

MATERNAL COMMUNICATION DURING A DEPLOYMENT WITH SCHOOL STAFF: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Carolyn Jean Davis

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers' in communicating with school staff during a military deployment. The increasing number of deployments since 2001 has affected the family unit, especially the children. The primary focus of the research on military deployments has been related to the effects on children and the family. This study used purposeful sampling to select seven maternal veterans who experienced a military deployment within the past five years lasting six months or longer. Participants shared their experiences with a deployment through a semi-structured interview. Prior to the interview, participants completed an online parental involvement survey to determine their level of involvement with their child's school. A focus group with school staff was conducted to explore parental involvement during a maternal deployment. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis included; school connection, technology based communication, school support, and lack of understanding and feelings of helplessness.

Keywords: Military deployments, parental involvement, maternal soldiers

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the women with children serving in the armed forces. The sacrifices made and their dedication serves as an example to everyone. I believe God has a purpose for everyone placed on this earth, I believe it was my purpose to provide a voice to the female soldier who serves and is a mother. I am so grateful to these outstanding women for sharing their experiences and allowing their voices to be heard.

Additionally, this dissertation would not have been possible without the encouragement of my cousin, Charles Brown, who encouraged me to attend college after high school. His advice “to start with one course” set me on a path that led to this achievement.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge those individuals that made this achievement possible. First, my committee members, Dr. Kuhne, Dr. Milacci, and Dr. Keller, your support, advice, and direction made the initial proposal develop into this dissertation. My family's support was monumental and provided the necessary support and incentive to complete this journey. My husband provided unwavering support and encouragement. My parents have always encouraged me to accept challenges and always do my best no matter the outcome. My dear aunt who was my prayer warrior throughout this journey, who unfortunately did not live to see this journey complete but I know continued to pray for my success. Finally, my savior, Jesus Christ, who led this journey and who made this accomplishment possible.

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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Global War on Terror has caused a dramatic increase in the number of deployments for both the active duty Army and the National Guard. Women represent 11% of the deployed population (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2012). The increased troop deployments affect not only the soldier, but also the family unit including the children. Since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, more than two million children of United States Service Members have been affected by wartime deployment (Smythers, Lemmon, Wolf, Bodzy, Swenson, & Spirito, 2011). There are many studies related to the emotional effects of parental deployments on children (Aranda, Middleton, Flake, & Davis, 2011; Chandra, Martin, Hawkinson, & Richardson, 2010; Pfefferbaum, Houston, Sherman, & Melson, 2011; Reed, Bell, & Edwards, 2011). However, few studies were found that focused on the deployed soldier and their parenting experience during a deployment, especially related to female soldiers. Studies were found that related to parenting behaviors and attachment with paternal soldiers (Andres & Moelker, 2011; Cohen, Zerach, & Solomon, 2011; Willerton, Schwartz, Ogelsby, & Scultheis, 2011). Studies found that focused on maternal soldiers were related to child attachment, retention in the military and child adjustment (Kelley, Hock, Bonney, Jarvis, Smith, & Gaffney, 2002; Morris & Agee, 2009). Additional studies were found that related to school transition, academic achievement, and family school communication (Bradshaw, Sudhinarest, Mmari & Blum, 2010; Engel, Gallaher, & Lyle, 2010; Ferrell & Collier, 2010). A case study by Custer (2014) explored the experiences of female soldiers with their children, caregivers, and teachers. However, there were no studies found that focused solely on parental communication of maternal soldiers with school staff during a military deployment.

Background

The Global War on Terror is responsible for the largest sustained deployment of military forces in the history of the all-volunteer force which has resulted in multiple separations for military families (Cozza & Lerner, 2013). The increase in deployment for military forces has created challenges for military families. Parental deployments and war trauma are military stressors shown to negatively influence academic, psychological, and socioemotional outcomes among some military children (Esqueda & De Pedro, 2011). Decreased test scores and increased levels of anxiety are some of the negative effects discussed in the research related to parental deployments (Aranda et al., 2011; Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010). However, much of the research has focused on the negative effects of a parental deployment instead of exploring positive outcomes for children who experienced a parental deployment. In research associating negative outcomes for children experiencing a parental deployment, it is vital for parents, educators and military leaders to understand how to mitigate these effects.

One way to address the academic effects is through parental involvement. Parental involvement is positively associated with student achievement and engagement with parents playing a crucial role in their child's instructional experiences (Jeynes, 2012; Rogers, Theule, Ryan, Adams & Keating, 2009). According to Epstein (1995), there are six components of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, collaboration, and decision-making. Parental communication involves "school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress" (Epstein, 1995, p. 705).

A parental deployment can disrupt involvement with the school environment for both parents. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center (2012), female soldiers with children represent 30.4% of the active duty force and 35.1% of the Guard and Reserve. A maternal

deployment can significantly impact the communication of the deployed parent with the school environment due to role changes and communication challenges related to serving in a combat zone. Guard and Reserve female parents' deployment involves job transitions, pro-longed departure from their families, and less social support from their home communities compared to active duty soldiers living on a military base (Foster, 2011). Family-school communication allows the deployed maternal soldier to maintain contact with the school environment. Ferrell and Collier (2010) found family-school communication critical to student success and enhanced student performance. Effective family-school communication between deployed maternal soldiers and school staff may mitigate any negative impact on student achievement by allowing the deployed parent to remain aware and involved in student progress. An extensive literature search revealed no studies that focused on the relationship between a maternal deployment and parental communication with school staff. The research cited earlier on the deployed parent has focused primarily on paternal soldiers (Andres & Moelker, 2011; Cohen et al., 2011; Willerton et al., 2011). There has been limited research on maternal soldiers and their children related to a deployment (Kelley et al., 2002; Morris & Agee, 2009). The focus of the research has been on the impact of a maternal deployment on attachment related to younger children. Therefore, more research is needed to understand the impact and the differences related to a maternal deployment of school-aged children.

Situation to Self

The motivation for this study was related to my position as a school counselor and as the spouse of a military service member. I witnessed a student experience the deployment of her mother four times during an eight-year period and the impact of the deployment on communication with school staff. I experienced the deployment of my spouse on two

occasions during the same time period. Through this experience, I understand the difficulties faced by families during a deployment.

The philosophical assumption for this study was based on epistemology. The epistemological assumption is that knowledge is known through the experiences of people (Creswell, 2013). This study involved understanding the phenomenon of a maternal deployment and the effect on communication with school staff through the lived experiences of participants who experienced the phenomenon of maternal deployments. Participants shared their experiences in communicating with school staff during a deployment through interviews.

The interpretive framework for this study is social constructivism. In social constructivism, reality is constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism “seeks understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2007, p.21). In this particular study, the participants’ experiences with school staff during a deployment served to describe the multiple experiences in an effort to understand the phenomenon of maternal deployments and school communication.

Problem Statement

The problem is the increasing number of deployments for soldiers and how this disrupts a parent’s involvement with his or her child and the school environment. Little research has been done regarding a mother’s deployment and the impact of the deployment has focused on younger children (Applewhite & Mays, 1996; Kelley, Herzog, Simmer, & Harris, 1994; Pierce, Vinokur, & Buck, 1998). The research identified challenges related to longer maternal deployments and readjustment needs for the mother and the child (Applewhite & Mays, 1996; Kelley et al., 1994; Pierce et al., 1998). The disruption is longer for National Guard families due to members typically requiring several months of training prior to the deployment causing their total

separation from their family to be closer to 18 months rather than the reported 15 months (Houston et al., 2009). In addition to readjustment issues, maternal soldiers must also deal with the psychological stress that comes from a military deployment and accessing the necessary services needed to prevent a negative impact on their personal relationships. Challenges accessing appropriate services resulted in a negative impact on the emotional health and relationship with their children for military mothers according to Helping Military Moms Balance Family and Longer Deployments (Joint Economic Committee, 2007).

The research identified parental involvement as an important element in student success. In a study by Rogers et al. (2009), school-focused parental involvement was associated with children's school achievement. Parent connection with the school is an important component to parental involvement and student success. "Students whose parents stay connected to their children and the schools are likely to have higher school engagement and better performance" (Mo & Singh, 2008, p. 9). A parental deployment impacts the relationship with the school environment and may negatively affect a child's academic performance. Limited research findings suggest that a parent's deployment in the past year reduces his or her child's total test score by 0.42 points (Engel et al., 2010). Maternal involvement has shown to have a positive impact on student achievement (McBride, Dyer, Liu, Brown & Hong, 2009; Rogers et al., 2009). Therefore, a maternal deployment may show a more negative impact on student achievement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers' parental communication with school staff during a deployment. At this stage in the research, a maternal deployment was generally defined as a maternal absence from the home due

to a military deployment lasting six months or longer. Parental communication was defined as communication with school staff during the deployment cycle.

Significance of the Study

Parental involvement has been cited in several studies as a contributor to student achievement (Gonzalez-De Haas, Williams & Doan Holbein, 2005; Jeynes, 2012; Mo & Singh, 2008; Rogers et al., 2009). Parental involvement has received an increased push by school districts based on the Goals 2000 legislation, which encourages and, in cases of Title 1 schools, mandates parental involvement programs and practices for schools (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). This study provides educators and military leaders with suggestions to enhance and assist military families in maintaining parental involvement, specifically family-school communication, during a deployment. Family-school communication has been identified as critical with a military population (Ferrell & Collier, 2010). Therefore, it is vital to study the impact a parental deployment had on parental involvement, specifically related to communication with the school. The research by Ferrell and Collier (2010) focused on the experiences of school staff with family school communication and military parents. This study focused on descriptions by maternal soldiers of their communication with school staff, specifically, during a deployment. Results from this study may be used to improve communication strategies of school personnel with both military and civilian parents who, due to employment, have prolonged absences from the home.

This study explored the parental involvement of maternal soldiers in an effort to provide military leaders specific issues related to maternal soldiers and parenting that affect children. “Maternal encouragement and support for learning was associated with higher levels of academic competence, higher self-concept in reading and a higher global self-concept” (Rogers et al.,

2009, p. 45), and mothers have shown higher levels of online parental involvement compared to fathers (Blau & Hameiri, 2012). Therefore, it was important to understand how a maternal deployment affected parent communication with school staff. Chandra et al. (2010) suggested that research should be conducted that focuses on the effects of maternal deployments.

The increase in deployments over the past decade has resulted in female soldiers with children being separated from their children for multiple and prolonged periods of time. Maternal soldiers may experience more family-related challenges than their male counterparts, such as arranging appropriate childcare and concern about their family's well being during the deployment (Street, Vogt, & Dutra, 2009). These issues are challenging for female soldiers who may be the primary caregiver. The Department of Defense reports that in 2012, there were 24,008 single mothers serving in all branches of the military service. In addition to being single parents, female soldiers often are married to male soldiers serving in the military, which only serves to complicate caretaking of the children if both parents experience a deployment. Data shows 11% of female soldiers serving in the reserve component are married to someone in the military (Department of Defense, 2012). In this study, four of the participants were married to someone in the military.

This study was comprised of seven veteran maternal soldiers who experienced a deployment of six months or longer within the past five years. The shared experiences in communicating with school staff were explored to identify challenges and best practices for communicating during a military deployment. Research suggests that military families may not seek out special treatment during times of stress causing "students to miss out on individualized support, instead experiencing anxiety or isolation" (Ferrell & Collier, 2009, p. 16). Chandra et al. (2010) suggested future research should involve understanding the parent's perspective of the

role of schools and expectations for school staff during a deployment. Research suggests that military parents feel school staff may not understand how to assist children in handling a parental deployment (Mmari, Sudhinarest, & Blum, 2010). By understanding the experiences with family-school communication of deployed soldiers, strategies can be developed to improve the communication between the parent and the school to ensure that students are receiving the necessary support in the school setting in an effort to mitigate any negative effects on students.

Additional research was suggested on the communication process with military families. This study attempted to fill this gap by understanding the maternal soldier's experiences with family-school communication. The effects of a deployment on the communication process were noted as an area of future research by Hinojosa, Hinojosa, and Hognas (2012) due to the strain placed on the family by deployment-related communication problems. Lester and Flake (2013) noted the need for more research regarding how military families "use real-time communication technology in an effort to guide policy and practice to enhance community education and intervention with the systems that surround military children, including school" (p.132). This study explored the communication process of maternal soldiers with the school environment in an attempt to identify how deployed female soldiers communicated with the school environment in an effort to identify best practices and challenges.

This study expanded the current research on the effects of a parental deployment on children by focusing on the experiences of maternal soldiers with parental communication. The limited research related to maternal deployments has focused on attachment, retention, and child adjustment (Kelley et al., 2002; Morris & Agee, 2009). This study attempted to provide maternal soldiers a voice regarding their experiences of remaining connected and a part of their child's education. The research by Ferrell and Collier (2010) focused on the experiences of

school staff with family school communication and military parents but did not provide a description of the deployed soldier's experience. By providing maternal soldiers the opportunity to share their experiences, strategies can be developed that will assist parents in maintaining communication with school staff in times of a parental absence from the home.

Research Questions

The following questions served to frame this study in an effort to understand the experiences of maternal soldiers with parental communication during a deployment with school staff.

Research Question 1: How do maternal soldiers describe their communication experiences with school staff prior to deployment?

This question serves as a reference point in describing the impact of a parental deployment on communication with school staff.

Research Question 2: How do maternal soldiers describe their communication experiences with school staff during a deployment?

This question was an overarching question directly related to the purpose statement of this study. It provides a description of the participant's experiences.

Research Plan

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological research design. "Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience and aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday life experiences" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). A phenomenological approach was chosen based on the purpose of the study, which was to describe the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon, a maternal deployment. The focus of this

phenomenological study was to understand the common experiences of maternal soldiers in order to gain an understanding of communication with school staff during a military deployment.

There are two types of phenomenological research, hermeneutical and transcendental. Hermeneutical uses interpretation of the experience in the description of the lived experience through text whereas transcendental research provides a description of the experience (Van Manen, 1990). Transcendental phenomenology attempts to eliminate prejudgments and presuppositions about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental was chosen because of the researcher's experiences with deployments and the need to bracket out those personal experiences. This allowed the researcher to put aside any prejudgments or presuppositions in order to focus on the experiences of the participant without interpretation based on personal experience (Creswell, 2013).

Delimitations and Limitations

This study focused on maternal soldiers due to an identified gap in the literature related to maternal soldiers with school-aged children. The purpose of this research was to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers in relation to parental involvement during a deployment. Parental involvement of the soldier during a deployment was selected for this study due to the research relating parental involvement with student success and achievement. The focus area of parental involvement chosen for this study was communication. Communication with school staff was selected to identify best practices and challenges to parental communication. Fathers were eliminated as participants from this study so maternal communication could be explored based on research demonstrating maternal involvement and positive effects on student outcomes.

A limitation of this study is the use of only maternal soldiers as participants and eliminating fathers as participants. A second limitation of this study was the data gathered came

from the maternal soldier; perspectives of family members and children were not included in this study. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of maternal soldiers in communicating with school staff during a deployment. The experiences of the primary caregiver and other family members during the deployment were not the focus of this study.

This study was delimited to school age children in grades K-12. Participants must have been the parent of a school-aged child during a military deployment; participants with younger children were not included in this study. The purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of the participants in communicating with school staff, therefore; parents with children not in school could not provide information related to the study.

Additionally, the study was delimited to only maternal soldiers who had experienced a military deployment within the past five years that lasted six months or longer. Maternal soldiers who experienced a deployment more than five years ago and lasting less than six months were not included in this study. The rationale was based on the ability of the participants to recall their experiences in more detail.

The initial recruitment of participants occurred through the Women Veteran of America Organization. However, the recruitment yielded no participants. In addition, the recruitment of participants through the University of Tennessee Veterans office was attempted but also yielded no participants. Therefore, recruitment from these organizations was delimited in this study.

Definitions

The following key terms are defined for the purpose of this study:

1. *Military deployment* - A temporary assignment within the United States or overseas (Chawla & Solinas-Sanders, 2011).

2. *Caregiver* - An individual who is at least 21 years of age who is capable of self-care and care of children, who agrees to care for one or more family members during a member's absence for indefinite periods to ensure the member is available for worldwide duties (Department of Defense, 2010).
3. *Parental Involvement* - A partnership between the home and school where parents play a role in their child's education (Brock & Edmunds, 2010).
4. *Family Care Plan* - A written plan that soldiers must have filed in advance of a deployment that gives instructions on the care of the soldier's family (Department of Defense, 2012).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers' parental communication with school staff during a military deployment. This chapter provided an overview of the impact of a parental deployment on children and the research regarding military deployments and the effects on children. Parental involvement and the positive effect on academic achievement were discussed in this chapter and will be explored more in depth in chapter two. This chapter identified a gap in the research concerning both maternal soldiers and the impact a deployment has on parental communication. Chapter Two explores the theoretical frameworks that support this study and the relevant literature concerning parental involvement, female soldiers, military deployments, and the effects on both the child and parent.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of literature on parental involvement and the effects of a parental deployment on children. The parental involvement literature reviewed discusses the effects on student achievement, maternal involvement, and family-school communication. The effects of a parental deployment on a child's psychological and academic functioning are included in this chapter. In addition, parentification and resiliency of military children are highlighted in this chapter. This review includes three theoretical perspectives related to parental involvement and family systems.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory was selected to frame this study because the ecological framework describes the cumulative and reciprocal influence on persons in the context of adjustment and development at multiple levels of influence (Gerwitz, DeGarmo, Plusny, Khaylis, & Erbes, 2010). The ecological systems theory relates to the impact a parental deployment has on communication with the school environment and the influence on the child. Ferrell and Collier (2010) found "ecological factors influence communication from the microsystems of school and family to the macrosystem of the military" (p.14).

This theory describes a set of nesting structures in which development occurs. Bronfenbrenner posits four levels that influence children "ranging from the immediate face-to-face interaction with another person, the level closest to the child, to very general cultural belief systems, the level furthest from the child" (Miller, 2011, p.205). The child develops through his or her interactions with the nesting structures and the interaction of the structures with each other. The nested structures include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem

(Miller, 2011). Figure 1 presents a graphic of the nesting structures and how they interrelate to the child's environment during a parental deployment.

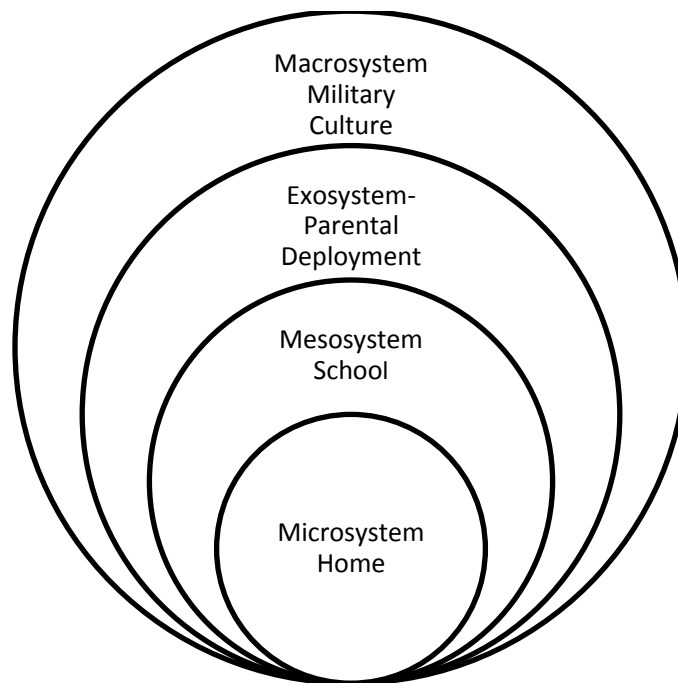


Figure 1. Ecological Systems Theory Related to Parental Deployment

The microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced through face-to-face interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For the developing child, the interactions would occur in the home and school environment. This would involve interactions between the child and their teachers, peers and family members.

