

Psychological well-being of the spouses of deployed and non-deployed commissioned officers of Indian Armed Forces: A comparative study

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Spouse of armed force personnel face anxiety and stress during the periods of deployment of their husbands to high altitude and other field areas and stress due to the danger of their husband's life as well as managing every task single handedly. Work pressure and separation from the family together makes the condition worse for the soldier thus, cases of anxiety and even suicides among soldiers are also increasing day by day which is also a contributing factor to disturb psychological well being of those spouses whose husbands are deployed away from home. Considering the gravity of the matter present study establishes the differences of various dimensions of psychological well being and overall psychological well being between spouses of deployed and non-deployed commissioned officers of armed forces. 100 officers' spouses among which 50 were those who belong to deployed category and 50 belonged to non-deployed category were selected as respondents. Statistical differences were found using students' T test. The results of the analysis show significant differences in total psychological well-being, life satisfaction and mental health between deployed and non-deployed officers' spouses.

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Spouses of military personnel are the "Silent ranks" that stand behind and nurture the soldiers of our country and therefore, regarded as an unseen gateway to protect the nation's security and its pride. Therefore, it is very necessary on the part of the spouses to be psychologically sound and physically healthy in order to support the soldier, mentally, emotionally and physically and to feel proud to be the part of the Military

life, but sometimes there comes such situations (deployments, relocations etc.) that triggers depression, anxiety, decreased marital satisfaction and stress among the wives of the military personnel and this may even lead to somatization.

Armed forces are an organization where the process of deployment of soldiers or military personnel occurs very frequently. The soldiers are frequently

deployed in either active field areas, high altitude areas and routine exercise because of which the families has to face separation for longer as well as for short duration influencing them emotionally, psychologically and mentally leading to stress responses, such as anger, irritability, sleeplessness, and anxiety, and significant levels of distress (Demers, 2008).

The deployment experiences can be summarized with five stressors: worrying, waiting, going it alone, putting double duty and loneliness (Lapp *et al.*, 2010). Spouses suffer from the emotional pain of separation and the fear that their loved one may be harmed on the other hand for few spouses the deployments are viewed as a positive situation, allowing them to explore their newly found independence, cultivate friendships and have a sense of accomplishment for maintain the structure and routine at home while their soldiers are away but greater would be the negative effects impacting mental and job related tasks of the spouse (Steel Fisher *et al.*, 2008) and ultimately the conversion of mental states of depression and anxiety into physical symptoms like high blood pressure, hypertension and even more worse forms of somatization such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and atherosclerosis etc. may arise as a result completely ruining the physical health of the person.

The stressors are not only present during the periods of deployments but could also be present during the periods of non-deployments among the wives of military soldiers as apart from deployments other activities like frequent relocation from one military station to another, regular moves, short duration stay in one location and dual parenting roles that are projected onto the spouse, make it hard for the spouses who are well qualified, to obtain and maintain their carrier leaving them mentally as well as physically fatigued.

It is correctly said "Inside a healthy body lives a healthy mind" therefore, it is imperative to study the states of well-being and the condition that influence the psychological well-being of Indian Military soldiers' spouse who would praise their husbands for going on their missions and defending the country, while refraining from expressing their true opinions so as to not diminish their husbands' moral (Sahlestein *et al.*, 2009) and are silently serving the armed forces by supporting their husband who are soldiers of our country.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

Women of reproductive age group of 18 to 45 years

were the target of the study. Five regiments posted in Suratgrah military station Rajasthan, was selected by random sampling 50 women from each group (deployed and non-deployed) was selected based on the selected criteria i.e. age, husband's rank and husband's deployment and non-deployment. Therefore comprising a sample of 100 officers' spouses.

Assessment of psychological well-being was done by standardized scale developed by Sisodia and Chaudhary (2005). The scale assess psychological wellbeing in 5 areas that includes Satisfaction, Efficiency, Sociability, Mental Health and Interpersonal Relation. Students' T test was employed to find out the statistical differences in psychological well-being between the two groups (deployed and non-deployed).

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study as well as relevant discussion have been presented under following heads :

Deployment and non-deployment wise differences in the dimensions of psychological well-being among spouses of officers' of Indian Military.

As indicated in Table 1 and Fig. 1, various dimensions of psychological well being *i.e.* life satisfaction, efficiency, sociability, mental health, interpersonal relationship and total psychological well-being were studied to establish significant and non-significant differences among deployed and non-deployed officers' spouses. The results shows that total psychological well-being, life satisfaction and mental health had significant differences between spouse of deployed and non-deployed officers whereas efficiency, sociability and interpersonal relationship also shows differences, though the differences were non-significant.

The analysis reflects the fact that the mean scores of life satisfaction among non-deployed officers' spouses (32.18) was greater than the mean scores of deployed counterparts (22.16) and there was a significant difference of. $t=3.02$; $P<0.01$, which shows that life satisfaction of non-deployed officers' spouses is greater than that of deployed ones. This difference could be accounted by the fact that during deployment the presence of stressors like marital dissatisfaction and loneliness etc. are more as compared to period of non-deployment and spouses seems to be dissatisfied with that phase of life that may lead to low life satisfaction among deployed spouses of officers. This indicates that

military personnel involved in deployment experience less marital satisfaction compared to a civilian and non-deployed.

