

Lengthy military deployments increase divorce risk for US enlisted service members

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The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been hard on military marriages, with the risk of divorce rising directly in relation to the length of time enlisted service members have been deployed to combat zones, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

The negative effects of deployment were largest among female military members, with women facing a greater chance of [divorce](#) than men under all the scenarios examined by researchers, according to the findings published online by the *Journal of Population Economics*.

While researchers found that any deployment increases the risk of divorce among military members, the [negative consequences](#) were higher for those deployed to the war zones in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Among [couples](#) married before the 9/11 attacks, those that experienced deployment of 12 months to [war zones](#) were 28 percent more likely to become divorced within three years of marriage as compared to [peers](#) who experienced similar deployment before the wars began.

The study found that the divorce risk was lower for couples married after the 9/11 terrorist attacks than for couples married before 9/11. Researchers theorize that couples who married after the 9/11 terrorist attacks were better prepared for the challenges posed by being married in the military than those who married before the [conflicts](#) began. This is consistent with the [hypothesis](#) that only the couples willing to accept the risks associated with military life went ahead to marry in the post 9/11

era.

More than 2.1 million U.S. troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since combat began in October of 2001. Some earlier studies had found that deployments had little or no effect on divorce rates or even helped to decrease the risk of divorce.

The data for the new study covers a wider time frame, follows couples for a longer period after marriage, and differentiates between divorce risk before and after the 9/11 attacks. The study uses individual-level information from 462,444 enlisted service members who married while serving in the military from March 1999 to June 2008.

Researchers found that cumulative months of deployment matter. More cumulative months of deployment increased the risk of divorce among military couples, regardless of when the couple married or when the deployment occurred. The risk of divorce was higher for hostile deployments than for non-hostile deployments, and women were always more likely to divorce than male service members as a result of time in deployment.

Researchers say cumulative deployment may be more disruptive and harder to adjust to in couples where a service member is female, although the study did not specifically address reasons for the higher numbers.

Ninety-seven percent of the divorces occurred after a return from deployment. The risk of divorce was lower among military families that had children.

Provided by RAND Corporation

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