The mesosystem comprises interrelations between two or more systems, such as the relations between school and home (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This would involve communication between the home environment and school environment, such as parent/teacher conferences. The two systems interrelate because of their relationship with the child. The interaction between the two systems is directly related to the developing child.

The exosystem refers to one or more settings that the child is not an active participant but which does affect the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The child is not actively involved in a parent's work environment but is affected by the work schedule. The child's development is affected by events occurring in a setting in which they are not present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For this study, the child is affected by the military deployment although not actively involved in the deployment setting.

The macrosystem is an overarching pattern of micro, meso, and exosystems that characterize a given culture or subculture (Miller, 2011). Military families are part of a military culture that operates and interrelates with the other systems. For example, active duty families that live on base are provided resources both on the base and in the community. The services provided by the community, such as schools, interrelate with the military culture to form the macrosystem.

The chronosystem encompasses development and change over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This system looks at the change in the environment over time and how this impacts the person from a longitudinal perspective. For example, "changes over the life course in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence, or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pg. 40). The impact of a parental absence and how this affects the family environment can have a life changing effect on the child. Children who must relocate or deal with a battlefield injury of a parent can affect how they view the world and interact with this world for the remainder of their life. Events that happen in childhood can change a child's view of their world and how they relate to that world in the future.

Spheres of Influence Theory

The spheres of influence theory relates to parental involvement with the school environment. The overlapping spheres of influence argues that schools, home and communities are the main context for children's education and the greater the collaboration by these environments the greater benefit to the child's learning and development (Epstein et al., 2011). Epstein identifies six types of involvement related to the spheres of influence theory: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating (Epstein et al., 2011). Table 1 provides a description of each type of parental involvement (Epstein, 2009).

Table 1

Types of Parental Involvement

Type 1	Parenting	Supporting, nurturing loving and child-raising
Type 2	Communicating	Relating, reviewing, and overseeing
Type 3	Volunteering	Supervising and fostering
Type 4	Learning at home	Managing, recognizing, and rewarding
Type 5	Decision-making	Contributing, considering, and judging
Type 6	Collaborating with the Community	Sharing and giving

The focus of this study is on maternal communication with school staff. Communication is the establishment of two-way exchanges about school programs and children's progress (Epstein, 2011).

The overlapping spheres of influence are related to the nesting structures of the ecological systems. "The constructs that impact parent decisions also provide guidance as to the types of communities most conducive to effective parenting interventions" (McCurdy & Daro,

2001). The home environment, school environment, and the military environment can work together to provide the necessary structure to the developing child to enhance learning and development. The interaction of the three spheres demonstrates the complex and essential nature of the interpersonal relationships that occur between the individual and the spheres of school and community.

The overlapping spheres of influence model “recognizes that the three major contexts in which students learn and grow—the family, school, and community—may be drawn together or pushed apart” (Epstein, 1995, p. 702). The absence of a parent due to employment, such as a military deployment, can cause a disruption in the family and school context. Student learning and growth may be affected if the relationship is not maintained due to the deployment. Parents and teachers who remain jointly engaged with the student communicate a common message about the “importance of school, working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school” (Epstein et al., 2009). By providing this common message, school staff and parents can provide a sense of stability to a child during a time of instability, such as the absence of a parent. The model also demonstrates how the military community can contribute by becoming engaged with the school environment and providing resources to military children that support and reinforce the common message.

Cognitive Development Theory

In discussing how the overlapping spheres of influence and ecological systems theory influence development, it would be remiss to not include cognitive development theory as a theoretical framework for this study. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development addresses the cognitive development of children and frames how a parental deployment may affect each stage of development. The theory posits that development occurs in four stages: sensorimotor, pre-

operational, concrete, and formal operations (Piaget, 1972). Each stage of development may be affected differently by a parental deployment because each stage of development involves different developmental tasks that are learned during each stage.

The sensorimotor period occurs from birth to age two and is marked by their understanding of their world through physical actions and reflexes (Miller, 2011). A deployment during this phase of development may result in the child not recognizing the deployed parent upon return. This is due to the child using mental symbols to represent objects and events present in their environment (Miller, 2011). The absence of a parent during this stage of development does not allow the child to develop a mental representation of the parent.

The pre-operational stage occurs from age two to seven and is marked by egocentrism, rigidity, semi logical thoughts, and limited social cognition (Miller, 2011). A parental deployment during this stage may result in the parent's absence being seen as permanent. The child is unable to understand the reason for the parent's absence and lacks the cognitive ability to understand the absence is not permanent.

The concrete operation period occurs from age seven to eleven and is marked by the child moving to a stage based on internalized, organized operations (Miller, 2011). During this stage, a child may understand a parental absence due to a deployment is temporary because they have an understanding of basic number operations and can look at a calendar to determine the number of days until the parent's return. However, they lack the ability to fully understand the risks and dangers associated with the deployment.

The formal operations stage occurs from ages 11 to 15 and is marked by the child's ability to think in terms of logical, hypothetical and abstract thought (Miller, 2011). This phase of development allows the child to understand the risks and dangers associated with the

deployment, and the parental absence is not permanent. A deployment during this stage of development may be more stressful due to the child's awareness of the dangers associated with the deployment (Maholmes, 2012).

Equilibration is an essential factor in cognitive development (Piaget, 1977).

Cognitive equilibration is achieved through the development of organized structures that provide ways of interacting with the world (Miller, 2011). The child becomes active and aware in his development and when faced with an external disturbance or challenge; he reacts and learns to interact with his world (Piaget, 1972). A parental deployment is an external disturbance that causes the child to react to the change in his physical environment. Equilibration integrates and regulates the other three main factors of development: physical maturation, experience with the physical environment, and the influence of the social environment as the child navigates the stages of development (Miller, 2011). The reaction to the deployment affects the child's ability to adjust, which may impact his or her ability to learn and engage in the learning process.

Related Literature

Effects of Parental Deployment

A parental deployment involves the absence of a parent from the home due to a military operation. A deployment of a "primary caretaker to a war zone for indeterminate period is among the more stressful events a child can experience" (Houston et al., 2009, p. 806). The experiences and effects on children with a deployed parent can vary by severity and the affected area of functioning for the child. The deployment effects on children discussed in this review can be categorized in terms of psychological, behavioral, and academic. Although significant research has been done on military families, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on research conducted with a small sample size and convenience sampling. It is difficult to develop a

holistic picture of the effects on children. The research points to negative effects for some children and highlights positive outcomes for others.

Psychological effects. A parental deployment places military children at risk for psychological problems. Military children face multiple stressors, which places them at higher risk of psychosocial problems in comparison to nonmilitary children (White, DeBurgh, Fear, & Iversen, 2011). Between 2005 and 2006, the number of behavioral and mental health visits of children for behavior and stress disorders increased by 18% and 19% while a parent was deployed (Esqueda et al., 2012). The most common diagnoses are depression, behavioral issues, sleep disturbances, and anxiety (Mansfield, Kauffman, Engel, & Gaynes, 2011). Anxiety appears to be the most common disorder related to parental deployments. Approximately one third of the children affected by parental deployments demonstrate significant symptoms of self-reported anxiety compared with community norms (Lester et al., 2010). Anxiety levels were not significantly different in children experiencing a current deployment and those children with a recently returned deployed parent (Lester et al., 2010). This supported reports by adolescents that the reintegration phase, the phase where the parent returns home, is among the most challenging and stressful phases of the deployment cycle (Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009).

A parental deployment appears to be a contributing factor for psychological and emotional effects on children. Military children with a deployed parent demonstrated significantly more symptoms of psychosocial morbidity than children without a currently deployed parent according to parental and child reports (Aranda et al., 2011). The emotional and behavioral problems experienced differ among age and gender. Adolescent boys who experienced a parental deployment experience more adverse effects on well being compared to

boys who have not experienced a parental deployment (Reed, Bell, & Edwards, 2011). For adolescent females, the effects appear to be related to feelings of depression. A parental deployment was associated with reports of suicidal thoughts and higher incidences of binge drinking compared to females with parents in the military without a parental deployment (Reed et al., 2011).

The child's emotional and behavioral problems may increase due to factors in the home environment. The mental health of the at home parent has been shown to influence the emotional and behavioral issues of the child. Children from homes with a parent with diminished mental health functioning and lack of a strong support system are at a greater risk for emotional or behavioral problems and challenges related to a deployment (Chandra et al., 2009; Mmari et al., 2010). The negative impact on psychosocial functioning can be mitigated if the child feels a secure attachment to the non-deploying parent, and the parent demonstrates effective coping skills and stable parenting practices (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

The length of deployment also appears to be a risk factor for mental health issues. Increased deployment times of more than 11 months were associated with increased risk of a mental health diagnosis for both males and females (Mansfield et al., 2011). In addition to the length of a deployment, the number of deployments a child experiences appears to affect behavioral functioning. Behavior problems of children with a deployed parent increase with the length and number of deployments (Barker & Berry, 2009). A child's age during the deployment also has an effect on a child's psychological functioning. The largest effects were found in relation to children whose parents spent more time away from the home and a greater risk for mental health issues in older children (Mansfield et al., 2011). The cumulative length of the deployment supports an increased risk for depression and behavioral disruptions in school-

aged children and increased distress in adolescents (Lester et al., 2010). The length of deployments for National Guard soldiers is longer than active duty soldiers, therefore increasing the severity of the effects for National Guard children. Children of National Guard/Reserve may suffer more adverse effects due to feelings of isolation, longer deployments, and lack of awareness of supportive services (Houston et al., 2009). The magnitude and duration of the effects of a parental deployment are affected by the length and duration of the deployment and home factors such as support systems and functioning of the non-deployed parent.

Behavioral effects. Parents and teachers witness the effects of stress and anxiety displayed in a variety of behaviors in children, as well as the effect of stress and anxiety on social interactions. Adolescent students may be irritable, bully others, or demonstrate attention-seeking behaviors (Fitzsimmons & Krause-Parello, 2009). National Guard and reservist's children may be at more risk for these behaviors than active duty children due to feelings of isolation. Children and families of deployed reservists often experience a sense of social isolation which stems from the inability of peers and others in their environment to understand their experiences with deployments (Harrison & Vannest, 2008).

A parental deployment may impact a child's ability to progress through developmental stages and may cause behavioral problems. Separation during key stages of a child's development results in regression among preschool-aged children and behaviors of dysregulation and academic difficulties in school-aged children (Lester et al., 2010). Progression through the developmental stages is critical to the child's development and the overall well being of the child. "The presence of persistent anxiety symptoms may interfere with important child developmental tasks and family life" (Lester et al., 2010, p. 318). The deployment may interfere with the child's development, causing problems related to his or her social interactions with

family and peers and disrupting the learning environment. Disruption in the developmental stages may cause children to have delayed development and less positive academic, economic, and health outcomes (Waliski, Bokony, Edlund, & Kirchner, 2012). Additionally, the gender of the deployed parent appears to have an impact on the behavior of the child. Children who experience a maternal deployment exhibited more externalizing behavior problems compared to children with non-deployed mothers (Card et al., 2011).

Academic effects. The limited research on academic affects from a parental deployment show some negative effects on academic functioning. However, research by Chandra et al. (2010) noted an initial decline in academics during the initial deployment but found some students were able to recover and perform well in the future. The issues related to the decline appear to be related to the mental health functioning of the child and the home environment during the deployment. Teens experiencing a parental deployment reported a decline in grades due to difficulty concentrating, less time for homework due to increased responsibilities at home, and less supervision by parents (Smythers et al., 2011). School staff supports these issues. Chandra (2010) found school staff felt children were less engaged in school work and more interested in avoidant behaviors. This may contribute to adverse effects on academic achievement test scores. Research findings show that fourth and fifth grade students with a deployed parent scored lower on the Terra Nova compared to students with a non-deployed parent; however, their performance was on grade level and in the average range (Phelps, Lyons, & Dunham, 2010). It appears the impact may differ among gender and age. Females in the fourth grade experiencing a deployment scored two grade levels behind, but there was no decrease in scores with fifth grade students for either gender or parent's deployment status (Phelps et al., 2010). Additional issues related to a parental deployment appear to affect

achievement scores. Research by Engel et al. (2010) found a “modest adverse effect in most academic subjects, with lengthy deployments and deployments during the month of testing associated with the largest detrimental effects” (p. 73).

The disruption caused by a parental deployment may impact a child’s learning due to reduced parental supervision of the child’s work caused by a disruption in role responsibilities (Engel et al., 2010). The research supported that a parental deployment has an effect on academic functioning but differs on the impact and long-term effects. Engel et al. (2010) found only modest effects on academic functioning, and the effects were not long term. Multiple and extended deployments appear to have a more adverse effect on academic achievement as in the case of previously cited research related to emotional and behavioral issues. Research conducted by Lyle (2006) demonstrated parental absences of longer durations have a more adverse effect on children’s test scores and appear to have a cumulative effect resulting in a child falling further behind with subsequent years of education.

It is important to note the high transition rate for military children when drawing conclusions about the impact of a deployment on academic achievement. The impact on the achievement scores may be due in part to multiple relocations for military families. Military families move three times more in comparison to civilian counterparts (Bradshaw et al., 2010). As noted earlier, a parental deployment increases stress for all family members and may result in emotional and behavioral challenges for military children. Military-related moves places stress on all family members and may result in behavioral and academic challenges for military children and their families (Bradshaw et al., 2010). These challenges also allow students to develop coping skills, which may increase their abilities to cope with parental deployments and frequent moves. Military children use a variety of coping skills and are described in one study

by their parents, school staff, and themselves as more mature than civilian counterparts (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

A parental deployment also impacts the school environment. School staff felt a child's anxiety related to parental absence, increased responsibilities at home, poor mental health of non-deployed parents, and difficulty accessing mental health services affected the ability of some students to function well in school (Chandra et al., 2010). Guard/Reserve children may feel a stronger impact due to a sense of isolation especially if they are not located near a military installation. National Guard and reserve children experience difficulties associated with social isolation and lack of experience with military life (Chandra et al., 2010). The lack of experience with military life places these families at a disadvantage regarding support services. Guard and reserve families report less support services for their families than active duty families (Chandra et al., 2010). Military families may experience a lack of knowledge regarding support services to assist them during a deployment. Research findings by Mmari et al. (2010) suggested school personnel felt military families would cope better during a deployment if they were aware of support resources available to military families.

The research demonstrates the impacts of a parental deployment affect children differently with some children experiencing negative outcomes and some children experiencing few negative effects coupled with positive outcomes. Two factors that seem to influence how a family and children deal with a military deployment are resiliency and attachment.

Resiliency and Attachment

Resiliency. Although previously cited research has focused primarily on the negative effects of a parental deployment, a deployment can provide opportunities for children to develop resiliency. Resiliency is defined as a sustained competence or positive adjustment in the face of

adversity (Eastbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013). Being part of the military community provides the opportunity for children to develop resiliency. One research review found that military children “function better than other children in several domains that help build resilience including self-regulation, intellectual and academic performance, and emotional well-being” (Eastbrooks et al., 2013, p.108). The development of resilience and self-regulation assists youth in engaging behaviors that result in positive outcomes for their future. They are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and are more open to differences in other people (Eastbrooks et al., 2013).

Parents play an important role in the development of resiliency in children. Children are “born with a natural resilience” (Ginsburg, 2006, p. 8) that is nurtured and supported by their parents. Children who have positive stable relationships with adults are more likely to show resilience (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013). Parents can assist children in building their natural resilience by providing them with “unconditional love, absolute security, and a deep connection to at least one adult” (Ginsburg, 2006, pg. 8). Additionally, children must develop confidence, competence, and positive coping skills to build resiliency (Ginsburg, 2006). Parents provide the support, the opportunities, and the examples to develop these traits.

In addition to parents, other adults in a supportive role help the child in the development of resiliency and coping skills. “Children who have supportive child caregivers, school environments, and adults who understand their military situation are more able to effectively recruit coping skills that augment family supports” (Davis, Blaschke, & Strafford, 2012, p. 5). A child’s ability to develop coping skills and demonstrate resiliency is related to factors in the home and community environment. In a stressful situation, it is imperative for a young child to have an emotionally available and supportive caregiver in order to build resilience (Osofsky &

Chartrand, 2013). The resilience of children is influenced not only by their parents but other adults in their lives, such as teachers. Therefore, the community environment and being part of the military culture supports the development of resiliency in children. The military culture “offers many sources for resilience for example, a strong sense of belonging to a supportive community with a shared mission and values (Eastbrooks et al., 2013, p. 101).

Frequent relocations and parental deployments are adversities that military youth face that help to foster resiliency. As previously cited, military children experience more relocations than non-military children. Evidence suggests that parents who display a positive attitude about relocating help increase their child’s resilience (Clever & Segal, 2013). Parental deployments provide opportunities for children to develop coping skills and demonstrate resiliency. For example, children whose parents are deployed may build their self-confidence by taking on new responsibilities in the family. Additionally, research has found families with deployed parents may grow closer together and that children in these families show more independence and responsibility (Eastbrooks et al., 2013). Although previously cited research has focused on the negative impact of a parental deployment on a child’s emotional and behavioral functioning, other research points to military children functioning as well as their civilian counterparts and coping effectively during a military deployment. Recent studies show two thirds of military youth reported no emotional difficulties related to a parental deployment and levels of depression and behavior problems were similar to civilian children (Eastbrooks et al., 2013).

Attachment. A parental deployment can create a sense of loss for military children. Deploying parents, who have acted as key attachment figures prior to their departure, represent a significant loss to the child that will lead to feelings of grief (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Attachment plays an important role in how the child reacts and copes with a military deployment. The

deploying and non-deploying parental relationship is a key factor for how the child deals with the stress of a deployment. A child's responses to the separation are related to their development level, the attachment formed with both parents, and the functioning of non-deployed parents (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). The mental health functioning of the non-deployed parent can positively or negatively impact how the child copes with deployment. Negative effects will be mitigated if the child has a secure attachment to the non-deploying parent, and this parent demonstrates effective coping skills and stable parenting practices (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

The impact of attachment and family relationships should not be overlooked in relation to children's resiliency and coping skills developed during a parental deployment. Positive effects of a deployment are related to attachment and resiliency. Attachment relationships and family systems are fundamental contexts for risk and resilience among military members and their families during the deployment cycle (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Attachment is an important aspect during the deployment but also plays an important role during post deployment. Most children with a secure attachment prior to a parental deployment will adjust positively post deployment (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

Parental attachment is viewed as having positive outcomes for children and this relationship appears to impact a child's social and emotional development. Research based on attachment theory has established that parent-child relationships are fundamental to social and emotional well-being throughout childhood (Lester and Flake, 2013). A secure attachment developed early in life shows children develop more positive social relationships with their peers, have greater academic success, and manage stress more effectively (Lester and Flake, 2013). Stress is a previously cited effect of parental deployments that may negatively impact a child's emotional and psychological functioning. The effects of a healthy secure attachment

relationship provide positive outcomes for children throughout their life span. The secure attachment contributes to cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth throughout childhood and into adult life (Lester and Flake, 2013).

Parentification. Parentification is a phenomenon seen with military children. Parentification refers to children taking on adult roles (Eastbrooks et al., 2013). During a deployment, children may take on increased responsibilities at home. The increase responsibilities at home due to parentification have been noted as a concern by school staff (MCEC, 2012). The research concerning increased responsibilities and parentification differ concerning negative effects or outcomes for children. Some research suggests that military children develop resilience by taking on adult roles but this was noted as an area of concern by school staff for military children (Eastbrooks et al., 2013). Much of the research related to parentification has occurred outside of a military context. The research outside of the military context also differs among its conclusions regarding negative outcomes. Negative outcomes of parentification include substance abuse, mental illness, poor functioning in relationships, and behavioral issues; however, research among teens with sick or unstable families show that parentification predicted better coping skills and less substance use when dealing with stressful events (Eastbrooks et al., 2013).

