Cultural Considerations for Civilians Providing Care for Navy Families

Part II

Paul S. Hammer
CAPT, MC, USN
Director, Naval Center for Combat &
Operational Stress Control

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Life at Sea

- Close living quarters and lack of privacy
- Long separations from families
- Constant routine
  - Work at their job
  - Watchstanding
  - Rest
- Deploying in harm's way far from any support

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Cycle of Deployment

- Shore Duty
  - Assignment to a command based ashore
- Sea Duty – Assigned to a ship or deploying unit
  - Brief periods in and out of port or in the field
  - Prolonged deployment, usually 6-7 months
- Current Conflict
  - Normal Sea Duty Cycle
  - Individual Augments (IA)
  - GWOT Support Assignments (GSA)
- Deployments can have a significant impact on Sailors and their families

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Operational Stress

- Different fighting force
- More and varied missions
- High op-tempo
- High stress environment

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Operational Stress vs. Combat Stress

- *Operational stress* is the process of responding to the challenges of Navy life and the direct and indirect challenges associated with Naval operations.

- *Combat stress* is the process of responding to the unique physical, emotional and moral challenges of the combat experience.

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Prevalence of Combat Stress Reactions

Legend:
- Pre-deployment
- 3 mo. Post-OEF
- 3 mo. Post-OIF
- 6 mo. Post OEF
- 6 mo. Post OIF

(Categories: Depression, PTSD, Any Mental Health Problem)

From WRAIR Land Combat Study and NEJM July 2004 Hoge, et.al.

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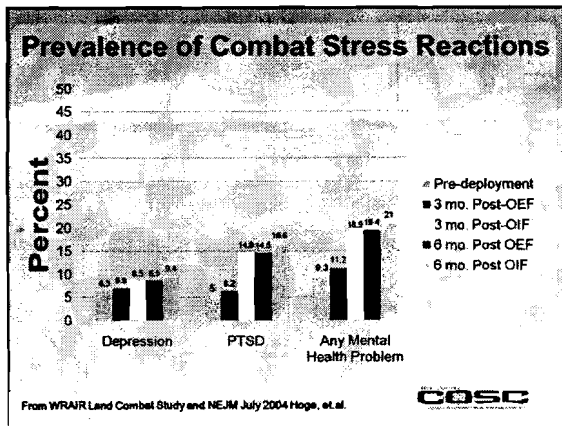
Deployment "Spiral"

With each deployment cycle, stress accumulates, having a cumulative effect on a family's well-being. Obtain the family's history of deployments, separations and relocations.

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Military Families

- An estimated 2 million-plus children have been affected by a parent's wartime deployment

- Over 40% of US service members are parents

- More than 50,000 military families include two active-duty parents

- Preliminary data show an increase in marriages and births among military personnel = MANY new, young military families & many blended families

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Reintegration into the Family

- Roles have changed since the service member has been gone
- From a teen or child's perspective there is "ambiguous loss" when a parent returns 'different' from when they left; loss is difficult to explain or describe
- Spouse was the sole decision maker and has been managing the home and finances independently; may resent having to share responsibilities again when the deployment is over
- Children may have had heightened sense of responsibility i.e., were the "man of the house" and may resent their parent taking back the reins
- Navy families can also be quite resilient

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Special Considerations for Navy Families

- Needs of the Navy may conflict with family's needs
- Frequent separations may increase sense of uncertainty and worry
- Spouses may be geographically isolated from family or friends
- Children may be uprooted, change schools frequently
- Spouses may be ill prepared to manage multiple roles
- Chain of command involvement with family issues
- Sponsor accountable for family member's actions
- Unavailable for family appointments due to job demands

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Family Issues in Cultural Context

- Take time to understand a family's issues in the context of the Navy's culture
- Ask about the Sailor's
  - Rate
  - Ship
  - Work hours
  - Deployment history (shipboard, IA, combat history)
  - Career history, motivation for service
- Ask about the family's:
  - Coping skills
  - Strategies for dealing with separations
  - Indicators of resilience
  - Support system
  - Knowledge of available resources

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Take Time to Learn More About the Navy Culture

- If you don't understand a term or practice, ask. They know when you don't understand.
- Learn more. The Navy's official website www.navy.mil or www.military.com are good places to start.
- Many commands have websites and Wikipedia entries on www.wikipedia.com.
- There are many good sites with information about Navy terms, slang and jargon.
- Take the opportunity to visit ships and get educated about Navy history, culture and life.
- Don't worry about appearing uninformed. Genuine interest and attempts to understand go a long way.

"Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care" – Theodore Roosevelt

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