Military Wives Matter
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An Internet-based study of military wives’ mental health status and barriers to treatment
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Participants

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Questions

Regarding military wives,

1. Can Internet identify those with or at risk of depression?
2. Are there barriers to mental health treatment?
3. Is the Internet useful for prevention or treatment of mental health problems and/or for research with this population?
Agenda

Background
Qualitative findings
Internet survey results
Summary and implications
Background

Military spouses

Active duty  700,000
Reserve / Guard  400,000

Department of Defense, Demographics 2010
Obama M, Strengthening our military families. White House (2011)
Blue Star Families, 2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey
Population

THE MILITARY WIFE.
Ordinary women need not apply....
Deployment and mental health

Wives of Utah National Guard Soldiers returned from Iraq:

45% above cut-off on Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale
(17% of normative sample above cut-off)

Renshaw et al., J Family Psychology (2008)
Treatment and barriers

“Spouses tell me all the time that they want to get mental health assistance … they really do believe if they seek help it will have a negative impact on their spouse’s military career.”

Deborah Mullen
Wife of Admiral (retired) Michael Mullen

Hefling, Minneapolis Star Tribune (2010)
Population definition

Female ages 18 and older
Married to or significant other of military male
Male on active duty or in Guard or Reserve
Deployed or expected to deploy
Contact with military male during last year
Concerned about mental health
Internet access

(inclusion / exclusion criteria)
1. Qualitative interviews
2. Website creation
3. Quantitative surveys
Qualitative study

Interviews and focus groups
Recruitment included snow-ball sampling
Participants (N = 17) chiefly local
Deployment is tough, I worry about his safety. But reintegration can be so much worse.

Participant
Mental health themes

- Access to services not same as for military or veterans
- Reluctant to seek help for fear it will harm husband’s career
- Misunderstood and diminished by mental health care providers
We don’t have to tell you how hard it is. However, if you would like to know more about what to expect and how to deal with it, there’s a new website designed to help you. It provides information about how the deployment process may affect you and your family.

www.militarywivesmatter.org
Web site components

- Survey
- Information
- Referral
- Interaction
Web site features

- Branching
- Randomization
- Interventions
- Safety
- Compliance
Survey domains

- Depression
- Mental health treatment needed but not received
- Distress
- Social support
- Marital satisfaction
- Husband’s symptoms (as perceived by wife)
- Attitudes toward seeking mental health treatment - participant and husband (as perceived by wife)
Depression measure

Center for Epidemiologic Studies – Depression (CES-D)

Please tell me how often you have felt this way during the past week,

Sample items

- “I felt depressed”
- “I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing”
- “I thought my life had been a failure”

rarely (less than 1 day) … most (5 - 7 days )

20-item scale, range 0 to 60

16 or greater = “mild” depression
27 or greater = possible major depressive disorder

Radloff Applied Psychological Measurement (1977)
“During the past 12 months, was there any time when you needed mental health treatment or counseling for yourself but didn’t get it?”

National Survey on Drug Use and Health
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Recruitment - traditional

- Face-to-face
- Snowball
- Posters
- Fliers
- Military newspapers and newsletters (e.g., Fort Lewis Ranger)
- Military family assistance centers
- Army community service facilities
Chat rooms
Forums
Web-sites (e.g., “Military Hearts”)
Recruitment - social networking

Twitter

Facebook
Facebook: 4300+ friends

Military Honeys Staying Strong
USMC Silent Ranks
National Guard Love
My Heart Deployed
Camouflaged Love
Military Issued Love
Always Faithful Military Love
GI Joe Stole My Heart
I Heart Camo
Sexually Deprived for your Freedom
Facebook friends

Top Countries
- United States: 3185
- Germany: 35
- Philippines: 15
- United Kingdom: 15
- South Korea: 15
- Japan: 12
- Italy: 7
- Australia: 5
- Turkey: 5
- Puerto Rico: 4

This photo was generated by My Friend Map
Participants

N = 569

45 states and Guam
(Most: CA, GA, MN, NC, OR, TX, VA, & WA)

Eight foreign countries
- Belgium, Costa Rica, Cuba, Germany, Italy,
- Japan, South Korea, United Kingdom

Recruitment opened May 2010 and closed July 2011
## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>29 (range 18 – 56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Newly enlisted to general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlisted</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deployment

Deployed ever 91%
Deployed now 53%
Mean deployments 2.4

How many times has he deployed since 2001?

0  9%
1  29%
2  25%
3  20%
4  5%
5  7%
6+ 5%
Depression

Mean score 27
Mild depression only 27%
Major depression 51%

Center for Epidemiologic Studies - Depression Scale
Mild = 16 through 26
Major = 27 or greater
Cronbach alpha = .93
Needed but didn’t get mental health treatment

Military wives 44%
National Survey 35%
Past 12 months
# General barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Military wives</th>
<th>National Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Military specific barriers

Unable to find provider who understands military spouse needs 35%

Couldn’t find a counselor that you felt you could trust 29%
Limitations

- Internet based — biased sample
- No husband data
- Few minorities
- Few questionnaires designed for military
- Missing data
- Validity unknown
- Survey contents limited
Summary and implications

- Some (?) many ?) military wives distressed and possibly depressed
- Military wives with mental health needs to be addressed
- General barriers such as logistical challenges (e.g., childcare)
- Military specific barriers (e.g., understanding provider)
- Internet may be useful
- Facebook recruitment noteworthy