Individuation has been identified as a factor related to the negative outcomes associated with parentification. Individuation refers to the process where children “come to understand themselves as independent individuals apart from their families” (Eastbrooks et al., 2013, p. 110). This may play an important role in relation to military children who are dealing with a parental deployment and a poorly functioning non-deployed parent who requires emotional

support from the child. Children who are vulnerable to problems with individuation take on the role to care for their parent's emotional needs (Eastbrooks et al., 2013).

As previously stated, research on parentification has mainly occurred outside of the military context. However, recent research was conducted on the impact of a parental deployment and parentification with adolescents. Research by Harrison and Albanese (2012) found that the impact differed based on three factors; gender, quality of the relationships with the non-deployed parent and the perceived support offered by their school. For instance, female experiences of parentification were found more strongly at work than males (Harrison & Albanese, 2012). Additionally, this study found support of the school staff and the availability and mental health of the non-deployed parent influenced experiences of parentification among adolescents (Harrison & Albanese, 2012). It is apparent that more research is needed to fully understand the effects of parentification on military children in regards to a parental deployment.

Cycles of Deployment

The cycle of deployment is marked by phases that soldiers and their families encounter during a military deployment (Devoe, & Ross, 2012). The cycles of deployment include predeployment, deployment, and post-deployment or reintegration (Rossen & Carter, 2011). Transition and adjustment issues by the soldier and their family members mark each cycle. During the cycles of a deployment, family members exhibit a variety of emotions and behaviors (Lester and Flake, 2013).

The emotional and behavioral issues for children occur throughout each phase in the cycle of deployment. The first phase in the cycle is the predeployment, which is "the time from first learning about the deployment to the actual deployment" (Rossen & Carter, 2011, p. 14). This phase varies in duration. The predeployment phase is marked by emotions of shock,

disbelief, worry, stress, and confusion (Esposito-Smythers, Lemmon, Wolff, Bodzy, Swenson, & Spirito, 2011). This period is described as a time of significant stress, especially for National Guard and reserve parents who have limited access to information, resources, and social supports compared to active soldiers living on an installation base (DeVoe & Ross, 2012).

The deployment phase of the cycle is marked by feelings of loss, grief, and fear for the deployed parent (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). These emotions for children become more prominent during this phase. Research by Pfeferbaum et al. (2011) suggests children's negative emotions and behavior worsen during the deployment phase of the cycle while decreasing during the pre-deployment and post deployment phase. During the deployment phase of the cycle, school related issues have been reported to affect school functioning. Chandra et al. (2010) found school function was affected in some children who experience anxiety, poor mental health of the non-deployed parent, and increased responsibilities at home. Child reports of school related problems were prominent during the deployment phase but recovered during the post-deployment phase (Pfeferbaum et al., 2011), thereby, suggesting the effects are not long-term, and children recover once the parent returns from the deployment.

The reintegration phase is a source of stress for the families due to the transition and role changes. The phase can be especially stressful for older children. "Older children tend to assume more responsibilities in the household during a caregiver's absence and thus may experience greater role shifting during deployment and reintegration" (Chandra et al., 2010, p. 23). The transition and role changes create stress with the parents due to role negotiation that impact the child. Role negotiation occurs between the returning parent and the non-deployed parent in relation to parenting, household roles, and financial responsibilities (Devoe & Ross, 2012). This period of adjustment creates challenges for the child as the deployed parent

readjusts to the family and the home environment (Mmari et al., 2010). This phase of the deployment cycle is described as posing greater stress and challenges for parents and adolescents than the parent's initial departure during the deployment phase (Mmari et al., 2009). Research findings show adolescents cite this phase as the most difficult in the deployment cycle because of the need to reacquaint with the returning parent (Mmari, et al., 2009). The stress placed on the child and family occurs throughout the phases of the deployment cycle.

Parental Involvement

The definition of parental involvement and the level of involvement can vary among families and schools. Parental involvement encompasses a variety of activities related to child-parent interaction and interaction with the school environment. Parental involvement is:

Described as creating partnerships between the home and school, the educational role parents provide such as when they serve as volunteers or instructional aides and parents who attend school events or support their child's academic learning by setting goals, monitoring homework, and establishing expectations are also considered to be demonstrating involvement (Brock & Edmunds, 2010, p. 50).

A theoretical framework for parental involvement emerged and encompasses six types of involvement. The six types of parental involvement described by Epstein (2009) include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration. Epstein's framework includes the six types of involvement. Parenting provides information to assist families in creating a home environment that supports student learning. Communication involves the development of a process that supports family to home and home to school communication. Volunteering uses parents to support the school environment through volunteer work. Decision-making allows parent to have a voice in the decisions that impact the school

environment. Collaborations seek resources outside of the school to support student learning. The activities and effects on students and schools differ among each type of parental involvement. Parental involvement activities can be viewed as having a direct effect, such as assisting with homework or an indirect effect on their child, fundraising, or volunteering at the school (Brock & Edmunds, 2010).

Family-school communication. Family-school communication involves the two-way communication process between the home and the school environment. In today's technologically advanced society, technology is a part of the family-school connection (Blanchard, 1998). The types of technology schools can use to facilitate the communication process include email, e-newsletters, and teacher web pages (Rogers & Wright, 2008). These types of communication methods can be extremely beneficial to parents whose employment causes them to be absent from the home environment.

Family-school communication that involves the use of technology appears to be the solution to the challenges of time and employment. In research conducted by Olmstead (2013), parents and teachers viewed "technology as an effective tool to promote parent involvement" (p. 35). However, other studies demonstrated that although technology is viewed as a valid communication tool, it is not the first selected method of communication by parents or educators. Instead parents rely on information provided through phone calls, printed newsletters and face-to-face communication with teachers through conferences (Rogers & Wright, 2008). The ease and convenience of emails, text messages, and teacher web sites could provide parents who must be absent due to employment the connection needed to maintain parental involvement in their child's education and with school staff.

Military families use technology to facilitate communication with family members during deployments. A military lifestyle survey conducted in 2010 found that 88 percent of families use a type of technology, such as email or social media, to connect with a deployed family member (Lester and Flake, 2013). This type of instant communication provides families the ability for instant knowledge of family issues. This communication allows family to maintain connections but may bring family problems to the war zone and the reality of war to the home environment (Lester and Flake, 2013). The availability of technology in a war zone provides parents the opportunity to stay connected to not just the home environment but also to the school environment.

Parental involvement and student achievement. Parental involvement has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement and engagement (Gonzalez-De Haas et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2012; Mo & Singh, 2008; Rogers et al., 2009). Student engagement is a key aspect to student achievement influenced by parental involvement. “Students whose parents stay connected to their children and schools are likely to have higher school engagement and better performance” (Mo & Singh, 2008, p. 9). Parents engaged in their student’s learning provide their child with the motivation and the learning opportunities at home to increase academic success. Parent involvement is “predictive of students adopting an approach to learning where they are more likely to seek challenging tasks, persist through academic challenges, and experience satisfaction in their school work” (Gonzalez-De Haas et al., 2005, p. 116). Parents who are highly involved with their child serve to motivate their child to become more engaged in learning, which, in turn, increases student engagement and leads to higher academic achievement (Mo & Singh, 2008).

Research related to achievement in specific academic areas shows parental involvement to be an indicator of achievement in these academic areas. Children who are read to at home and provided with more books show higher reading scores on achievement tests (Epstein et al., 2009). Parental involvement is also shown to affect self-concept in subject areas such as math. “Children’s self-concepts of math ability may be more closely related to their parents’ perceptions of the child’s ability than to the actual grades the students earned” (Epstein et al., 2009). Parents have a strong influence in their child’s academic success and their self-concept related to academic ability.

Maternal involvement. In examining the effects of parental involvement on student achievement it is important to distinguish between maternal involvements versus paternal involvement. Earlier studies show that mothers tend to be more involved than the father due to fewer mothers working outside the home (Epstein, 2010). Factors identified by Epstein as affecting parental involvement with the school environment include; single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school are less involved unless opportunities by the school are presented to the parents (Epstein, 2010). The increase of mothers in the workforce resulted in shifts to more equal levels of parental involvement (Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Youn, Leon, & Lee, 2012). In 2005, the rate of mothers with school-aged children in the workforce was 75% (Youn et al., 2012).

The dramatic increase in mothers entering the workforce warrants research to understand the impact on parental involvement. “A prevalent view is that the sheer absence of the mother from the home might reduce both the quantity and the quality of her involvement with the children, including time, supervision, love, and cognitive enrichment” (Youn et al., 2012, p. 1228). The length and duration of the absence appears to negatively impact the student’s

achievement. Evidence indicates a positive effect on grades and work habits of children who spend more time with their mother (Youn et al., 2012). A study by Rogers et al. (2009) found that a mother's active involvement in the learning environment positively affected academic competence, self-concept in reading, self-concept in math, and global self-concept. Additionally, children's enjoyment of school was associated with maternal homework involvement, maternal interpersonal involvement, direct school involvement, and interpersonal involvement with education (Stright, & Yeo, 2013). More specifically, reading to a child and talking about school were related to school enjoyment (Tan & Goldberg, 2009).

Maternal employment appears to affect the level of parental involvement. Mothers who work part-time show higher levels of involvement than mothers who work full-time (Youn et al., 2012). "Specifically, mothers employed full time were associated with lower rates of school involvement and educational trips whereas part time employment was associated with higher overall levels of school involvement and parent-child interaction (Youn et al., 2012 p. 1243). Therefore, part-time employment provided an advantage in academic learning due to more opportunities for participation in the learning environment. Full time employment provided fewer opportunities for mothers to participate in the learning environment due to their work schedules. Brock and Edmunds (2010) found the "two most prevalent barriers to parental involvement were not having enough time and challenges with work schedule" (p. 54). Employers and schools that provide flexibility in work schedules and family opportunities facilitate parental involvement opportunities (Weiss et al., 2003).

Female Soldiers

A woman serving in the military is not a new phenomenon. Females have served in the military since 1901 in some capacity. The Army Nurse Corps was the first service women could

participate in, but they were considered separate from the Army (Woefle, 1981). However, their status and roles have changed since first becoming part of the military force, including those females with children. Women became part of the Army during World War II with the establishment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (Woefle, 1981). During the following years, women served in the military with limited assignments. It was not until 1994 the "risk rule" was rescinded and allowed women to be assigned to all positions except direct combat (National Women's Law Center, 2015). This allowed all branches of the service to increase assignment opportunities for women serving in the armed forces. However, it still restricted assignments related to combat missions. In 2013, the 1994 assignment policy was rescinded allowing women to serve in previously closed units and assignments (National Women's Law Center, 2015). Women have been serving in combat related missions in Iraq and Afghanistan since the beginning of the Global War on Terror; this change to policy simply provided more opportunities related to units and assignments.

The military force serving in the Global War on Terror includes female service members who are mothers. The deployment of a mother to a war zone can disrupt the home environment differently than a father's deployment from an intact two-parent home. Military mothers are three times more likely to be single parents and five times more likely to be married to a military spouse who is also eligible for deployment (Joint Economic Committee, 2007). The event of a dual deployment for both parents or the deployment of a single mother involves a disruption in the child's living environment. Children of partnered women usually stay with the other parent during a deployment, but children of a single mother typically move in with relatives (Kelley et al., 2002).

According to the Department of Defense (2010), more than 30,000 single mothers have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. To address these issues of childcare for active duty and deploying National Guard and reserve soldiers, the Department of Defense has mandated family care plans. Family care plans address the logistical, financial, legal, and medical arrangement for military dependents for primary short-term and long-term caregivers and custody in the event of parental absences (Fitzgerald, Duboyce, Ritter, Omori, Cooper, & O'Malley, 2013). The family care plan ensures arrangements for dependent children are in place so the soldier can perform his or her duty. Even with family care plans in place, maternal soldiers who are single or dual military parents experience difficulties associated with childcare during a deployment. These maternal soldiers report changes in childcare arrangements as a result of deployment likely affect the female soldier readiness (Zellman, Gates, Moini, & Suttorp, 2009). Often times the deployment causes a change in the living situation for children of single parent female soldiers.

Deployment issues. Although there has been an increase in maternal deployments, there are very few studies related to the effect on children. One study conducted by Applewhite & Mays looked at the effect of a maternal deployment on infants. This study found that children separated from their mother for an extended period were not anymore affected psychosocially than children separated from their fathers (Applewhite & Mays, 1996). A second study of deploying Navy mothers demonstrated higher levels of internalizing behavior of their children compared to children with non-deployed mothers and higher levels of parenting stress in anticipation of a deployment compared to non-deploying mothers (Kelley et al., 1994). A third study involved Air Force mothers who deployed during Operation Desert Storm. This study found children experiencing a maternal deployment suffered from psychological and social

issues during the deployment (Pierce et al., 1998). The effect of maternal deployments on children is an area of research that needs further investigation.

The issues related to a maternal deployment encompass parental stress, distant parenting, post deployment parenting, and post deployment mental health issues. A maternal absence due to a deployment causes a significant disruption in the child's life and results in a readjustment process for both mother and child upon return from deployment (Mattocks, Haskell, Krebs, Justice, Yano, & Brandt, 2012). A mother's absence from her child may vary in duration from a couple of months up to two years. Research shows a deployment "may be particularly stressful for some military mothers who must manage their family responsibilities from afar; potentially exposing female members to the dual stress associated with both warzone and family-related concerns" (Street et al., 2009, p. 691) which may be intensified by the ease of communication. Frequent communication through email, phone calls, and social media make soldiers more aware of the challenges their family members are dealing with during a deployment.

The family-related challenges that some female soldiers face include arranging for appropriate childcare and concern about their family's welfare during deployment (Street et al., 2009). A mother experiencing a deployment experiences the dual job responsibilities of family caregiver and soldier. The issues described may be particularly challenging for National Guard or reserves "since these women may be less likely than women deployed from active duty to have an infrastructure in place to address their childcare and domestic need during deployment, particularly if they were their family's primary caregiver" (Street et al., 2009, p. 691). A larger percentage of women serve in the Guard and reserve compared to active duty: 14.5 percent in the active duty force versus 18 percent in the Guard or reserve (Clever & Segal, 2013).

Many women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan experienced stress both during the war and upon returning home (Mattocks et al., 2012). A maternal soldier faces parenting challenges during the deployment cycle. Research shows navy mothers suffer higher levels of separation anxiety than their male counterparts (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003). The parenting challenges differ in the post-deployment cycle and may involve behavioral issues with the child. The challenges can be attributed to the child exhibiting behavioral problems caused by the deployment or the mental health issues of the mother, with single mothers experiencing more stress related to depressive symptoms and poor family functioning (Street et al., 2009).

PTSD and mental health issues. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a problem that affects males and females from the active duty and Guard and reserve components. PTSD, anxiety, and depression are risk factors associated with military deployments and post deployment. Based on civilian research, women are at a greater risk for severe symptoms of PTSD when compared to men (Erbes, Meis, Polusny, & Compton, 2011). The risk for PTSD post deployment was nearly 2.5 times greater for women in comparison to men with positive screening rates of anxiety, depression, alcohol abuse, and PTSD increased from predeployment to post deployment (Skopp, Reger, Mishkind, Raskind, & Gahm, 2011).

Female soldiers experiencing PTSD suffer a greater impact to their personal relationships than male soldiers. A greater relationship disruption is present for female soldiers who exhibit PTSD symptoms and worse relationship adjustment than soldiers who do not screen positive for PTSD (Erbes et al., 2011). This disruption in relationships affects the children and the parenting relationship. Children of soldiers with PTSD exhibit PTSD symptoms and higher levels of anxiety and depression due to the disruption in the relationship and the repeated exposure to the symptoms affecting the parent (Holmes, Rauch, & Cozza, 2013).

Summary

This chapter reviewed the current literature related to military deployments and the effect on maternal soldiers and children. Additionally, the effects of parental involvement on student achievement were explored with an emphasis on maternal involvement. The effects of a parental deployment included psychological, emotional/behavioral, and effects on academic achievement. Positive factors related to a parental deployment were explored and discussed related to resiliency and attachment. Parental involvement was shown to positively affect student achievement and the school environment. A military deployment disrupts the maternal soldier's involvement with the school environment. PTSD and other mental health issues impact the parent-child relationship upon return from a deployment. The impact of PTSD and other mental health issues were discussed in this review and the impact on personal relationships was explored.

The literature reviewed in this chapter supports the need to understand the experiences of maternal soldiers with family-school communication in an effort to mitigate the negative effects associated with a parental deployment on children. A review of the current literature provided no research related to maternal deployments and the effect on parental involvement, specifically focusing on family-school communication. One case study was reviewed that discussed maternal soldiers, caregivers, and children regarding educational experiences during a deployment. However, this study focused on the experiences of the child, caregiver, and mother in regards to ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity as it related to educational experiences (Custer, 2014).

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers in communicating with school staff during a deployment. This chapter discusses the research design, provides a rationale for this design selection, and attempts to show how the design aligns with the research questions. The chapter includes information regarding the participants, sampling procedures, and the setting for the study. Data collection and analysis are discussed in this chapter, as well as information regarding the researcher's role, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness.

Design

According to Van Manen (1990), phenomenological research is the study of lived experiences. Phenomenology “focuses on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects and parts” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). The phenomenological research design was chosen for this study because the lived experiences of the deployed maternal soldiers' communication with school staff were explored. Phenomenology is based on a complex multifaceted philosophy that includes the standpoints of Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology (Schwandt, 2007). Each type represents a study of the lived experiences in an effort to understand the essence of the experience. Hermeneutics refers to the interpretation of the meaning of an object in order to understand the experience (Schwandt, 2007). Transcendental phenomenology uses the Epoche to eliminate interpretation; “In the Epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense” (Moustakas, 1994, p.34).

Transcendental phenomenology was chosen because the focus of the study is the shared experiences with the phenomenon of maternal deployments and the impact on parental

communication with school staff. Transcendental phenomenology allows for the “bracketing” of the researcher’s personal experiences with the phenomena to allow for an accurate description of the participants experience without interpretation by the researcher. It is hoped that the participants shared their experiences and feelings on communication with school staff to gain an understanding and meaning from the experiences. Moustakas (1994) describes the meaning of an experience as “what appears in consciousness is an absolute reality while what appears to the world is a product of learning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 61). It is hoped that this study provided an understanding of the experiences of deployed maternal soldiers and parental communication with school staff.

Research Questions

The following questions served to frame this study in an effort to understand the experiences of maternal soldiers with parental communication with school staff during a deployment.

Research Question 1: How do maternal soldiers describe their communication experiences with school staff prior to deployment?

Research Question 2: How do maternal soldiers describe their communication experiences with school staff during a deployment?

Setting

Participants for the focus group were recruited from a public school district in a neighboring state that served a large military population. An informational e-mail was sent to the school district for distribution to their staff (see Appendix A). The focus group was conducted at an elementary school in the school district. The rationale for selecting this school was proximity to a large military installation serving military children in the district.

Initially, recruitment of maternal soldier participants was sought through the Women Veterans of America organization. A recruitment e-mail was sent to members of the organization. However, the recruitment e-mail did not generate any potential participants. Additional participants were sought through a university student veteran affairs office; however, no potential participants were identified for the study. Therefore, snowball sampling was used to find participants. In snowball sampling, the researcher contacts an individual who has experienced the phenomenon being studied and is asked to provide the name of another potential participant and the process is repeated until reaching an appropriate number of participants (Jupp, 2006). A male soldier known to the researcher who experienced a deployment was contacted and provided the recruitment flier. He contacted a female soldier who he deployed with and provided her with the recruitment flier. From this participant, other participants were contacted and recruited through snowball sampling. Potential participants who had deployed with the Tennessee National Guard contacted the researcher. Tennessee has the sixth largest National Guard and was fourth in deployments during the Global War on Terror (Tennessee Department of State, 2012). The Tennessee Military Department (2015) reported that approximately 28,000 soldiers have deployed in support of the Global War on Terror. This provided the rationale for recruitment within the state. All the maternal soldier participants deployed as a member of the Tennessee National Guard. Several of the participants deployed with the same unit within the Tennessee National Guard. The Tennessee National Guard comprises both Army and Air Force units that are located throughout the state. All the participant interviews were conducted within the state.

