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Abstract

Since September 11, 2001, the United States Army continues to fight the Global War on Terrorism. Due to the war, the operational tempo is having a severe impact on its soldiers and Army families. The Army recognizes the strain placed on families and has attempted to mitigate the impact. However, divorces are at an increased rate, and might continue to rise with longer deployments. Values and strong family foundations are key to families making it during this time of war.

Army Deployments and Family

An ethical problem facing the Army and soldiers is the current operational tempo with the global war on terror and the effects it is having on Army families. Since the beginning of Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom, many soldiers deployed on more than one occasion. These deployments mean leaving behind their families for seven to fifteen months at a time. Depending on the type of unit a soldier is in, he or she may have two to five deployments under his or her belt, which equates to 24 to 36 months away from a soldier's family. Families are sometimes shattered due to the amount of time soldiers spend in a combat zone.

The effects from a deployment are based on the welfare of the relationship prior to the deployment. If the relationship was on a weak foundation, then the effects from a long separation are only a contributing factor to the demise of a marriage or relationship. Regardless, the effects cause hardship and strain on relationships no matter how strong the foundation is. Some effects from deployments are loneliness, depression, and unfaithfulness of the Soldier and/or the spouse back home. Loneliness normally causes a person to attempt to find someone to replace the absence of that significant other and to relieve some of the depression.

Army leadership recognized the problem of soldiers committing adultery during periods of deployments. In recognizing this, the leadership or General Officers created General Order Number One, which outlines many different rules rolled up into one massive order. One of the rules in this order basically states that soldiers of different sex are not allowed in private quarters unless in the line of an official duty. An example of official duty is Health and Welfare inspections of life support areas. Another rule outlined in the order is the prohibition of

pornographic material. The reason behind this is to be culturally considerate of the area the Army is operating in. Along with cultural awareness, soldiers watching or looking at pornographic material sometimes present the soldier an unreal expectation of the “honeymoon period” when they get home. The order attempts to keep good order and discipline within units in theater. Another step the Army has taken to assist soldiers strengthen their relationship prior to and after deployments is having the Army Chaplains give classes to soldiers on keeping real expectations. The Army Chaplains also have marriage retreat programs and enrichment classes which help improve the bond between couples. There are ways for soldiers and spouses to keep their relationships strong during the time of separation. Correspondence is the most effective way of keeping couples together. Since early 2003, the commands in both Iraq and Afghanistan established Internet cafes, telephone cafes, video teleconferencing and mail offices to ensure families keep good communications.

Another problem involved with deployments is the lifestyle change of soldiers and spouses after reuniting. Most spouses are independent and have established new manners in which the household is managed. But when the soldier returns home, they want to regain control of the house, or they want things to return to the way the house was run prior to deployment. The issue of regaining control or returning to the old ways causes severe problems for the couple to work through. Also not only does the soldier need to reestablish the relationship with the spouse, but also needs to reconnect with the child or children. The stress of reconnecting contributes to the stress of the soldier trying to find his or her place among a relatively “new” family. Along with these problems, the soldier, the spouse and the children have changed. Being in a high stress environment for a long period of time can cause soldiers to continue the high state of readiness even long after the return back home. And the spouse has become adjusted to taking care of the

household and the children. Children either resent the soldier for leaving or want to maintain the new way of life. Unfortunately, in many cases, all these factors or problems trigger the want or need for divorce.

If you were to look on the Internet to see research figures or look for news articles of the divorce rate, one word would appear in almost every editorial you would find during a Google search. The word is triple. Since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism, the divorce rate in the United States Army has tripled since 2001. The U.S. Army saw a major increase in divorces with officers. One of the theories to the increase in officer divorce rate is from the hours officers put into a duty day before and after deployments. And with the tours in Iraq and Afghanistan increasing to 15 months, one can only expect the divorce rate to either maintain at its current level or increase within the next year. Army leadership realized the increase of tour time would have a profound impact on Army families, however, until enough brigades are created to support the overall mission, the increased deployment time was the only viable option to give units enough time to reset and give soldiers a minimum of 12 months to spend time with families.

The blame for the increase in divorce does not rest with the Army's participation in the war on terror or the increase in deployment time. A majority of the blame rests with the soldiers and spouses themselves. Though the war has contributed significantly to the rise of divorce, people themselves are susceptible to temptation when faced with periods of loneliness, desperation and depression. These factors affect people in different ways, which could add to the need for a person to find someone to fill the void, or just give a person the excuse to cheat on their spouse. Regardless, the values and beliefs of the person will define the route the individual will travel. We have heard or seen too many instances where soldiers, regardless of rank, have

taken the worst road. Or we have heard the horror stories of soldiers coming home, to only find an empty house or to find another person living with the spouse. As I stated above, values and beliefs will drive the actions people take, whatever the situation an individual finds themselves in.

Leaders are faced with a huge issue when dealing with soldiers and families, especially prior to, during, and after deployment. The issue is preparing the Army family, under their command, for the rough road ahead. The Army has implemented several programs through the Army Chaplains to prepare soldiers and spouses for the long separation. Systems are emplaced in theater to keep families in contact throughout the deployment. Families with a good base and strong morale value will succeed. The problem rest with those of weak values and the amount of time the military will remain its current operational tempo.