of Women in the South African Department of Defence*. Pretoria: Department of Defence.

Vitzthum, K., Mache, S., Joachim, R., Quarcoo, D., and Groneberg, D. (2009). Psychotrauma and effective treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in soldiers and peacekeepers, *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology*, 4 (21), 1-7.

Weiss, T. W., & Boss, P. (2006). Maintaining family resilience before, during and after military separation. In T. Britt, A. Adler & C. Castro (Eds.), *Military life: The psychology of serving in peace and combat: The military family*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 13-38.

Wilén, N., & Heinecken, L., (2018) "Regendering the South African Army: Inclusion, Reversal and Displacement", *Gender, Work and Organization*, 25 (6), 670-686.

Wilén, N., & Heinecken, L., (2017) "Peacekeeping Deployment Abroad and the Self-Perceptions of the Effect on Career Advancement, Status and Reintegration", *International Peacekeeping*, 24 (2), 236-253.

Winsor, M. (2015). South Africa Peacekeepers worst sexual predators on UN Mission, United National Report Says, 24 June, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/>, accessed 19/04/2017.

Table 1: Responses according to themes and categories

TOPIC	THEMES	CATEGORIES
Homecoming/Honeymoon period	Preparation homecoming	Resilience training Adaption strategies
	Excitement	Family reception Family activities
	Relational ambivalence	Estrangement Communication Change routines Family demands
External influences	Mission Stress	Deployment experience Mission related stress (PTSD) Length of deployment Support military peers
	Demographic influences	Gender Race Age
Family reintegration	Relational Uncertainty	Infidelity Divorce
	Boundary negotiation	Role conflict Patriarchy
	Children	Guilt Discipline Behavioural problems
	Finances	Financial conflict Financial benefits
Family support	Unit support	Health support Social support

		Communication families Spouse forums
	Community support	Military community Civilian community
	Political support	Politicians Society/status mission

¹ Using both individual interviews and focus groups allowed us to both get in-depth personal reflections in the individual encounters, and a better understanding of group dynamics from the focus groups. As the authors did not perform the recruitment themselves, they did not experience, nor did they hear about any challenges with regard to the recruitment.

² Seven rank and gender segregated focus groups of between four to five participants (with a total of 32) lasting between 60-90 minutes were conducted among lower-ranking riflemen and non-commissioned infantry soldiers in empty class rooms at the military base. Segmented focus groups as a method of data collection served to counter the effect of power relations related to rank and gender that could influence the free flow of conversations (Söderström 2011). Particularly the more junior soldiers felt more comfortable in talking in groups with peers of similar rank. On a more practical level, focus groups enabled us to reach a greater number of participants within the given time constraints and the availability of personnel.

³ We used NVIVO software initially, to separate the homecoming questions and answers from the other topics of the interviews (gender integration, career development and self-perceptions). After this initial separation, we interpreted and coded the interview findings manually.