Participants

Participants in this study included veteran maternal soldiers and school staff members. Specific criteria were used to select participants based on the purpose of the study. This study was comprised of seven veteran maternal soldiers with school-aged children and six female school staff members. The veteran maternal soldiers selected for this study had to have been the parent of a school-aged child during a military deployment that occurred in the past five years and lasted six months or longer. The school staff members were selected based on their direct work with children who experienced a military deployment. Phenomenological research designs are comprised of groups of three to four to 10 to 15 individuals (Creswell, 2013). The number of participants selected was based on the research design. The low number of veteran maternal participants for this study is representative of the overall number of female veterans with children who have experienced a deployment with the National Guard.

The Department of Veteran Affairs (2013), reported that 27.7% of female veterans have served in response to the Global War on Terror. The maternal soldiers selected for this study were veterans who served with the National Guard or Reserve during Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom in response to the Global War on Terror. Maternal soldiers represent 35.1% of the Guard and Reserve (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2010). These statistics demonstrate the narrow pool of potential female participants meeting the criteria of the study from one state. The researcher had difficulty finding participants who met all criteria for the study. Snowball sampling was used to provide the participants for this study. Each participant was asked to provide the researcher's contact information and the recruitment flier to individuals known to the participant who met the criteria of the study and would be interested in participating in the study. Potential participants contacted the researcher to determine eligibility

and obtain the consent form. Two potential participants contacted the researcher, but they did not meet the criteria of the study and therefore were not included.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who experienced the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling means that individuals are selected based on their experiences related to the phenomenon and the purpose of the research study (Groenewald, 2004). The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of maternal soldiers in communicating with school staff during a deployment so all participants were female and mothers of school aged children. Pseudonyms were used for the all participants in this study.

Procedures

After completion of the research proposal, Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from Liberty University (see Appendix B) and permission from the Commander of the Tennessee National Guard (see Appendix C) was obtained so that interviews could be conducted with members of the Tennessee National Guard. Once IRB approval was obtained, the informational email was distributed to members of the Women Veterans of America. Since no participants were gained using this recruitment procedure the researcher contacted a person who had experienced a deployment to determine if they knew any potential participants for the study. Snowball sampling was used due to the difficulty locating participants who fit the criteria of the study. The snowball sampling method solicited seven female veterans interested in participating in the study. After contacting the researcher about participating in the study, each potential participant was sent an informational flier and consent form. Once the consent form was signed the participants were sent an e-mail containing the link to access the parent involvement survey to determine their eligibility for the study and their level of parental involvement (see Appendix

D). The survey was completed online using Survey Monkey. After completion of the survey, participants were contacted for individual interviews.

A separate focus group was conducted with nonmilitary school staff members who worked with students who experienced a maternal deployment to assist with quality interview questions and to gain background information regarding parent communication during deployments (see Appendix E). Participants for the focus group were recruited from a local school district that served a large military population. The school district selected for this study was in a neighboring state that served students from a large military installation. After receiving approval from the school district, an informational e-mail was sent to the school district to recruit school personnel who had experienced the phenomenon of maternal deployments to participate in the focus group. The focus group was conducted onsite at an elementary school in the school district. A monetary gift card of \$25.00 was offered to each school staff member who participated in the focus group.

The interviews with the female veteran participants were conducted several weeks to months after the focus group. The interviews and the focus group were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis by a professional transcriptionist. The transcription was securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in my personal office.

The Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher in qualitative studies is to serve as the research instrument. As the researcher, I collected and analyzed the data to provide an essence of the phenomenon. My interest in this subject was twofold, first as a military spouse who has experienced deployments and second as a school counselor who worked with students experiencing the deployment of a parent, specifically a mother. Parental communication is a struggle sometimes for teachers and

parents. I was interested in finding ways to alleviate the challenges, especially for those parents who must work away from the home for extended periods. I believe parental communication and involvement is fundamental to student success. Strategies developed from this study can be used to assist parents, students, and teachers.

According to Moustakas (1994), my personal experiences with deployments and counseling students during a parental deployment make it necessary to bracket out personal experiences. It was important that I conveyed my personal experiences with deployments to the participants and those reading the study. Before the interviews, I disclosed to the participants my experiences with deployment and my work counseling students with deployed parents. I chose transcendental phenomenology for the bracketing out of personal experience, because I did not want my experiences or assumptions to influence or distort my description of the participants' experiences. By bracketing out my personal experiences, I was able to put aside any assumptions and focus on the participants' experience. This was a difficult task so I used journaling and visualization techniques to assist with the bracketing process. I used journaling during the data collection, analysis, and writing process (see Appendix F). The journaling conveyed my assumptions before each step in the process. This allowed me to clear my mind of preconceived ideas and biases so that I could have an open and fresh perspective on the phenomenon through the experiences of the participants. I used the visualization techniques to assist in the interview process; by visualizing myself as an active listener I was able to allow the participant to speak openly and freely about the experience without interruption or judgment.

The participants in this study were individuals that I did not know personally, except one; an acquaintance through a former employer. The participants had served with the Tennessee National Guard and my spouse is a member. However, the participants in the study were not in

the same unit as my husband, and they did not have a personal or work-related relationship with him. Due to the confidentiality of the study, my husband was not aware of any of the individuals that participated in the study.

Data Collection

This study involved data collection through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a parental involvement questionnaire.

Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire

The female veteran participants completed the online Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire consisting of 22 questions. The questionnaire used in this study was a modification of a questionnaire created by the Fast Track Project. The questionnaire, technical reports, and scoring programs were downloaded from the Fast Track Project website. A request was made to use the questionnaire with modifications and permission was granted for use in this study (see Appendix G). The original questionnaire scan forms were not used and a new questionnaire form was created with the questions and answers with modifications. The modifications used with this questionnaire included removing a set of questions that were not applicable to this study and noting the questionnaire was a modification of the Fast Track Project. The questionnaire was administered before the interviews to determine the level of parental involvement and gain an understanding of the participant's involvement with the school environment before the deployment.

The first four questions of the questionnaire were added by the researcher and provided the demographic information to determine eligibility. To be eligible for the study, the participants must have been veterans that experienced a deployment within the past five years and the parent of a school-aged child during the deployment. The revised questionnaire

measured the amount and type of parental contact with the teacher, the parents' degree of satisfaction with the school, and the parent's level of involvement in their child's education (Walters, 2001). The questionnaire was based on a four-point scale.

Frequency of parental contact was measured with questions one through four, and parental involvement and volunteering with the school was measured with questions five through seven, nine, ten, and 18-22 (Walters, 2001). The parent's perception of the school was measured with questions 11-14, and questions 15-17 assessed the quality of the relationship between the parent and the teacher (Walters, 2001). To develop a score, an average score was calculated for each participant based on the categories of parental involvement and volunteering, perception, and quality of the school relationship. After obtaining an average score for each participant from each category, an overall average score was calculated using the individual participants score in each category. Even though questions 1-4 measured frequency of contact, the other questions provided a holistic picture of the parent's involvement and their relationship with the school environment.

Focus Groups

A focus group was conducted with school staff at Springfield Elementary School (pseudonym) in a district that served a large military installation. The school was located in a neighboring state so the staff members were not acquainted with the female veteran participants' children. The focus group was held at Spring Field Elementary which serves approximately 689 students in grades Pre-K through 5 (Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, 2014). Spring Field was chosen due to its close proximity to a large military installation with frequent deployments.

The focus group with school staff was conducted prior to the female veteran participant's interviews to assist in the development of interview questions. The purpose of a focus group is to generate "a discussion-based interview that produces verbal data generated via group interaction" (Breakwell, Smith, & Wright, 2012, p. 413). The participants were asked to share with the group their experiences with deployment and parental involvement (see Table 2). The focus group was conducted at Spring Field Elementary School. The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist hired by the researcher.

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

-
1. How would you describe parental involvement?
 2. What methods do you use to communicate with parents?
 3. Which methods do you feel are most effective in communicating with parents?
 4. How would you describe communication with military parents during a deployment?
 5. What challenges do you face in communicating with military families?
 6. How are you informed of a parental deployment?
 7. How can schools assist deployed parents in maintain communication with school staff?
 8. How would you describe the effects of a military deployment on a child?
-

Interviews

In qualitative research, interviews are typical in a phenomenological study and involve a "lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). The researcher conducted individual interviews with seven female veterans who experienced a deployment that focused on parental communication with school staff during a deployment. In

the interview, time was not a factor; the dialogue allowed the participants “ideas, thoughts, feelings and images to unfold and be expressed naturally” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). The interviews were scheduled and conducted at a mutually convenient location and time. They consisted of 24 questions (see Table 3). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality agreement.

Table 3

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

-
1. Tell me a about yourself, your family and your experience serving. When did you become a parent, while you were serving or before you enlisted?
 2. Why did you decide to join the military? Did your motivation change over time? (If YES) can you share an example?
 3. How many children do you have and what are their ages now?
 4. Were you deployed in the last ten years? (IF YES)? How many times, where and what was your mission? About how long was your most recent deployment and how old was your child (children)?
 5. We're you wounded, ill or injured as a result of your deployment?
 6. Considering either your longest deployment or your most complex separation, what were your children's ages and how did each react predeployment, during your deployment and then through reintegration?
 7. What worked best for your family in terms of staying connected? Given your experiences now, looking back, what one or two things do you, as a mom, wish you could have done differently?
 8. How are your kids doing in school? If you had to rate each child on a ladder from the lowest rung being one to the highest rung being ten, how would you rank them now?
 9. What would that be during your longest deployment?
 10. Was your children's school supportive? Give some examples?
 11. Who had the primary responsibilities for caring for your children during your longest deployment?
 12. Describe your involvement with your child's school prior to the deployment.
 13. Please share how you connected your spouse or other caregivers to the school before your longest deployment?
 14. How did you maintain communication with family members during the deployment? Especially related to school?
 15. How did you communicate with the school, teacher, etc.? Please tell me a more about how this worked?
 16. What were the surprises? How did you and your family adapt?

17. How did the deployment affect the child's academic performance (test scores, grades, etc.)? What indicators did you have and how did you, your spouse or other caregiver respond?
 18. What were some challenges in communicating with school staff during the deployment? What worked?
 19. What challenges in communicating with family members did you face during the deployment and how did you overcome the challenges? What advice do you have now for other moms?
 20. What services could the school have provided to improve communication for you with the school? What worked best for each of your children? How consistent were these supports?
 21. What services could the school have provided to your child to maintain academic progress during the deployment? Please share how this was different for children based on age or special need?
 22. Overall...thinking about the service of women who are mothers, what advice do you have for schools to help the parent stay connected? How is this different for single parents?
 23. What services could the military have provided to improve communication for you with your family and the school staff? Now what advice do you have for the military?
 24. Considering your experience as a family, what advice do you have for other mothers who are serving?
 25. What else would you like to share that I haven't asked you?
-

The first four questions served as icebreaker questions to develop rapport with the participants. They provided background information concerning motivation for joining the military and the location and length of the deployment. Question 11 served as a reference point to gauge involvement prior to the deployment. The remainder of the questions was used to provide information related to the purpose of the study. The questions served as a guide and allowed both the researcher and participant the flexibility to expand on answers.

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) identifies three steps in data analysis of phenomenological research: the epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. This study used these three steps to analyze the data from the focus group with school staff members and the questionnaire and interviews with the maternal soldiers.

Epoche

The first step in the data analysis process involved the epoche, in which the researcher set aside their prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This involved the process of bracketing out my personal experiences with deployments, using journaling and visualization techniques. Journaling involved writing down all ideas related to maternal involvement, deployment, and communication with the teacher before the interviews and then again before analysis. Visualization occurred prior to each interview and involved visualization of active listening skills during the interview.

Phenomenological Reduction

The next step in data analysis was phenomenological reduction, which consisted of horizontalization and a textual description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups were read and reread for the description of the experience of maternal communication with school staff during a deployment. The transcripts were analyzed using horizontalization. Horizontalization involved the rereading of the transcriptions to identify only statements or horizons relevant to the experience of the phenomenon, a maternal deployment and school communication (Moustakas, 1994). Initially, statements related only to communicating with the school were highlighted by the researcher and statements that were unrelated to the experience were set aside. The software program Atlasti was used to group statements that were similar and given initial codes. Statements related to school communication were assigned codes and the statements were then clustered and assigned into themes. The clustered themes allowed the researcher to develop a textual description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The textual description was the final step in phenomenological reduction.

Imaginative Variation

The last step in data analysis involved imaginative variation. Imaginative variation aims to provide a structural description of an experience; it serves to describe the “how and what of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p.98). The textural description provided a description of the participant’s experiences that led the researcher to develop a structural description that described the essence of the experiences, maternal communication with school staff during a deployment (see Appendix H).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness for this study was addressed in the following four ways: clarifying researcher bias, triangulation, member checking, and peer review.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

Clarifying researcher bias involved the researcher disclosing any prior experience with the phenomenon. This made the reader aware of any biases or assumptions that may impact the study (Creswell, 2013). In addition to disclosing prior experience with the phenomenon, the researcher set aside any prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon through bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). I used journaling to bracket any preconceived ideas or prejudgments regarding maternal communication with school staff during a military deployment. Specifically, I wrote about my experiences as a school counselor working with a student whose mother was deployed.

Triangulation

Triangulation involved the use of multiple methods of data collection. The data collection methods for this study included focus groups, interviews, and a parental involvement questionnaire. The evidence to document a code or theme from different sources provides

validity to the findings (Creswell, 2013). The use of the parental involvement questionnaire provided a base line level and examples of involvement prior to the military deployment. The interviews provided information regarding parental involvement both prior to and during a deployment. The focus group provided data concerning how parents communicate during a deployment, which were used during the interviews with the maternal soldiers.

Member Checks

Member checks involve taking the data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants for review and to gain informant feedback (Moustakas, 1994). The feedback from the participants judges the accuracy and credibility of the analysis, interpretations, and the conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2013). In this study, each participant reviewed her transcription for accuracy and clarification. Each participant was e-mailed a copy of her interview transcription to review, correct, and clarify any mistakes.

Peer Review

Peer review provides an external check of the study and the research process (Creswell, 2013). During the dissertation process, the dissertation committee reviewed all aspects of the study and provided feedback. Peer review coupled with informant feedback or member checks ensured each individual description is a true representation of the participant's experience.

Ethical Considerations

Participants in this study received pseudonyms to protect their identity and preserve the confidentiality of the participants. In addition, all tape recordings, transcriptions, and questionnaires were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet. Any items stored on the researcher's computer were stored to a password protected external hard drive stored separately from the researcher's computer. The external hard drive was also stored in the locked filing

cabinet with the tape recordings, transcriptions, and questionnaires. The professional transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement prior to transcribing the tape recordings. The interviews were conducted in person at the participant's home or via the telephone. One interview was conducted in a coffee shop at the request of the participant. For the focus group with school staff, the interview was conducted at the school and occurred in a conference room with only the participants present.

This study involved female veterans discussing their experiences with a military deployment and this could have caused emotional issues to surface. To address this issue, participants were given the number to the veteran's crisis line to access a professional counselor after the interview. My role in this study was to serve as the researcher and therefore, a separate counselor was needed to be available for the participants. A previously identified ethical issue to this study is my personal experience with deployments. To address this issue, my prior experience was disclosed to prevent researcher bias for the study.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the research design selected for this study. Transcendental phenomenology was the chosen design because the focus of the study was to explore the shared experiences of maternal soldiers with the phenomenon of communicating with school staff during a military deployment. Data collection for this study included a focus group, parental involvement questionnaires, and individual interviews with the maternal soldier participants. Data was analyzed through epoch, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. Issues related to trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers' parental communication with school staff during a military deployment. A transcendental phenomenological design was used in this study due to the researcher's experience with the phenomenon being studied and the need to bracket out personal experiences. It was important for data to reflect the participant's experience and not be influenced by the researcher's experiences. This chapter begins with a review of the data collection methods and then discusses the results of the data. The data collection methods used in this study included a focus group, a parental involvement questionnaire, and individual interviews. Four distinct themes and six sub themes emerged from the data analysis: School Connection, Technology Based Communication, School Support, and Lack of Situational Understanding and Feelings of Helplessness. The following questions helped serve to frame this study:

Research Question 1: How do maternal soldiers describe their communication experiences with school staff prior to deployment?

Research Question 2: How do maternal soldiers describe their communication experiences with school staff during a deployment?

Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with six female school staff members in order to develop questions for the individual interviews with the female veteran participants. The focus group was conducted with the school staff members prior to the interviews with the female veteran participants. Information gained from the focus group was used to assist with questions for the female veteran participants regarding communication with school staff during a deployment.

The focus group was held at Spring Field Elementary (pseudonym) in a neighboring state that serves a large military installation. Spring Field was chosen due to their close proximity to a large military installation with frequent deployments. Spring Field Elementary has a Military Family Life Consultant that works with military families and the school has been recognized the past three years for outstanding student achievement on state assessments (Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, 2014). The focus group was comprised of six female school staff members who worked with students and parents in varying positions. The table below provides information regarding their position at the school and their years of experience in education.

Table 4

Summary of School Staff

Name (Pseudonym)	Position	Years of Experience
Mary	Principal	Undisclosed
Donna	School Counselor	Undisclosed
Debra	Media Specialist/Curriculum Specialist	21 years
Ann	4 th Grade Teacher	Undisclosed
Tracy	Special Education Teacher	13 years
Christie	Military Outreach Specialist (District Level)	Undisclosed

The focus group questions were related to the communication process between the school staff and military parents. A variety of communication techniques were discussed by the school staff members that included email, mail, phone calls, and parent meetings. The school staff members described more communication with the parent or caregiver that was home versus the deployed parent. Donna stated she primarily communicated with the parent at home: “I have communicated with the deployed parent but it’s usually the parent that’s here”.

In regard to communicating with the deployed parent, the school staff participants described challenges such as the time change and the location of the deployed parent. The location of the deployed parent made communication difficult according to Debra. She stated, “It’s so much more difficult to communicate with the parent whose location may be totally, you know secret”. Additionally, Mary discussed problems with using Skype at the school to communicate with the deployed parent. She described the problem in the following way, “It was just so many kinks in it and to get their addresses, I think it is a great thing that they can do within the family system it’s just different with the school schedule”. The challenges described by the school staff was also noted by the veteran participants in relation to the theme of technology based communication.

This school district also had a parent portal that allowed the deployed parent to access their child’s grades, attendance, and behavior reports. Christie discussed how the district provided opportunities for deployed parents to remain involved through the parent portal and not miss important events, such as, graduation and sporting events. She stated, “I think our district provides opportunities, like this year, they offered live streaming of graduation and even some sporting events”. They described this parent portal as way to give access to deployed parents. Ann and Tracy both discussed how deployed parents are included in activities during a deployment, and how they can contribute feedback to the school through parent surveys. Ann discussed the use of online parent surveys. She stated, “our surveys can be accessed online so deployed parents can still participate if they are not able to come to the school. Tracy discussed how that anything sent home to parents could be accessed through the portal for deployed parents, “anything that we send home they are still able to participate that way”. The information from the focus group provided additional questions for the female participants about

who the teachers communicated with during the deployment and if the school provided a system to access the child's grades, attendance, and behavior reports online.

