

ACCEPTANCE OF PREGNANCY WITH MILITARY IMPOSED FAMILY SEPARATIONS

Lt Col Karen L. Weis, RN, MSN, USAF
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Carrington Hall, CB #7460
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7460
Pregnancy, Social Support, Military

Background: Deployments place the family of a service member under great stress. However, the impact of military family separation on pregnancy adaptation is unknown, despite 90,000 babies being born to U.S. military families each year (Ryan, 2003) and well over 100,000 troops currently deployed (Air Force Times, April, 2004). **Purpose:** To examine the influence of military separations and perceived community support on maternal acceptance of pregnancy across the trimesters. **Methods:** Survey methodology using the Social Support Index (SSI) and the Lederman Prenatal Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (PSEQ) were provided to the participants in each trimester of pregnancy. Subjects were 421 women of mixed parity all military beneficiaries either active duty or dependant wives receiving prenatal care at military healthcare facilities. Of the total sample, 176 experienced separation from their spouse because of deployments from 3 weeks to 8 months. A repeated measures ANOVA was used to assess change over time for acceptance of pregnancy with three between-subject factors: husband's deployment status (yes or no), perceived community support (a 3-level categorical variable of low, medium, and high), and location of the community of support as on or off base. **Findings:** A statistically significant difference in anxiety for those with deployed husbands ($F=5.48$; $p=.005$) across the three trimesters was seen. Women with deployed husbands had greater levels of anxiety related to acceptance of pregnancy. The level of community support to acceptance of pregnancy also reflected statistically significant changes across all trimesters ($F=4.75$; $p<.002$). The interaction of acceptance of pregnancy with deployment status and community support reflected statistically significant differences ($F=2.86$; $p<.03$). Differences in the level of acceptance of pregnancy to the community of support as on or off base were not significant. However, mean scores reflect less difficulty with acceptance of pregnancy for those with on-base support systems regardless of the perceived level of support. **Discussion:** Maternal conflict associated with acceptance of pregnancy was impacted by the presence or absence of the husband. Support offered by community resources reduced the anxiety experienced by the women. The on-base community appears to provide better support to this group of women. Implications for policy related to base and community support programs will be presented.

(Project was sponsored by the TriService Nursing Research Program (TSNRP), MDA-905-00-1-0039 and approved by the Institutional Review Board, Protocol #FWH20020114H. The content and conclusions do not necessarily represent TSNRP, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government).