Mental health, on the other hand have also shown significant differences ($t=6.42$; $P<0.01$) among deployed and non-deployed spouses of officers' with average score among deployed was 22.6 which was comparatively less than the mean scores of non-deployed with the average score of 40.06 showing the fact that non-deployed officers' spouses having better mental health than deployed counterparts. Again the reason could be because of deployment there much pressure of work and tensions regarding managing children alone and loneliness might contribute to anxiety or even depression that affect the mental health of deployed officers' spouses in a negative manner. The above result is congruent with the findings of Burton *et al.* (2009) examined stress induced somatization in the spouses of deployed versus non-deployed Servicemen. They filled out the perceived stress scale and patient mental health questionnaire. The results showed that spouses of deployed servicemen has significantly higher perceived

stress scores as compared to spouses of non-deployed soldiers.

Next in line, significant difference ($t=2.38$; $P<0.05$) was found in total psychological well-being that shows higher scores of mean value among non-deployed (165.14) as compared to 133.20 as mean score of deployed population reflecting that overall psychological well-being of non-deployed officers' spouses were better than that of deployed officers' spouses. As already depicted in the table that there are vast differences in mental health and life satisfaction among both the categories thus, it is obvious that these differences affect overall psychological well being of deployed officers' spouses. Though deployment phase brings a lot of positive aspects in the life of spouse but the result shows that more than positive, there are influences of negative aspects that deployment phase brings into the lives of the spouses of military personnel. The findings are in line with a study conducted by Knapp and Newman (1993) indicated that extended military separations have a profound impact on military wives. Accumulated stressors and perceived military stress were able to

Table 1 : Deployment and non-deployment wise differences in the dimensions of psychological well-being among spouses of officers' of Indian Military

Psychological well being	Total respondents (100)				t-value
	Deployed(50)		Non-deployed(50)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Life satisfaction	22.16	15.65	32.18	17.47	3.02**
Efficiency	28.84	11.92	33.50	15.71	1.67
Sociability	28.44	12.88	29.44	16.75	0.33
Mental health	22.6	15.15	40.06	11.85	6.42**
Interpersonal relationship	31.16	12.91	29.96	16.42	0.41
Total PWB score	133.20	65.50	165.14	68.52	2.38*

* and ** indicate significance of values at $P=0.01$ and 0.05 , respectively

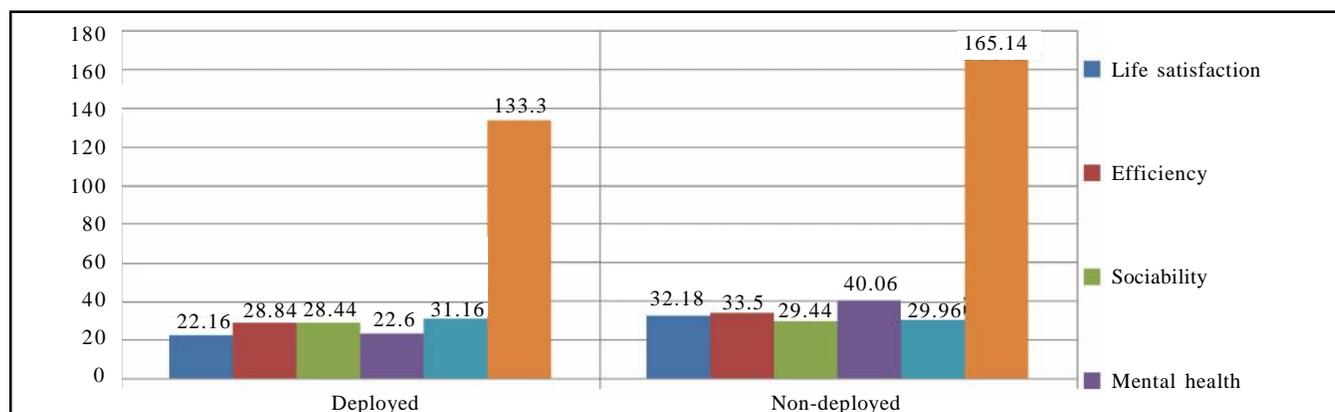


Fig. 1 : Deployment and non-deployment wise differences in the dimensions of psychological well-being among spouses of officers' of Indian Military

account for a significant portion of the variance in psychological well being. This suggests that during an extended separation, the lower the accumulation of stress and perceived military stress, the greater the psychological well being of army wives.

Non-significant differences were found within efficiency, sociability and interpersonal relationship however the efficiency mean score of non-deployed officers' spouses (33.50) were greater than deployed ones (28.84) with non-significant differences similarly the sociability mean scores of deployed officers' spouses (29.44) were higher than deployed ones (28.44) with non-significant differences. Contrary to this just one dimension *i.e.* interpersonal relationship was found to have higher scores among deployed ones (29.96) though the differences were non-significant (31.16) as compared to non-deployed. This could be because of the fact that during deployment the spouses greatly depend on their fellow spouses because the husbands are out and feel the need to maintain healthy relations each other that effect increases the interpersonal relationship of deployed ones as compared to non-deployed ones.

Conclusion :

The present study compares the dimension of psychological well-being of deployed and non-deployed officers' spouses. The results concludes the fact that overall psychological well-being, life satisfaction and mental health of the spouses of officers' who are not posted in field had better scores as compared to the spouses whose husbands are deployed (at present, in immediate past or is going to be deployed) therefore, significant differences in the mean scores were found. Whereas non-significant difference was seen in the rest of the dimensions. Hence, this proves the fact that different phases of deployment (pre, deployment and post deployment) shatters a women's psychological well-being due to many contributing factors like loneliness, fear

related husband's safety, anticipation of work load, anxiety etc that hampers her mental health. Therefore proper counseling centers and more facilities should be extended to this section of women to prevent and uplift their moral and overall state of well-being.

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