Interview Participants

Seven female veterans participated in this study by completing a parental involvement questionnaire and an individual interview. The female participants had served with the National Guard and the Air Force Reserve. They were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Participants varied in their marital status, number of children, rank, and level of parental involvement. The level of parental involvement was calculated based on a four point Likert scale where participants indicated if they strongly agree or disagree with a statement. The questionnaire measured parental involvement, volunteering, parent's perception of the school, and assessed the quality of the parent teacher relationship. A mean score was calculated for each participant and is included in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Participants

Participant	Branch of Service	Ques. Score	# of Children	Children's Ages During Deployment	Year Deployed	Marital Status
Audra	National Guard	2.9	1	7	2008-2009	Single
Rebecca	National Guard	1.8	3	14, 2, less than 12 months	2009-2010	Married
Nicole	National Guard	2.2	1	9	2009-2010	Divorced
Christine	National Guard	2.5	4	15,13,11,and 2	2011	Divorced
Angie	National Guard	1.8	3	18, 15, and 11	2011	Divorced
Melissa	National Guard	2.9	3	6, 8, and 10	2009-2010	Married
LeAnn	Air Force Reserve	2.5	1	6	2011	Married

The following section provides an overview of each participant concerning motivation to serve in the military, number of years of military service, marital status during the deployment, length of deployment, age of child during the deployment, and the primary caregiver during the

deployment. Six of the participants have served in the National Guard for over 10 years, with four of those six serving over 20 years.

Audra

Audra is a single mother of a male child, and she has served in the National Guard for 26 years as an officer. She reports joining in college and was influenced by her father who served in the military. She describes joining the military like her father as “when it’s in your blood, it’s in your blood”. She became a mother several years after joining the National Guard.

Audra has deployed one time in 2008-2009 to Iraq. She volunteered for this deployment and felt it was her “turn”. She had watched several of her friends and co-workers deploy and that influenced her decision to volunteer for a deployment. Her son was seven years old when she deployed and was nine years old when she returned. She described her son’s reaction to the news she was deploying as difficult for him. She stated:

He asked if I could get out of it. I told him I could probably get out of it but I told him that it was my turn to go and because of that I didn’t feel like it was fair if I didn’t go and had somebody else go in my place.

The total length of the deployment to include training and “boots on the ground” was a year and a half. The primary caregivers of her son during the deployment were her parents and sister.

Rebecca

Rebecca has served as an officer in the National Guard for 29 years as a traditional guardsman for two years and Active Guard Reserve the remaining 27 years. She joined the National Guard initially to help pay for college. She described her motivation to remain in the guard for so many years as feeling “honored and humbled to be part of an organization that helps defend freedoms”. It was apparent during the interview that Rebecca has a strong sense

of admiration and dedication to serving in the military. She described the sacrifices and commitment that military service members make regarding their families when they chose to serve in the all-volunteer force in the following way:

It's a very admirable thing to do because you are sacrificing so much time away from your family, from your work, the amount of birthdays or weddings or different events that we've missed throughout the years. Yet, we're ready to deploy at a moment's notice and leave our families. I think it's a very selfless occupation as well that we really give a lot to this, to the uniform and to the United States and again, being a part of that small minority that actually is a part of the military, I'm proud to be one of those people.

Rebecca has deployed twice in her military career, once during Operation Desert Storm and then again in 2009-2010 for a year to Iraq. She is the mother of three children, two boys and one girl. Her children were fourteen, two, and less than a year old at the time of her deployment. The primary caregiver of her children during her deployment was their father. Rebecca's oldest son was removed from the family home due to custody issues and moved in with his biological father in another state. Rebecca's two younger children lived with their biological father in the family home.

Nicole

Nicole was also a member of the National Guard who has served 17 years as enlisted and has one daughter and two step-children. She describes her motivation to serve as being influenced by her grandfather serving in the military. She described her motivation as changing over the years to more of job security, "the peace of mind of knowing that if something happens, I can take care of my child". Nicole has been deployed twice in the past ten years, once in 2004

and then in 2009. Both times she was deployed to Iraq. The first deployment was 15 months and the second was ten and a half months.

Nicole has one daughter and two step-children. Nicole's step-children were in their teens during her first deployment and her daughter was two and a half years old at the time of the first deployment. During her second deployment she was divorced, and her step-children were out of the home and her daughter was nine. Her daughter's father was the primary caregiver during the deployment. Nicole's ex-husband was also in the military, so her daughter is a dual military child.

Christine

Christine is a veteran of the National Guard who has served as enlisted for 14 years. She originally entered the military in 1994 when she joined the Air Force and served four years. She describes her motivation for entering the military as "to get away from my family and travel". She stated her brother was in the military and he "always had a paycheck" and that was appealing since she reported she "grew up dirt poor". She states her motivation for reentering the National Guard was due to her enjoying doing military activities. She expanded on her motivation to rejoin the military by stating:

I really like doing operational things. I like doing, I like riding around in the vehicles and, and, you know, shooting a weapon and that stuff that you don't as a civilian ever get to do. I like going out and doing trainings. I like staying in tents.

Christine is the mother of four children who were fifteen, thirteen, eleven, and two at the time of her deployment. She has been deployed one time in 2011 to Kuwait for one year. The children's father also served in the military. Christine is divorced and her ex-husband was the primary caregiver of the children during her deployment.

Angie

Angie also has served as enlisted with the National Guard for over 25 years. Angie described her motivation for entering the military as a result of growing up in a troubled home and being encouraged by her foster mom; “the only reason I went to the test and joined is because she wouldn’t shut up about it”. Angie stated after returning from her basic training she was motivated to stay full time in the service so she could “do something with my life”.

Angie is the mother of three children, one boy and two girls. Angie discussed considering getting out of the military due to having children and the possibility of deploying. She described the influence of female soldier on her career after learning she was pregnant. Angie states;

when I got pregnant with my son, my battalion commander at the time actually tried to talk me into getting out of the military. And I had a female soldier that was a great influence on my career. She said, look, yes, deployment is definitely one of those things that may happen, but you don’t have to get out of the military just because you’re having a child.

She deployed once in 2011 to Kuwait for one year. Her children were 18, 15, and 11 at the time of the deployment. Angie was not married during the deployment and her children lived with their father during the deployment. Angie’s two oldest children her son and daughter lived with their father and her youngest daughter resided in a separate home with her father.

Melissa

Melissa has served in the National Guard for 25 years as both enlisted and as an officer. She describes her initial motivation to join as “to do something different and I always thought the military seemed like it would be exciting” and the motivation changed to more about the

financial and educational benefits. Melissa stated, “it became a way of paying for college. Then it became, um, working towards retirement”.

Melissa is the mother of three children, two girls and a boy. Melissa has experienced two deployments. The first deployment was in 2004, and she was pregnant with her middle daughter. During that deployment, Melissa did not deploy overseas. She did work with the deploying unit and describes the work as,

doing like, rear detachment and I handled all the people that were still in the rear, new recruits who were just coming into a unit, those transferring in and different things like that and those that were sent back for various reasons. That’s what I did.

She deployed a second time for seven months in 2009-2010 to Iraq. Melissa felt her previous experience with deployments helped her prepare for her deployment overseas. During the deployment, her children were six, eight, and ten. Melissa’s husband is also in the military and they were both deployed at the same time. The primary caregiver of her children was her niece who moved into the family home.

LeAnn

LeAnn served both active duty and reserve in the Air Force. She resigned from the Air Force reserves in 2014. She joined the Air Force when she graduated from high school to help pay for college and was active duty for two and half years. She and her husband, who was a marine, were both set to deploy at the same time and were having a child so she left the military. She rejoined the reserves in 2008 because “I missed the Air Force and being part of the military”.

LeAnn is the mother of one child, a daughter, age 10. She deployed for eight months to Afghanistan in 2011. As a result of this deployment, LeAnn stated that she is “dealing with PTSD”. LeAnn’s husband was deployed as a military contractor at the time of her deployment.

Her daughter was six at the time of the deployment for both her parents. LeAnn's parents were the primary caregivers of her daughter during the deployment.

Results

Data analysis of this study included the focus group questions with the school staff, completion of the parental involvement questionnaire and individual interviews by the female veteran participants. During the data analysis four themes emerged: School Connection, Technology-Based Communication, School Support, and Lack of Situational Understanding and Feelings of Helplessness that described the phenomenon of maternal communication with school staff during a deployment. From the themes of School Connection, Technology-Based Communication, and School Support sub themes emerged that helped describe the participant's experience in communicating with school staff during a deployment.

Sub themes of parental involvement and connecting caregivers to the school emerged from the first theme of School Connection. These sub themes helped to describe the participants' school connection through their description of parental involvement and how they connected the caregiver to the school environment. The sub themes related to Technology-Based Communication were limited communication and challenges. The participants described limited communication types and frequency with school staff and challenges they faced in communicating with both the school and their families. The sub themes of lack of understanding of military deployments and status update by school staff emerged from the third theme, School Support. Participants described a lack of knowledge and understanding by the school staff concerning military deployments and the needs of military children. Also, they believed schools could help deployed soldiers by providing a status update. The fourth theme, Lack of Situational Understanding and Feelings of Helplessness emerged from the discussion on

a status update. Participants described struggling with their absence from the home and their inability to resolve the issues faced by their child due to the deployment.

The emergence of themes and sub themes came from the interviews and the questionnaire data. The participants' words painted a description of how they communicated with school staff during a military deployment. Figure 3 represents the emergence of themes and sub themes.

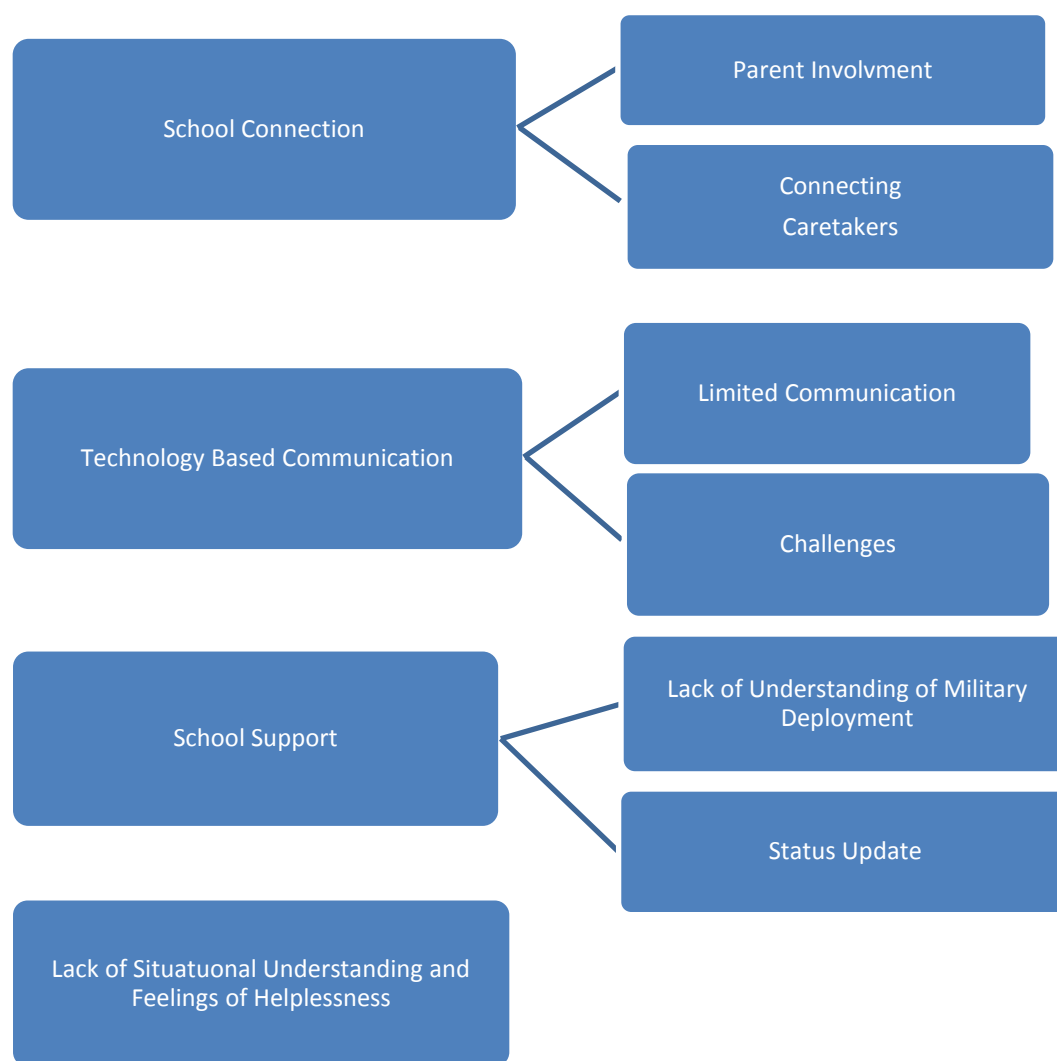


Figure 2. Emergences of Themes.

Theme One: School Connection

School connection encompasses the six types of parental involvement noted in Chapter Two with Epstein's Spheres of Influence Theory. The six types of involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et al., 2011). Two types played a role in describing each participant's connection to the school prior to the deployment: communication and volunteering. The parental involvement questionnaire and the individual interviews were used to convey their experiences. Two sub themes emerged that described the participant's experiences in communicating with school staff prior to the deployment. The two sub themes were parental involvement and connecting caregivers.

Parent involvement. Research has shown that parental involvement has a positive outcome on academic achievement and student motivation (Gonzalez-De Haas et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2012; Mo & Singh, 2008; Rogers et al., 2009). This study demonstrates how parental involvement influenced the school connection for the participants and their children. The participants' attendance of school events, correspondence with the teacher, and volunteering at the school helped the participants to establish a connection to the school environment. This connection provided the participants with knowledge about the staff, programs, and the day-to-day operations of the school. This knowledge positively impacted their school connection because participants knew the school staff and how to contact them. The participants had met and contacted the school staff prior to the deployment so there was a level of familiarity, which in turn created a sense of support for them and their children. An overview of the participant's frequency of contact with the school, parental involvement and volunteering prior to the deployment are represented in Table 6.

Table 6

Summary of Participants' Responses to Parental Involvement Questionnaire

Participant	Frequency of Contact	Parental Involvement & Volunteering
Audra	Weekly Correspondence	Attended weekly events and P/T conferences 2x a year
Rebecca	2X a year written correspondence	2X a year attended events and P/T conferences
Nicole	2X a year written correspondence	Monthly visits to the school 2X a year attended P/T conference
Christine	2X a year written and verbal communication	2X a year attended school events
Angie	Monthly Correspondence	Attended monthly events and P/T conferences 2X a year
Melissa	Weekly correspondence	Attended monthly events and monthly P/T conferences
LeAnn	2X a year written correspondence	Volunteered weekly, attended monthly events and monthly P/T conferences

Communication with the teacher and volunteering at the school provided the participants with a sense of security and belonging to the school environment. It is this sense of security and belonging that influenced Audra's decision to return her son to his previous school prior to her deployment. She stated:

We transferred from Knoxville to Middle Tennessee when he was in the first grade. And in doing that, when I found out I was deploying shortly after moving into Middle Tennessee, I called his old school and, asked if he could come back to the same class that he was into, same friends, so there would be the least amount of disruption in his life. And they welcomed him back with no problem. So he started back in the same class

A sense of belonging was created through their involvement and volunteering in the school, with several of the participants having an active role in the school environment. Angie

describes herself as “very involved” and she describes a sense of belonging with the school environment through her volunteering and communication with the teachers. She stated:

When they were younger in primary school and in middle school, it was almost a, a weekly thing with one of them because I had four in school, because I had a stepdaughter. And I was at one of the schools once a week. And all the teachers knew me, my face. They recognized me. I was going to all the programs, you know, parent/teacher conferences, the programs they had at school. All my kids have always been involved in school. So I was always at the school for sporting events and in fundraisers and all of that stuff.

LeAnn also described herself as an active participant in her daughter’s school environment prior to her deployment. Leann’s daughter moved to a new school prior to the deployment and helping her daughter transition was important to Leann. She described helping her daughter transition to the new school in the following way:

I didn’t have a job, so that was kind of my job, was to get her adjusted, those four months up until I deployed. I just volunteered a lot at the school and just kept the lines of communication open. I was basically always at the school. I was eating lunch with her and volunteering in the class. I just volunteered a lot at the school and just kept the lines of communication open.

LeAnn established a connection to the school environment, which enabled her to develop open communication with the teacher. This ability to establish this type of communication with the school environment provided LeAnn with a sense of security since her daughter was transitioning to a new school.

Nicole also described a sense of security due to her strong connection with the school environment prior to the deployment. She communicated monthly with the teacher and volunteered in the classroom. She was involved in her daughter's school and the teachers knew her, which contributed to feelings of security and belonging. She described the school as "proactive and supportive of military families". Involvement with the school environment through communication and volunteering provided a connection for these participants.

All the maternal soldier participants described communication with the school staff. However, they differed in the frequency of their communication. Christine described her involvement with the school as "limited, involvement. I would go hang out at the school and talk with them and do whatever. I knew who the teachers were from the orientations". Melissa also described limited communication with the teacher and stated:

I had a couple, I think, I think I just had one parent/teacher conference before I left... probably a few weeks to a month prior to leaving and I was able to sit down with each of the teachers and let them know what was going on and, you know, just be aware of the situation.

Communication with the teachers and volunteering with the school were two types of parental involvement that each participant described in this study. Audra, LeAnn, Angie, and Nicole each described a sense of belonging with the school environment. Their volunteering and attendance of special events allowed them to feel like they were a part of the school environment. This provided them with a connection to the school environment. In the case of Christine, Rebecca, and Melissa, they were connected to the school environment through their communication with the teacher.

Another important aspect related to school connection was connecting caregivers to the school environment prior to the deployment. The participants' involvement with the school environment provided the opportunity to connect the caregiver to the school. As with the differences in their level of involvement, the participants differed in how they connected the caregivers to the school. Some participants provided the school with notification paperwork and contact information while other participants directly introduced the caregiver to the school staff. Each participant, except Rebecca, connected the caregiver to the school environment prior to the deployment. Rebecca experienced custody issues prior to her deployment, which prevented contact with the school until after she deployed.

Connecting caregivers. The selection of a caregiver for children is an important and careful decision each military service member makes regarding a deployment. Soldiers with children must complete a family care plan and the plan identifies a caregiver for the soldier's children during an absence. In the case of Rebecca, Nicole, Christine, and Angie, the responsibility of caring for the children was the children's father. Audra, Melissa, and LeAnn selected family members as the caregiver for their children.

In preparing for the deployment and connecting the caregiver, each participant notified the school of the deployment and provided the necessary contact information for the primary caregiver during the deployment. In some instances, the participants simply provided contact information for the caregiver. Christine provided the school with paperwork on the deployment and the caregiver; she stated "I had sent in whenever the, the parent mobilizes you have to send in paperwork to the school to get it on record saying that there's a parent that's mobilized overseas and all this other stuff". In Melissa's situation, her husband was deploying at the same time so her niece moved in the family home and became the primary caregiver of the children.

She provided the contact information to the school prior to the deployment and included emergency contacts that were already in place prior to the deployment. She stated:

I provided the school new contact information and give them all the new contact information my parents being emergency contacts, so they still had contact with my parents and his parents and, a lot of that still remained the same.

Angie also met with the school staff prior to her deployment and provided the contact information. As stated earlier, Angie had an established connection with the school prior to her deployment. However, her children had to change schools because they went to live with their father during the deployment. Since Angie did not have an established connection to this school environment, she described meeting with the teachers prior to the deployment and how she provided the contact information on the children's father. She connected their father by alerting the school of the need to connect with him regarding any issues related to the children in the following way:

I told them all ahead of time look I'm deploying. If, there's a problem and an issue with me being deployed that's causing them a problem emotionally, academically or anything else first and foremost let their dad know. If there's anything I can do let me know.

Some participants not only provided the necessary paperwork and contact information to the school but directly connected the caregivers to the teachers. Audra had two primary caregivers of her son during her deployment, her parents and her sister. She connected both to the school and made sure each caregiver had access to any correspondence from the teachers. This ensured continuity between Audra and the caregivers of her son. She stated:

I connected those (caregivers) with the teachers. I made sure that they, that the school had their contact information as well as mine, so when the teachers would put out emails to the parents, they were also including my parents and my sister, as well as me.

In Nicole's situation, her ex-husband was the primary caregiver, and he was set to deploy at the same time. She described how they made the decision of who would care for their daughter and the connection to the school in the following way:

My second deployment, he was supposed to be actually deploying at the same time going to Afghanistan, and, we had always promised her that we would never leave her without one parent at home. And so, it come down to we were going to be deploying, like a month apart, and she was going to be left here and have to be left with one of the family members, and, of course, he had like twenty-eight years in service, and, of course, I'm just now at seventeen-and-a-half years, so the only choice we had was for him to voluntarily retire, which he was willing to do. It's something that we had agreed upon years ago, and a matter of fact, he retired, and then went and got trained and become a full-time sub at the school.

Nicole's ex-husband established a connection to the school environment by becoming an active participant in the school environment. He was part of the day-to-day activities at the school. This connection provided him the opportunity to be aware of any issues related to his daughter that occurred in the school environment.

As earlier stated Leann was an active participant in the school environment through her communication with the teacher and volunteering. She moved with her daughter to another state prior to the deployment to help her daughter transition to her new school and the living situation. LeAnn's daughter lived with her parents during the deployment due to her husband also

experiencing a deployment at the same time. LeAnn's connection to the school provided the opportunity to connect her father to the school through the enrollment process. She described the enrollment process with her dad in the following way:

I moved; we lived in Georgia. I lived in North Carolina when school started, so I could help my daughter transition before I deployed. I basically enrolled her with my dad.

They had to have power of attorney so I had to, you know give them power of attorney in this situation

In summary, each participant, through parental involvement that included communicating with the teacher and volunteering at the school, established the connection to the school environment. This connection provided the participants' with a sense of belonging and security related to the school environment. Also, each participant established a connection between the school environment and the caregiver. They provided contact information or directly connected the caregiver to the school environment. The establishment of this connection with the caregiver and the school ensured continuity of communication between the participants, the caregivers, and the school.

Theme Two: Technology Based Communication

The communication methods used today by soldiers differ greatly than methods used in past wars. Written correspondence was the primary method used by soldiers to communicate with family members prior to the Global War on Terror. However, the availability and accessibility of technology based communication methods, such as email, has increased the frequency of communication for military families. Participants in this study described technology based communication as an important aspect of how they communicated both with their family and the school. Even with the availability of technology, the participant's

communication with school staff was limited in type of communication and frequency. Additionally, they discussed some of the challenges they faced using technology to communicate.

Limited communication. Technology based communication was the primary method of communication with the school. It encompassed emails and the access to parent portals through the school. The parent portals provided online access to their child's grades and assignments. A variety of technology based communication types were used by the participants to communicate with family members, such as Skype, V-Texting, and email.

In communicating with school staff, the participants' described their communication as limited to primarily email with the teachers. Audra communicated with the teacher through email and direct conversations with the teacher through her parents. She stated:

It was always email. And if there was something that I received or let's say my parents received something that they, we hadn't discussed beforehand as far as what to do, they would email me, and I would let them know, and then they would take it into the school. My parents did attend the parent teacher conferences and they would report back to me, how well he was doing, or if there were anything that he needed to work on.

LeAnn also described email correspondence with the teacher, "The teacher gave me her email, so I could have correspondence with the teacher while I was deployed. I emailed her one time."

Several of the participants had limited communication with the teacher due to the access of the parent portals. Rebecca, Nicole, and Samantha all had access to the parent portals. The portals provided access to their child's grades and they were able to see if their child was completing their assignment. Rebecca learned of her son's decline in grades and his not

completing his assignments from the portal. This awareness prompted communication through email with the teacher.

I finally got access to that about halfway through the school year, and when I did, that's when I found out that, you know, ... wasn't submitting half of his assignments (parent portal). Well, then I, would either email or try to call his dad, saying why aren't these assignments being turned in? And then when I'd email the teachers, they're like, yeah, ... a gifted child who just needs to apply himself. He never you know, he constantly doesn't turn in his homework. He's not applying himself, all this.

Nicole commented on the availability and benefit of the portals and how the portals limited the need to speak directly with the teacher.

I could logon, get online and look at her assignments; there was no reason to actually contact the teachers directly because you had access just about to everything online. I think I maybe talked to her teachers one time while I was gone, everything else was just online or through email.

Christine also had access to the school portal and checked them with her children. Due to security log on issues, she was unable to access the portal through her computer, she states "I'd have to have the kids pull it up (parent portal) at home and then show it to me on the other computer". In communicating with the teachers, Christine also primarily communicated through email with the school staff. However, she did encounter one teacher who wanted to only communicate with her by phone which proved challenging. "He (principal) and I only communicated through emails... then she (teacher) only wanted to call. And I had to call the school probably five or six different times because she would have failed that class".

Communication with the school staff was limited in terms of the frequency. The staff did not initiate the communication but were responsive to the participant's emails. Angie felt the teachers did not see a need to communicate with her during the deployment unless there was an issue. She states:

No, no, of course, they don't really communicate and it's really like her being in high school now, unless there's a problem...you just never hear from them. I mean, like, if I were to email them, they'd be like, yeah, she's doing fine, you know. Yeah, she's good. Melissa had no contact with the school during her deployment. The teachers did not contact her during the deployment about her children, even though two of her children's grades declined, and her son experienced some behavioral issues in the classroom.

As previously stated, Audra, Nicole, and Christine communicated with the school. They described the school staff as responsive to their emails; however, they (the participants) initiated the communication. In analyzing their pre-deployment communication with school staff, the decline in frequency could be attributed to the lack of direct contact with the school staff. Audra, Nicole, Angie, Melissa, and Leann each visited or volunteered at the school monthly prior to the deployment. Three participants, Rebecca, Christine, and Nicole, had access to school portals for grades, discipline, and video streaming which may have limited their need to communicate directly with the teacher.

Challenges: Time delay and infrastructure. Challenges in communicating with family and school staff were a common thread among the participants. Each participant described challenges in communicating with school staff and their family members. The participants in this study were deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq, which resulted in a seven or eight hour time change. The time change was a challenge discussed by the participants. The time change

resulted in a delay in communication, especially with the school staff. Audra described the time delay in relation to email but felt the teacher responded in a timely manner even with the delay.

She states:

So anytime an email went out, even though there were seven or eight hours difference depending on Daylight Savings Time, um, my parents would always get it. And they had, of course, authority to sign for everything for me. So yeah, there was some delay, but, but normally, no, she (teacher) was very on top of it

Rebecca also noted the time delay as a challenge in communicating with the teacher but felt “they were, I would say, fairly good about, about the same amount of time anybody takes to respond to an email, maybe that day or the next day.” Although there was a time delay, the participants felt the teachers did a good job responding to their emails in a timely manner. For some participants, the time delay was not the only challenge they experienced related to technology-based communication.

Another challenge noted by some participants was the lack of infrastructure at the bases, especially for those participants that moved from base to base. Infrastructure refers to the access to the internet, internet connection, availability of computers, and phones. Several of the participants were deployed to Iraq during the scale down of troops, which resulted in bases being closed and the infrastructure removed. Christine noted the time delay as a problem in trying to communicate with the teacher and she also experienced difficulty accessing the school portal due to the infrastructure. She stated:

“She (the teacher) was like no, no, no. I’ll just have to catch you. And then we were playing phone tag for a while. So yeah, that made it difficult the time zone. And because you are overseas it is harder to get onto the portals. A lot of the parent portals they used

to have them, they changed them recently but they used to have them where there was just so many securities that you had to go to just to even be able to look, that the connection-, the Internet connection from where I was at to where they were at all the securities, the country security codes and...all that would not, wouldn't, wouldn't work.

Angie discussed moving from base to base in Iraq as they were being closed. She reported challenges in communicating with both her family and school staff due to the infrastructure. She described the Internet connection as “terrible, the connection obviously that’s the biggest challenge and the time delay”. The lack of infrastructure limited the participant’s ability to communicate with both their family and the school. Of course, some participants were limited more than others based on the infrastructure at the base they were located. LeAnn was the only participant deployed to Afghanistan and described a lack of infrastructure at several of the bases.

My deployment was rough in that I didn’t have access to communication, I would say, probably 75% of my deployment. I don’t know that I would have been able to utilize them (technology based communication) all just because of the locations that we were at and they didn’t have Internet and mail that ran through there on a number of temporary locations.

Although participants experienced similar challenges, the degree of the impact differed among participants. For example, Angie and LeAnn both experienced moving to different bases that were either closing or did not have the infrastructure available to support a variety of technology based communication methods. The challenges discussed were related to the time delay and the infrastructure at the bases where they were deployed. A reoccurring statement related to the teacher’s responsiveness to emails showed the participants felt the teacher

responded in a timely manner. Of course, there was the delay due to the time change but each felt the response time was appropriate based on the circumstance. Christine was the only participant who experienced difficulty in receiving a timely response to the teacher. This was in part due to the teacher only wanting to speak on the phone which proved challenging due to the time delay. It took several weeks for Christine to make contact with the teacher and correct the problem.

The challenges described by the participants may have resulted in the limited communication with the school staff. There was a decline in communication with the school staff for each participant during the deployment. Their communication with the teacher was limited by type and frequency. The challenges with the time delay and infrastructure contributed to the limited communication. The time delay created challenges in communicating with the teacher by phone and limited the communication to primarily emails. Also, the infrastructure limited some parents in their access to the portals, virtual classrooms, and Skype.

Theme Three: School Support

During a military deployment, schools have the opportunity to provide a support structure to both military children and their families. The participants described their child's school as overall supportive. The type of support described included counseling services, being responsive to the parent's emails, and appreciation and acknowledgement of the deployment.

Nicole, Angie, and LeAnn described specific things the school staff did to support their children. For both Nicole and LeAnn their children attended schools where multiple children were experiencing a parental deployment. LeAnn's daughter attended a school near a military base. She felt the school understood the military lifestyle and had support systems in place to help her child. Her daughter attended a weekly support group. In addition to being supportive of

her daughter, she described the school as supportive to her during the deployment; she described their support in the following way:

They were, you know, whatever I needed, they, they were going to try to do it or, you know, keep me informed. So I feel like the school was very helpful or very willing to help in that situation.

Another school that experienced multiple deployments even though there were not located near a military base was Nicole's daughter school. Nicole had similar a similar experience described by LeAnn with regard to the school support toward her and her daughter. There were several students experiencing a parental deployment at the same time of Nicole's daughter. The school acknowledged and integrated the deployment into the classroom setting. Nicole described the acknowledgement and integration in the following way:

They made like little video clips and stuff they would send me. Additionally, the school would put together, her class would put together like boxes and send it to me, you know, um, draw pictures and stuff, and write letters to the soldiers, and I would hand it out for them and stuff.

Acknowledgement of the deployment was a commonality that Angie also experienced with her children's school. For Angie, acknowledgment and recognition by the school staff was very important to her. She talked about how she was recognized with her daughter at the school after returning from her deployment. When she spoke of this experience, it was apparent that she felt a sense of pride in the recognition and was appreciative of the school acknowledging not just her but her daughter. It was like she was more proud that her daughter was introduced with her than her being recognized for her service. It was important to Angie that her daughter was recognized with her and their sacrifices acknowledged. She stated:

I think the thing that meant the most to me was that both of the schools invited me to programs where they could recognize me with my child... stand up in front of the whole school and gave me a certificate of appreciation and this is ... mom and she went to Iraq.

In describing her experience with school support, Christine's children experienced support from the elementary school her younger children attended but did not from the high school her daughter attended. Christine described the school her younger children attended as supportive, "their teachers were always asking questions about me. They were always wondering if everything was okay". She stated it was "almost like hero worship with the younger two". However, she did not feel the high school her daughter attended was supportive and lacked an understanding of the needs of military children during a deployment. The lack of understanding of military deployments emerged as a sub theme for several participants and will be discussed later.

The participants' experiences showed schools who were serving multiple children experiencing a deployment provided more support than the schools with one student affected by a deployment. LeAnn and Nicole's children attended schools that had other children experiencing a deployment. They both described a strong support structure for their children. Schools who serve a limited number of children experiencing parental deployments can still support the soldier and the child through acknowledgment and recognition, as described by Angie for her and her daughter. Audra and Rebecca both described the school as supportive; however, they described incidences of misunderstandings. Melissa was the only participant who did not feel the school was supportive during her deployment, stating, "I did not notice a difference in how they were treated before and during the deployment".

Audra, Rebecca, Christine, and Melissa discussed a lack of understanding or miscommunication with the school staff and felt the school staff lacked knowledge about the effects of a military deployment on children. Therefore, a sub theme of Lack of Understanding of Military Deployments emerged from the interviews.

Lack of understanding of a military deployment. The culture of the military with their customs, vernacular, and the different stages of deployment and training can be confusing to those individuals who are not a part of this culture. School staff members who are not familiar with the military culture may not understand the impact on children, the stages of the deployment cycle, and the limitations of communicating during a military deployment. This was a sentiment expressed by the participants in their discussion of school support. They each started out stating the school was supportive, except Melissa, and then provided an example of where there was a misunderstanding or miscommunication, which could be attributed to a lack of understanding of the military and deployments. For example, the ability of the parent to call at certain times during the day or an understanding of the issues the children are dealing with during the deployment. It is important to note that in the cases of Audra, Christine, Rebecca, and Melissa, their children attended a school with a limited military population.

The participants in this study were all deployed as National Guard soldiers and the lack of understanding by school staff may be especially true with these children due to them attending a school with a limited military population. As in the case of Audra's son, who was the only child at his school experiencing a military deployment; Audra described a misunderstanding with the classroom teacher regarding her two weeks leave. She requested to visit the classroom during her leave but the teacher never called her with a time. The teacher did not understand the different phases of the deployment. Audra states:

She (teacher) did not realize that when I came home on my two weeks of break that I was going back. She thought I, I had come home. When I went in to say goodbye to him and take him to school that morning, I was in uniform, and she started crying. And she came up to me and she said, I didn't know. I didn't know you were going back.

Rebecca had a similar experience with her son's teachers and attending a parent teacher conference and their lack of understanding in her ability to attend the meeting in person. Rebecca's son was experiencing a decrease in his grades. In her communication with the teachers, they would suggest that Rebecca attend a parent teacher conference to discuss the problem and develop a plan to help him. They provided her with the dates of conference and only talked about her attending conferences in person; they never offered other suggestions, such as video conferencing. She describes her conversation with them in the following way:

In discussing ...grades and not completing his assignments, they kept on saying, um, we'd love to meet with you, you know? And they would tell me "we have a parent teacher conference on this day". And I'm, well, I'm in Iraq. I can't quite make that.

Participants also expressed a lack of understanding of the teachers regarding the impact on the children. Christine and Melissa both described feeling that teachers lacked understanding on how to deal with a student experiencing a parental deployment. Christine stated, "I just think there was a lot of, I guess a lack of knowledge on their part as far as the impact that it has on kids." Christine described a situation in which her daughter was going to fail a class over a missed test. The caregiver was unable to take off from work to take her to the doctor and she missed a test due to being sick. Christine stated, "I had to call the school probably five or six different times because she would have failed that class". It took several weeks to clear up the situation due to the teacher only wanting to discuss the situation by phone not email. Christine

felt the teacher should have been aware of the difficulty of the situation with only one caregiver at home. Melissa also felt the teachers did not really understand the impact of a parent being away from the home and felt there was no real support system in place for children during the deployment. She stated:

The administration and, teachers in general don't have any, they don't really have a true grasp on what a deployment involves and probably the behavioral and the challenges that the kids are going through. They don't really seem to have a support system in place at the schools. I saw no real difference in how my children were treated during the deployment versus before the deployment.

As previously stated, Nicole and Leann's children attended schools where other children in the school were experiencing a parental deployment. These two instances serve as exceptions concerning this sub theme. Leann's daughter attended a school near a large military installation that experienced frequent deployments, "my stepdad, retired from the Marines, so he was by a Marine base and the Marines deploy all the time so it is a very much military path". Although Nicole's daughter's school is not located near a military installation she reported several students with deployed parents at the time of her deployment. "As a matter of fact, our regimental commander, um, he was deployed, and his children go to the same school as my child. And I know there were a few others". The multiple students experiencing military deployments at the same time may have contributed to the extra support these schools provided to military parents and the reason Nicole and Leann did not relate with this sub theme.

During the participants' discussion on school support, the participants were asked how schools could help military families during a deployment. Each participant discussed the importance of communicating with the deployed soldier and providing a status update on how

the child was dealing with the deployment from the school's perspective. They each described a desire to know how their child was functioning in the school environment and the importance of making caregivers aware of any changes in the child's behavior. A sub theme of status update emerged during their discussion on school support.

Status update. Each participant expressed the importance of the school providing a status update or making the parent aware of any changes in the child's behavior. The participants in this study were made aware of issues their children were dealing with because of the deployment from other family members or other individuals not connected to the school. In Christine's case, she was made aware of the issues through social media postings that were brought to her by her commander. The participants felt it was important for the school staff to be observant and alert regarding issues related to the deployment but also provide the parent an update on how their child was functioning in the school environment. It was apparent during the discussion that all participants believed a status update from school staff was an important communication piece during a military deployment.

As previously stated, Audra communicated with her child daily during her deployment. She felt it was important for the teacher to make parents aware of any changes in the child that they see at school. She stated:

I would ask them to make sure that they, if they see any difference in that child's behavior, in that child's schoolwork, in that child's reactions to things that's different from when they first met them, to let that parent know, good or bad. Anything that the teacher observes because the teacher spends more time with him and any feedback is greatly appreciated because the teacher gets to see everything. How they're interacting

with kids. How they're interacting with other adults. How they're, you know, do they sit alone at lunch? Do they not? That sort of thing.

Rebecca felt it was important for the school staff to pay special attention to children who are experiencing a parental deployment. She also feels it is important to notify the parents so they may intervene to offset any negative effects. Specifically, she stated "the school needs to look out for those children, if they start to come in withdrawn and that's when they need to make the caregiver aware of the changes".

Angie also felt it was important for the teachers to notice changes in children's behavior and to alert the parent's to these changes. She spoke directly about her own children regarding the status update. She stated:

I think it would be nice if they at least tried to figure out okay, well, this if child is struggling just a little bit, why? Why is it that this semester they were fine and just watch their mannerisms and who they're hanging out with, you know? I mean, I don't expect them to raise my child. That's one thing I've always said, but I would like to know of any changes especially in high school, that's like a critical, forming point of who they're going to become.

Angie felt if she was made aware of changes or problems, she could intervene and alleviate a negative impact for her child. Specifically, she discussed a situation with her daughter's grades dropping during her deployment. She learned about the decline in grades from her daughter's father. She was able to call her daughter and discuss the issue and develop a plan for improving the grades. Angie believes that problems can be addressed and alleviated if the deployed parents are made aware of the situation.

Christine also discussed the importance of a status update and how it could have helped with her situation with her daughters. When asked about what the school could have done to help her during the deployment, Christine's response centered on awareness about her children's behavior and social interaction at school. She stated:

And I think, another thing that they could have really done that probably would have helped me is a more personal assessment as to what the kids are doing and as far as their emotional adjustment went. Their grades didn't change, but I would have liked to know were they interacting differently with their friends? Were they carrying different friends? Because my oldest daughter she did. She went from one whole group of kids who they were just squared away students over to this other little group who were just little who were just little, you know, I'm going to go out and party and drink and, you know, live life.

A personal assessment may have assisted Christine in addressing the emotional needs of her children before reaching a critical point. If she had been aware that her daughter was acting depressed, she may have been able to intervene before it reached the point of suicidal thoughts.

Melissa and LeAnn both discussed how the school staff could provide a support structure that alerted parents of any problems their children were having as a result of the deployment. Melissa suggested using school psychologists to serve as an intermediary to determine if issues are being missed by the caregivers and alert the caregivers of the issues. She stated:

The psychologist could sit down with each of the student or each of the kids and just kind of talk with them, see if there might be something they could pick up on that other people may not and just hey, if you need anything, we're here for you.

She felt by establishing this relationship early, the psychologist may notice changes that the caregiver is missing that could be addressed early instead of waiting until after the deployment.

Leann described learning from her daughter that “she cried a lot during the deployment” which she was unaware until after she returned from the deployment. She had contacted her daughter’s teacher during the deployment for an update on how her daughter was doing. She described the importance of being able to contact the teacher and to hear that her daughter was doing well. LeAnn believes that parent contact with the teacher and a status update on the child is extremely important for parents. She stated:

So I think, you know, just having a, an email that the parent can email the school, and, you know, have somebody return those emails, I think, is super important. And I think, even just being able to, for the parents to call and just speak with somebody and hear that their child is doing good, I think that’s pretty important as well.

In summary, the participants had frequent contact with their children during the deployment. However, a disconnection from the day-to-day experiences existed for them. Although the participants had access to the Internet to communicate with the school through email and the online school portals, there was still a lack of situational awareness with the school environment concerning their child. Participants were not aware of their child’s behavior, social interactions, and academic progress. They each described wanting to be alerted about any changes in their child’s emotional well-being, changes in their social group, and academics. Additionally, they desired for the school staff to regularly check with their child to see how they were handling the deployment. They felt the school could provide a status update that could help them be aware and resolve any issues.

Theme Four: Lack of Understanding and Feelings of Helplessness

As previously stated, a military deployment is a stressor for military families that can affect a child's psychological, emotional, and social behavior (Esqueda & De Pedro, 2011; White et al., 2011). The participants in this study discussed academic, emotional, and behavioral issues their child experienced during the deployment. Several participants described a specific incident where their child either struggled academically, emotionally, or experienced changes in their behavior. It was apparent that the participants struggled with trying to understand the changes and how they could help their child, which in turn created a feeling of helplessness. A theme of Lack of Understanding and Feelings of Helplessness emerged from the discussion on school support and a status update. It was apparent their feelings of helplessness were the result of their lack of understanding of the challenges their child faced and their inability to be at home to help the child resolve the challenge.

For some participants, this lack of understanding and feeling of helplessness was related to behavioral or academic changes in their child. Audra described her son as very distant with her during her deployment even though she communicated with him daily. She described an instance where she learned from her father how upset her son was over her deployment, and her feeling of helplessness. She states:

He didn't talk to me very much. I'll never forget, and this is not related to the school side, but to just the communication side, my sister was a little worried about... because he was taking a shower, but he was taking a little longer than normal. And she went in to check on him, and he was crying in the shower, and that was how he was trying to deal with it, by himself... and didn't know that he could talk to my sister and talk to my

parents. And 6,000 miles away when your dad is telling you that, the first thing you want to do is get on a plane and come home.

To address her feeling of helplessness regarding the situation, Audra searched for online resources to help her to get him to open up to her. This also enabled her to understand more clearly her son's anger over the deployment and ways to help him.

I realized how much I needed, I needed to do more. So I started doing research, and the only thing I could think of was what resources online do I have being all the way over here? Because I don't have books available to me. I can't go and, go to a library, or go, so what do I have online? And that's when I found Military OneSource and that whole area, and found things I could say to him while I was on the phone with him.

Rebecca also experienced a feeling of helplessness concerning her son's grades and difficulty communicating with his father and the school. Her son's father sued her for custody when she deployed and this made communication with her son and his father difficult. She described her frustration over the situation and feelings of helplessness in the following way:

Do you know how frustrating this is for me to sit in Iraq and not be able to do anything physically, tangibly, to, you know, make a trip to Virginia and talk to him (son) saying you really have to focus on this? It was just a very hard time. It's like your hands are tied behind your back, you just get so frustrated that these are easy fixes that his dad wouldn't listen to. And then you try to talk to the school and the school's, like, well we can't make him come to tutoring or we can't make him turn in his assignments. You know, it was just a very frustrating, helpless time.

Melissa experienced similar feelings of lack of understanding related to her children's academic progress and behavior at school. This feeling may have been exacerbated by the fact

that she had no communication with the school staff and learned about the issues from a family member. After returning from her deployment, she learned that her daughters had a learning disability, which contributed to their academic challenges during her deployment. She believed her daughters could have done better academically if the learning disability had been discovered and if her daughters had not been distracted by her deployment. Melissa's son experienced some behavioral issues in class during her deployment. The academic and behavioral challenges her children experienced alluded to a lack of understanding and a feeling of helplessness. She described the situation with her children in the following way:

I know they could have done better on different things and they found a learning disability from them later. So, the girls were more distracted. My son was more behavioral; acting out and just being argumentative and just showing out more. My mom is a teacher. She didn't teach at the same school, but, somehow, sometimes it would get back to her... and I'd hear about it.

Christine's daughters experienced emotional and behavioral issues during the deployment. One of Christine's daughters suffered from depression and suicidal thoughts. She learned about this through social media. Christine's ex-husband was the primary caregiver during the deployment and her daughter did not get along with her father. Christine's described her other daughter as having "a complete personality flip". Her daughter changed the way she looked, acted, and her group of friends. She described the changes in her daughters in the following way:

My oldest daughter, she went from being, a goodie two-shoe, all A's, did everything like she was supposed to do all the time by the letter. She was always like the role model to she still got the great grades but she wore excessive amounts of makeup, and she dressed

really slutty, and just everything changed. She went from being I'm never going to date, I'm going to go to college, I'm going to do this, everything's going to be planned out, I'm never having kids, I'm never doing any of that to by the time I got back she was all about boys... everything was all about boys. I don't know if that was because her dad was there and her dad dates around a lot, or because that's what typical fourteen-year-old girls do. My sixteen year old she went through a, I guess you could call it like a real depressed stage. She's usually very self-confident. She owns the room when she's in it and she's very intelligent. But then when I was gone, her and her dad didn't really get along very well and she like got really depressed and to the point of suicidal and just upset all the time.

It became apparent in her description of her daughters; she was searching for a reason or looking for understating to explain the changes in their behavior and actions. Christine's experienced a feeling of helplessness in trying to understand the changes in daughters. Later in the interview, Christine talked about how the school could have made her aware of the changes which may have helped her to intervene early and prevent any negative effects associated with the changes.

Angie's also described a feeling of helplessness related to her children during the deployment. Although the feeling was related more to her not being at home, instead of the feelings of not understanding described by Christine or the feeling of not being able to fix the problems like Audra and Rebecca. She described a situation where her daughter needed her and she was unable to be there with her. It was apparent during the interview this situation really bothered Angie and that she felt completely helpless in the situation. In discussing the situation, Angie described feeling alone and having no one to talk to, even though; she was living in a barracks with 50 other women. She described the situation in the following way:

My daughter started her menstrual cycle while I was deployed and that was, that was probably the hardest thing. I'm sitting here and I'm like, I just want to go home to my baby. She needed Mom at that very moment and I couldn't, there was nothing I could do. I couldn't have gone home if I wanted to.

The feeling of lack of understanding and helplessness also resonated with LeAnn in regards to her communication with her daughter. She had no control over the frequency of the contact with her daughter due to issues with the caregiver and the lack of infrastructure described in an earlier theme. She stated, "I hadn't talk to my daughter at home and, you know, that's because of my mom, but I was just really going crazy". LeAnn emailed her teacher to check on her and was informed "she was, was doing well and that the support group seemed to help". This contact with the teacher helped LeAnn deal with her feelings and provided her a status update on her daughter. This alleviated LeAnn's concerns over her daughter's well-being and provided LeAnn with the knowledge she needed to understand how the deployment was affecting her daughter.

Nicole was the one participant that did not describe experiencing any feelings of helplessness during her deployment. This may be attributed to the support she and her child received from the school. She described the school as being "proactive in, I guess, supportive of the military". This support provided her daughter with a secure supportive environment at school where Nicole described the teacher "as her stand in parent". Nicole's description of the teacher as a "stand in parent" provided Nicole the security and assurance that her child would receive the necessary support from the school to alleviate any issues resulting from the deployment.

Summary

This chapter discussed the results of this study regarding the phenomenon of maternal communication with school staff during a deployment. Four distinct themes emerged during the data analysis of this study related to the research questions. The theme of school connection described participants' parental involvement prior to deployment and how they connected the caregiver to the school. The theme of technology-based communication described the communication with school staff during the deployment. A sub theme of limited communication type and frequency was discussed along with challenges. The theme of school support described how schools supported both the participant and their child during the deployment. A lack of understanding of military deployments emerged as a sub theme along with the desire and the importance of a status update. The lack of understanding by the school staff and the lack of status update impacted the participants feeling of support at the schools. Additionally, the fourth theme, lack of situational understanding and feelings of helplessness, described how participants struggled with understanding the issues faced by their child and how to help their child resolve the issues. This theme was exposed during the discussion on school support and the sub theme of status update. The four themes describe the experiences of female soldiers communicating with school staff. Findings from this study provide new insight regarding maternal communication during a deployment.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

This study focused on describing the experiences of maternal soldiers in communicating with school staff during a military deployment. A transcendental phenomenological research design was used in order to explore the lived experiences of the deployed maternal soldiers. Purposeful and snowball sampling were used to ensure participants had experienced the phenomenon of a maternal deployment. A focus group was conducted with school staff members prior to the deployment. The primary purpose of the focus group was to gain an understanding of how staff members communicated with military parents and to aid in the development of questions for the maternal soldier participant interviews. A parental involvement questionnaire was used to gain an understanding of the maternal soldier participants' level of parental involvement prior to the deployment. Individual interviews were conducted with the maternal soldier participants to convey their experience in communicating with school staff during the deployment. This chapter provides a summary of findings in relation to prior research, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The data from the focus group showed that the school staff communicated more with the non-deployed parent than the deployed parent. The school district offered online services such as an online portal, which allowed the deployed parent the opportunity to access grades, behavior reports, and live streaming of events such as graduation. Maternal soldier interview questions gained from the focus group related to access to a parent portal and communication between the school, the parent, and the caregiver.

Data from the parental involvement questionnaire and the individual interviews were used to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers with the phenomenon of communicating with school staff during a military deployment. Based on this data, four themes emerged that helped to describe the experiences of the deployed maternal soldiers in communicating with school staff: School Connection, Technology-Based Communication, School Support, and Lack of Situational Understanding and Feelings of Helplessness. Additionally, six subthemes emerged to help describe and provide an essence of their experiences with the phenomenon. Parental involvement and connecting the caregiver were sub themes that emerged from the School Connection theme. Two sub themes emerged from School Support: Lack of Understanding of Military Deployments and Status Update. Limited communication and challenges emerged as sub themes related to the theme of Technology Based Communication.

In discussing their experience communicating with school staff prior to the deployment, each participant described a connection to the school environment. This connection to the school environment encompassed one of the six types of parental involvement related to Epstein's Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1995). The types of parental involvement used to connect to the school involved communicating with the teacher and volunteering at the school. Participants described attending parent teachers conferences, communicating with the teacher on a weekly or monthly basis, and some volunteered at the school assisting with fundraising or attending special events. Prior to leaving for their deployment, the participants connected the primary caregiver during the deployment to the school. They connected the caregiver to the school through notification with deployment paperwork, providing contact information, and in some cases introducing the caregiver to the teacher. The connection to the school environment assisted the caregiver and parent in establishing a two-way communication process with the school

environment, which allowed for a smooth transition from the deploying parent to the caregiver in regards to school related activities.

In describing their experience in communicating with school staff during the deployment, technology-based communication methods were a prominent theme. The participants communicated with the school staff primarily using technology-based devices. For example, e-mail was the primary method used by the participants to communicate with teachers. Although the advancement in technology-based communication devices should have provided the participants with a variety of opportunities and ways to communicate with the school, their communication was limited by type and frequency.

Technology-based communication was an important aspect in communicating with their children and family members. The participants described using a variety of methods to include Skype, V-texting, and email. However, email was the prominent method used to communicate with the school staff. The challenges with time delay and infrastructure affected their communication with both their family and the school staff; however, communication with family members was a top priority whereas communication with the school staff was not.

The participants viewed the school environment as a source of support for their child during the deployment. Participants expected the school staff to be on alert of any changes in their child's behavior and intervene to assist the child in dealing with issues related to the deployment. They did not expect special treatment for their child but just an acknowledgement that their child may be affected by the deployment. Nicole and LeAnn both described types of support offered to their child during their deployment. The types of support described included a support group and integrating the deployment into the class setting. The schools their children

attended had multiple children experiencing a military deployment either prior or during their deployment.

Several of the participants felt the school staff lacked an understanding of military deployments and how this affected children. Audra, Rebecca, Christine, and Melissa described experiences where there was a misunderstanding or miscommunication related to the teacher's lack of knowledge or understanding of military deployments. In these cases, the child was attending a school where no military child attended or had a limited military child population. The lack of understanding described by these participants could be attributed to the school's lack of experience in working with a military population. The schools were not located near military installations and primarily served limited numbers of military children from the National Guard or reserve.

In relation to school support, participants wanted the school staff to provide a status update on their child. They wanted to be alerted about any changes in behavior, academics, or socially. The participants were disconnected from their children's daily lives, even though, most communicated with their children on a daily basis. Several participants described emotional, behavioral, or academic issues their child faced during the deployment. The status update would allow the participants to be more aware of issues their child faced and help them to intervene to alleviate any serious consequences. Each participant discussed the importance of being aware of how her child is doing during the deployment and how schools can help military parents by providing them an update on their child.

Finally, the participants described a lack of situational understanding concerning issues faced by their child, which led to feelings of helplessness during the deployment. It became apparent the participants struggled with helping their child deal with the deployment from a

distance. The participants had to rely on communication from others and their perceptions in order to be aware and understand the issues. This contributed to their feelings of helplessness as well as their absence from the home environment.

Discussion

This study was framed using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory describes how the nesting structures interrelate in the life of a child. The home environment (mesosystem), the school (exosystem), and the military culture (macrosystem) all interrelate and influence the child. The school environment can work with the home environment and the military to positively support a child experiencing a military deployment. As stated earlier, some participants felt the school staff lacked an understanding of military deployment, which is part of the military culture. It is imperative for school staff to understand the military culture and communicate with the home environment including the deployed parent to avoid a negative impact on the child.

Additionally, the spheres of influence theory by Epstein et al. (2011) served as a framework for this study. This theory discusses how the home, the school, and the community influence a child's learning through parental involvement (2011). In this study, participants described their level and type of parental involvement prior to the deployment. Communication with the teacher is one of the six types of involvement described by Epstein. The participants described their experiences in communicating with teachers during the deployment. Although technology-based communication methods were available, communication was limited during the deployment. The communication was initiated by the participants and was primarily email.

Four themes emerged during the data analysis of this study, providing a description of how maternal soldiers communicated with school staff before and during a military deployment.

Research concerning maternal military deployments has focused on the effects of a maternal deployment on children. There was no study that focused primarily on the maternal soldier's communication with school staff during a deployment. As such, this study has served to fill a gap in the literature.

Connection to the School Environment

Parent involvement. There has been substantial research to support the positive effects of parental involvement. Epstein (1995) identified six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, collaboration, and decision-making. The maternal soldiers in this study each had a connection to the school environment that encompassed one or more of the six types described by Epstein et al. Participants varied in their frequency and type of parental involvement with the school environment. Their involvement and connection to the school environment included attending parent/teacher conferences, volunteering at the school, written and verbal correspondence with the teacher, and visiting the school for special events.

This connection was important because parental involvement is so strongly linked with student success. Several studies cited in Chapter Two linked student achievement, student motivation, and overall school satisfaction with parental involvement (Gonzalez-De Hass et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2012; Mo & Singh, 2008; Rogers et al., 2009). The connection to the school environment provided the participants the opportunity to intervene and avoid any negative impact on their child's academic success. All participants described their children as academically strong with no significant impact academically during the deployment. However, Rebecca and Melissa reported a slight decline in their child's grades. Rebecca had a delay in communication with the school and only started communicating with them halfway through the

deployment. Melissa had no communication with the school staff during the deployment. Findings from this study support the prior research on the positive influence parental involvement has on academic achievement.

Connecting caregivers. Military personnel with children are required to have a family care plan. Family care plans are legal documents defining who has the legal responsibilities of caring for a child during a parental absence. This includes logistical, financial, legal, and medical arrangements for the children in the parent's absence (Fitzgerald, et al., 2013). The father assumed the responsibilities of caring for the child or children in the case of four participants in this study. For the other three participants, family members assumed the responsibility including grandparents, a sister, and a niece.

The process for connecting the caregivers and alerting the school involved the same type of procedures for the participants. Deployment paperwork was provided to each school and contact information was provided for the caregiver. The selection of a caregiver that will be supportive is vital for military children because an emotionally supportive caregiver helps build the child's resiliency (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013). By connecting the caregiver to the school environment, continuity was encouraged between the home and school environment. School staff not being aware of a parent's deployment was a concern expressed by participants in a study by Bailem (2011). However, the school's lack of awareness of the deployment was not consistent with this study. The maternal soldiers made all schools aware of the deployment.

Theme 2: Technology Based Communication

The communication methods used by participants to interact with both the school and home environment centered on technology based types of communication. The types described by participants during their deployment included email, Skype, online parent portals, and texting.

The primary method used to communicate with school staff was email. Communication with school staff prior to the deployment consisted of more face-to-face interactions such as parent teacher conferences and visits to the school.

Prior research cited supports the findings of this study with technology based communication playing an important role in how the participants communicated with the school and home environment. Lester and Flake (2013) found that technology-based communication played an important role in family communication with 88 percent of families using a type of technology, such as email or social media, to connect with a deployed family member. This study demonstrates the importance technology-based communication not only as it relates to family communication but also with school communication.

Limited communication. The participants' communication with school staff in this study was limited by frequency and type. Five of the participants communicated with teachers through email and three participants had access to parent portals. The participants who communicated through email had limited correspondence, and they initiated communication. However, they felt the teacher was responsive to their emails. One participant also communicated with a teacher via phone calls, although that was not the participant's preferred choice, and this type of communication was difficult. This study found that communication was limited during the deployment even though technology based communication was available. The participants described more traditional methods prior to the deployment and this may have played a role in their limited communication with school staff. Rogers & Wright (2008) found that in relation to school communication parents rely on more traditional methods of communicating such as, phone calls, newsletters, and parent teacher conferences. Also, three participants had access to parent portals, which may have limited the need to communicate more

frequently. The parent portals provided them with information regarding their child's grades, attendance, and discipline reports. Rebecca, Samantha, and Nicole used the portals primarily to access grades.

Participants maintained parental involvement with the school through email communication and access to school portals during the deployment. The participants in this study initiated the communication with the teacher and the teacher was responsive to the communication; however, the teacher did not initiate communication with the deployed parent. The lack of initiated communication by teacher may be related to several factors, such as, the increasing responsibilities of classroom teachers related to state assessments, the comfort level of the teacher using email to correspond with the deployed parent, and the teacher's perception of the parent's ability to communicate from a combat zone. Teachers may feel the deployed parents' communication priority is with family members and they do not want to interfere with the parent communicating with their family.

The connection to the school environment can be described as both initiated and maintained by the participants. This coincides with research by Baliem (2011), which showed that military parents feel it is important to maintain contact with the school environment, and that the main form of communication between the deployed parent and the school occurred through email which supports finding from this study. Also, the desire of the participants for a status update from school staff coincides with findings by Custer (2014) in supporting the need to stay connected during a military deployment. "Communication during the deployment was important in establishing roles for the deployed mother, the child, and the caregiver" (Custer, 2014, p.169). It was important for the participants to maintain the parental role by intervening and assisting the child with the issue.

Challenges: Time delay and infrastructure. Studies related to the communication of deployed service members have focused on the communication with family members with limited research on communication with school staff. In a study by Durham (2013), soldiers described experiences in communicating with family members. The themes that emerged were related to connecting with family, understanding communication, technology based communication, and infrastructure. The lack of infrastructure to support technology-based communication was a common theme discussed by the maternal participants in this study. This demonstrates the importance of technology-based communication and the desire soldiers have for updates so they can remain engaged in the child's life during a deployment. The lack of infrastructure described by the participants included no phones or Internet connection.

Theme 2: School Support

This study found that that the maternal soldiers viewed the school as supportive during their deployment. The school environment provided the children with supportive services such as access to counselors. In addition, teachers were viewed as a source of support for the child by being aware of changes in their behavior and talking to them about the deployment. However, two subthemes emerged, lack of understanding of military deployments and status update.

Lack of understanding of military deployments. This sub theme coincides with previous research and recently conducted studies concerning deployed soldiers and parental involvement. Previously cited research show that school personnel felt many teachers and counselors are not prepared to deal with deployment issues and needed special training in dealing with military students (Mmari et al., 2009). A study related to the parental involvement of soldiers dealing with multiple deployments also noted that parents and caregivers expressed the need for training of school staff on issues faced by military students (Bailem, 2011). The

participants in this study felt school staff lacked knowledge related to deployments and expressed the need for training or information to better prepare the schools for working with children and parents experiencing a military deployment. LeAnn was an exception because her daughter attended a school that was near a military base, and she felt the school staff was prepared to deal with children experiencing a military deployment. Her daughter attended a school that offered a support group for children dealing a parental deployment.

Status update. The participants wanting to be informed about their child's emotional and social state during the deployment was a prominent sub-theme in this study. The interaction with their child during the deployment did not provide them with information from the school environment about the child's behavior and emotional and social functioning. Additionally, the participants were seeking information to help them understand the emotional and behavioral changes their children experienced during their deployment. Each participant felt it would have been beneficial for the school to provide a status update to deployed parents regarding their child. The update should focus on social and emotional aspects, not just academics.

Communication during the deployment plays a key role during the reintegration phase. By providing the status update, school staff can assist the deployed parent and the child prepare for the post deployment phase. Communication helps the parent to stay informed and helps the child accept the parent back after the deployment (Greene, Buckman, Dandeker, & Greenburg, 2010). In providing this update, schools help deployed parents intervene before problems arise and help the post-deployment transition. Every parent has a desire to be informed about his or her child; this desire is greater for parents who are absent due to a military deployment. The participants lacked the daily interactions at home with their child, and this caused a lack of

awareness of the day-to-day issues their children were facing both in the home and school environment.

Theme Four: Lack of Situational Understanding and Feelings of Helplessness

Some participants in this study described behavioral, academic, and emotional challenges their children faced during the deployment. The theme of lack of situational understanding emerged during their description of the issues and their need to understand the cause of the problem. It was apparent the participants struggled to understand the cause of the challenge and how to help their child. This struggle resulted in feelings of helplessness for some of the participants. The status update from the school staff may have helped the participants to understand the challenges their children were facing and helped them to intervene to avoid any negative effects.

The frequent communication with the home environment provided the participants with awareness of the challenges faced by their child. This can be stressful for a deployed soldier because they are unable to interact with their child in the home environment. Research shows a deployment “may be particularly stressful for some military mothers who must manage their family responsibilities from afar; potentially exposing female members to the dual stress associated with both warzone and family-related concerns” (Street et al., 2009, p. 691) which may be intensified by the ease of communication. The communication with family members and their children provided the participants with awareness of challenges. However, this awareness of family issues, and their inability to physically come home to address the issues resulted in feelings of helplessness for most of the participants.

Communication during a deployment allows family to maintain connections but brings family problems to the war zone (Lester & Flake, 2013). In communicating with family

members, participants were made aware of challenges their children were dealing with during the deployment. This awareness prompted a need to understand and feelings of helplessness in some participants.

Implications

This study provided maternal soldiers the opportunity to describe their experiences in communicating with school staff during a deployment. This study is significant because it identified a gap in the research regarding maternal soldiers and school communication. The information gained from this research has implications for parents, schools, and the military in maintaining communication with the school environment during a parental absence such as a military deployment.

Implications for Parents

This study demonstrated the importance of a parental connection to the school environment. The participants in this study described how they connected to the school environment prior to a military deployment and during the deployment. Technology-based communication played an important role in connecting and remaining connected to the school environment. Parents who are unable to attend school functions can still be a part of the school environment by accessing school portals and communicating with the teacher via email. It is important for parents to access technology based communication with the school staff during an absence to ensure they continue to be part of the school environment.

Implications for Schools

This study demonstrates the need parents have for information from the school regarding the well-being of their child both academically and emotionally. Participants in this study expressed a desire for a status update on their child from the teacher. A report card did not

provide them with enough information regarding their child's interactions in the school environment. They wanted to know more about how the child was functioning on a daily basis in the school environment. This was especially important for the participants who were not interacting with their child on a daily basis in the home environment. A feeling of helplessness was described by most of the participants and awareness may help to alleviate the feeling of helplessness. Teachers and other school staff members who work with deployed parents should provide parents feedback regarding not only academic progress but social and emotional updates on the child. This type of update increases the parent's connection to the school environment and to the child. The status update provides parents the opportunity to promptly address any serious emotional or behavioral issues that may arise from the parent's absence.

Implications for the Military

This study demonstrated the need for the military to have a technology-based infrastructure available to soldiers during a deployment. By providing a technology-based infrastructure, soldiers have the opportunity to maintain communication with the school environment. The participants described using email, online parent portals, and cell phones to communicate with teachers. Participants also described using Skype to communicate with family members. This type of technology could be used by parents and schools to allow deployed soldiers to participate in classroom activities and parent teacher conferences. Military commanders need to be aware of the availability of these types of technology-based communication methods to allow and encourage soldiers to access video conferencing with teachers and participate in classroom activities.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The participants experienced a military deployment with a guard or reserve component. This study did not include any female soldiers who were active duty military. A study that only included active duty maternal soldiers may provide a different perspective on how schools communicate with deployed parents. The public and Department of Defense schools that serve military installations may have a structured support system for military children because of the transition issues experienced by children of active duty service members. As noted in this study, an exception existed with the two participants who had children that attended schools with other children experiencing a military deployment. These participants felt the school provided a strong support structure for their child and did not experience some of the challenges noted with the other participants in communicating with school staff.

A second limitation to this study is all participants were from the same geographical location and were deployed during the same time frame. A study that provided a more diverse population from different geographical regions and different time frames may demonstrate a more broad view of how schools communicate with deployed military parents. Results from this study have limited transferability due to the geographical limitation and time frame concerning the deployment.

A third limitation to this study was the demographics of the participants. All participants were Caucasian and were female. Participants of diverse ethnic backgrounds may provide a different perspective in how they communicated with school staff. Additionally, paternal soldiers were not included and their perspective in communicating with the school is another

limitation of this study. The participants in this study were diverse in their marital status and rank in the military.

Finally, all participants were mothers, and only the perspective of the maternal soldier was described in this study. Input from family members and school staff was not solicited for this study. Perspectives from other family members and the school staff would have provided a more holistic picture of the communication during the deployment. Several additional themes emerged in the data analysis that had to be discounted because they were not related to school communication but were more related to how the family communicated with each other during the deployment.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, I will discuss recommendations for future research based on the themes from the data analysis of the questionnaire, interviews, and the focus group. Additionally, recommendations for military leaders, school personnel, and parents will be discussed to help improve communication with deployed soldiers and the school environment. The recommendations for military leaders, school personnel, and parents were gathered from the participant interviews, specifically from their responses concerning advice for schools, deploying parents, and military leaders.

Maternal involvement and communication with the school environment was described in this study. A study that focused on the involvement of paternal soldiers would provide a unique perspective in describing their connection to the school environment prior to the deployment and how they connected caregivers to the school and notified the school of the deployment. Many of the studies cited in Chapter Two regarding parental involvement examined the role of the mother on student success (Rogers et al., 2009; Jeynes, 2012; McBride et al., 2009). A study that

focused on the male perspective of involvement may provide insight into a father's effect on student success.

In this study, the maternal soldier notified the school of the deployment. It is important for schools to be aware of military-connected children so they can provide the necessary support services. It is imperative to identify military connected children in schools. A study exploring how states are identifying military connected children would shed light on this issue and help determine if services are being provided to these students during a deployment and after to address any issues related to the deployment. .

Currently, there is no consistent reporting method of military-connected students within a district. The Military Dependent Student Identifier Amendment will identify these students, allowing districts to track them and offer quality resources. The amendment, offered by Nevada Representative Joe Heck, was added to the Student Success Act in a unanimous bipartisan voice on February 11, 2015. (Military Child Education Coalition, 2015)

A national military identifier system would ensure that military connected children receive the necessary support structure in schools to deal with such issues as deployments, transitions, and the impact of war-related injuries of their parents.

Additional research is needed regarding technology-based communication that focuses on the preferred method of communication by parents and teachers. By exploring how each group prefers to communicate during a parental absence, barriers could be identified and eliminated prior to the parent's absence. Parents and teachers may differ in the way they wish to communicate during a parental absence. Therefore, a study that examined each preference could shed light on issues related to technology based parental communication.

Participants in this study all deployed with guard or reserve unit and for most of the participants, their child was the only child in the school experiencing a parental deployment. A study that examines the differences between schools with an active duty population versus guard or reserve population may provide insight into the school's support structure. Schools serving the guard or reserve may only have one student in the school experiencing a deployment. Chandra et al. (2010) noted social isolation and lack of military experience for these children. A study exploring the differences between the schools may provide strategies that could eliminate the social isolation felt by National Guard or reserve children.

Additionally, several participants in this study expressed the schools' lack of understanding of military deployments. A case study exploring how schools serve and support military families would provide best practices that could be used by other schools to develop programs supporting military families during times of transition and military deployments. The school used in this study for the focus group is an example of a school district that should be explored as a case study. The district provided several opportunities for deployed military service members to remain connected to the school environment. For example, the parent portal not only provided access to student grades but could also be accessed to watch live streaming of graduation and other school events.

During the course of the analysis, several participants eluded to feelings of helplessness to assist with situations at home and at school. Most participants communicated with their children at least weekly and often times on a daily basis. A study that explored feelings of helplessness could provide insight into issues maternal soldiers are facing during a deployment concerning their families. The information gained from this type of study could assist military leaders in providing support services to help soldiers deal with these issues, as in the case with

Angie who was experiencing feelings of helplessness but felt she had no support structure while deployed to help her deal with this issue.

Recommendations for Military Leaders, School Personnel, and Parents

During the interview process, each participant was asked to provide advice to military leaders, school personnel, and parents dealing with a military deployment. The participants used their personal experiences or the experiences of others to discuss best practices and offer suggestions to improve services offered during a deployment. Below is a summary of the recommendations for each group.

All participants felt overall the military was doing a good job supporting soldiers during and after a deployment. It was recommended that the post deployment activities allow them more time with their families instead of immediately going through the necessary briefings that come at 30, 60, and 90 days post deployment. Several stated it was difficult to concentrate on the information being provided pre-deployment and post-deployment concerning programs for families because of the desire to spend time with their families. In addition, they recommended the family readiness groups become more involved with the children instead of the spouses. They suggested the family readiness groups interact more with schools to provide services to the children experiencing a deployment.

Overall, the participants felt the schools were supportive. Several participants suggested having Skype available to the children during the school day so they could avoid the challenges with the time delay. Additionally, Skype could be used for conferences with the teacher, since most communication with the teacher was through email. Also, the participants suggested training of school staff regarding the effects of military deployments on children.

Participants felt it was important to start preparing their child, the caregivers, and the school early for the deployment. They felt it was important to openly discuss the deployment with children in an effort to take the misconceptions out of the situation. They advised involving the child in the preparation by explaining the location and the deploying parent's job during the deployment. One participant even described going through practice scenarios with her husband in caring for the children. Preparation was the predominant advice the participants had for female soldiers prior to a deployment.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of maternal soldiers in communicating with school staff during a deployment. The experience of maternal soldiers and parental involvement, specifically school communication, was an identified area of need after an extensive literature search. This study provided a personal account of seven maternal soldiers' experiences in communicating with school staff during a military deployment. The qualitative design allowed the researcher to probe more deeply into the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon. The study identified four common themes among the participants. The information gained from this study can be used by educational and military leaders to help maintain the connection between the deploying soldier and the school environment.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Flier

Carolyn Davis, a doctoral student at Liberty University seeks participants in a study that examines family-school communication between maternal soldiers and school staff during a deployment. This study seeks a school staff member who worked directly with a student who experienced a maternal deployment within the past two years to participate in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to gather information regarding maternal communication and involvement with the school during a military deployment. Participants in the focus group will receive a \$20.00 gift card. If you are interested in participating in the focus group please email Carolyn Davis at cjdavistn@msn.com

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 5, 2014

Carolyn Davis
IRB Approval 1849.060514: Maternal Communication with School Staff during a
Deployment: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Carolyn,


We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,




Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling



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Appendix C

Approval Letter



NOT IN TAG


18 September 2014

To prospective participants of the Military Department of Tennessee

Mrs. Carolyn Davis is a doctoral candidate, and is conducting research for her dissertation. She has my full support and approval to approach members of the Tennessee National Guard to request their acquiesce and participation. I have studied her research project and am fully aware of the content, how it will be used as anonymous data, and how the results will be shared to help understand and benefit female veterans, with children, who have experienced a deployment.

If selected, your participation in this research study is highly encouraged. I feel it is important that we, as a Guard Family, do what we can to help enhance our understanding of our families in regard to deployments.

Sincerely,


 PERRY M. HASTON
 Major General
 Tennessee National Guard

Appendix D

Parental Involvement Questionnaire

Thank you for participating and completing this questionnaire.
This survey is a modification of the original Fast Track version of the measure.

1. Are you a U.S. Veteran?

Note: For the purpose of this study, a U.S. Veteran is defined as anyone who has served on active duty, in any job capacity, while a member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard active components or of the National Guard or Reserves, regardless of discharge status.

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. In which branch (or branches) of the U.S. military have you served?

☐ Army

☐ Navy

☐ Air Force

☐ Marines

☐ National Guard or Reserve

☐ Coast Guard

3. Did you experience a deployment within the past five years?

☐ Did you experience a deployment within the past five years? Yes

☐ No

4. Were you the parent of a school-aged child during your deployment?

☐ Were you the parent of a school-aged child during your deployment? Yes

☐ No

5. Considering the year prior to the deployment, please indicate the best answer that completes the statement:

	Never	Once or Twice Per Year	Almost Every Month	Almost Every Week	More Than Once Per Week
In the past year, you have called your child's teacher		<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>		
In the past year, your child's teacher called you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past year,	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never	Once or Twice Per Year	Almost Every Month	Almost Every Week	More Than Once Per Week
you have written your child's teacher					
In the past year, your child's teacher has written you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past year, you stopped by to talk to your child's teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past year, you have been invited to your child's school for a special event (such as a book fair)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past year, you have visited your child's school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past year, you have been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past year, you have attended a parent-teacher conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past year, you have attended PTA meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Your child's school is a good place for your child to be	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The staff at your child's school is doing good things for your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You have confidence in the people at your	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
child's school					
Your child's school is doing a good job of preparing children for their futures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	No Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal
You feel comfortable talking to your child's teacher about your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You feel your child's teacher pays attention to your suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You ask your child's teacher questions or make suggestions about your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You send things to class like story books or other things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You read to your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You take your child to the library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You play games at home with your child to teach him/her new things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You volunteer at your child's school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe parental involvement?
2. What methods do you use to communicate with parents?
3. Which methods do you feel are most effective in communicating with parents?
4. How would you describe communication with military parents during a deployment?
5. What are challenges do you face in communicating with military families?
6. How are you informed of a parental deployment?
7. How can schools assist deployed parents in maintain communication with school staff?
8. How would you describe the effects of a military deployment on a child?

Appendix F

Journal Entry

10/2/14: My first interview is in two days, feeling anxious and excited. I am concerned about the interview process, making sure not to interject my thoughts and comments. I plan to take a 10 second pause before making a comment. I am visualizing the interview process, active listening, pausing, and not interrupting the participant until they finish speaking. Interview being conducted at the home of the participant, I hope this makes them feel more comfortable during the interview. Expectations? Did the teacher communicate with her or just the caregiver? Did they use Skype, the phone, or email? Did they communicate with the counselor or just the teacher? I need to be careful not to talk about my experience as a counselor working with student whose mother was deployed and project that experience. I am not sure what I expect to hear about the participants' involvement since she was very involved prior to her deployment.

Appendix G

Approval Letter for Parental Involvement Questionnaire

From: Jennifer Godwin, M.D. (jgodwin@duke.edu)

Sent: Wed 1/22/14 10:31 AM

To: Carolyn Davis (cjdavistn@msn.com)

That was created by the Fast Track Project. You can download the questionnaire, technical reports, scoring programs, etc. from our website.

Please Note: The scan forms are copyrighted and you may NOT make copies of the scan forms to distribute as that is a violation of copyright laws.

If you would like to use this measure in your own study please do the following:

1. Create your own document with the questions and possible responses,
2. Do not change the wording of the questions or responses,
3. Remove all references to Fast Track from the measure,
4. Cite the measure source as the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (CPPRG),
5. If you do change the wording of the questions or responses, describe all changes in detail in all publications, presentations, and grant proposals, AND note that your measure is a modification on the original Fast Track version of the measure.

Thank you for your interest in Fast Track,

Jennifer

Appendix H

Textual Description

This study described how maternal soldiers communicated with their child's school staff prior and during a military deployment. Prior to the deployment, the participants varied in their level and type of involvement with the school environment. Several of the participants, Audra, Nicole, Angie, Melissa and Leann can be described as very involved with the school through volunteering, visits to the school, and through their correspondence either verbally or written with the teacher. Rebecca and Christine's involvement with the school was limited to correspondence with the teacher and attending parent teacher conferences twice a year. Although the level and frequency of involvement varied, they each had a connection to the school environment.

The connection to the school environment prompted the participants to alert the school of their deployment and connect their child's caregiver to the school environment. This allowed the caregiver to attend parent/teacher conferences and to discuss any academic issues that arose during the deployment. By making the school aware and connecting the caregivers, the participants took a proactive approach in preparing the school for their absence.

Technology based communication types played a key role in how deployed maternal soldiers communicated with the school environment and with their family members. Although, in many cases the communication with school staff was limited in terms of frequency and type they still were provided with an opportunity to communicate with the school environment. The participants discussed challenges related to communicating with both school staff and their family members. These challenges included time delay and infrastructure.

Finally, school support was important aspect that each participant discussed during the interview. The participants identified ways in which the school supported their children and indicated ways they could have been more supportive to the participants and their children. The participants discussed the need to receive updates regarding their child's progress, behavior and emotional well-being. The participants felt the school staff lacked an understanding of military deployments and the effect on children. Overall, the participants felt the school staff was supportive of their children during their deployment.