

Understanding the impact of military deployment on families: An Australian Study

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Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Background



- Department of Veterans' Affairs Family Study Program launched 2007 (\$13.5mil)
 - Vietnam Veterans' Family Study ongoing
- **Timor-Leste Family Study 2009-11**

The Timor-Leste Family Study is part of the Department of Veterans' Affairs Family Study

Rationale and Literature



- First Australian study to investigate the effect of deployment on the health & wellbeing of **families**
- Timor was the 1st large-scale deployment since Vietnam
- High current operational climate
- Literature from the U.S.A. – different military, different culture

Research Aims



- To determine what, if any physical, mental or social health impacts there are on a service member's family from the member's deployment to Timor–Leste.
- To identify any risk and protective factors associated with any health impacts.

Measures of Interest



1. Timor-Leste Deployment
2. Physical Health
3. Mental Health
4. Family Health
5. Child Health
6. Social Health
7. Risk and Protective factors

Methodology



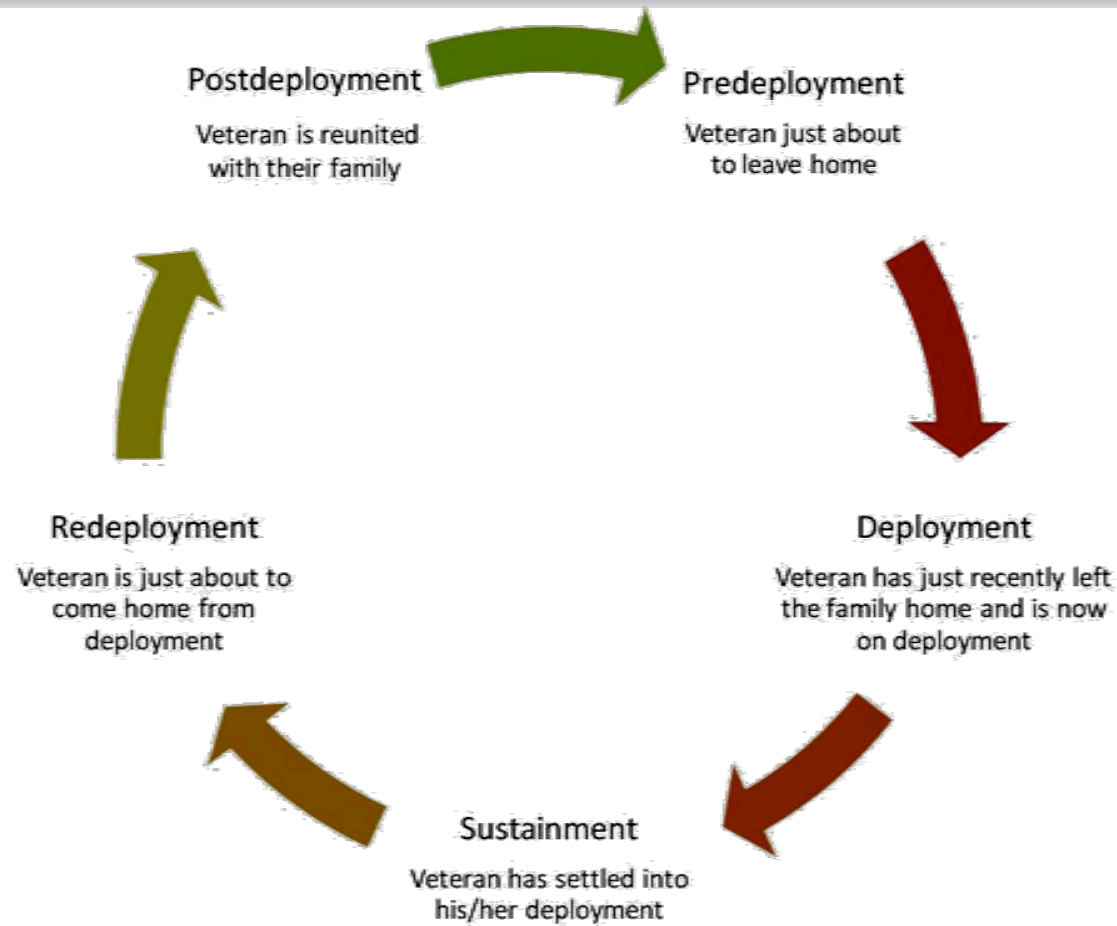
Qualitative Research

- Current and former partners of ADF members who have gone on a deployment (Timor-Leste or elsewhere)
- **4 in-depth focus groups**
- **Semi-structured individual telephone interviews**

Quantitative Research

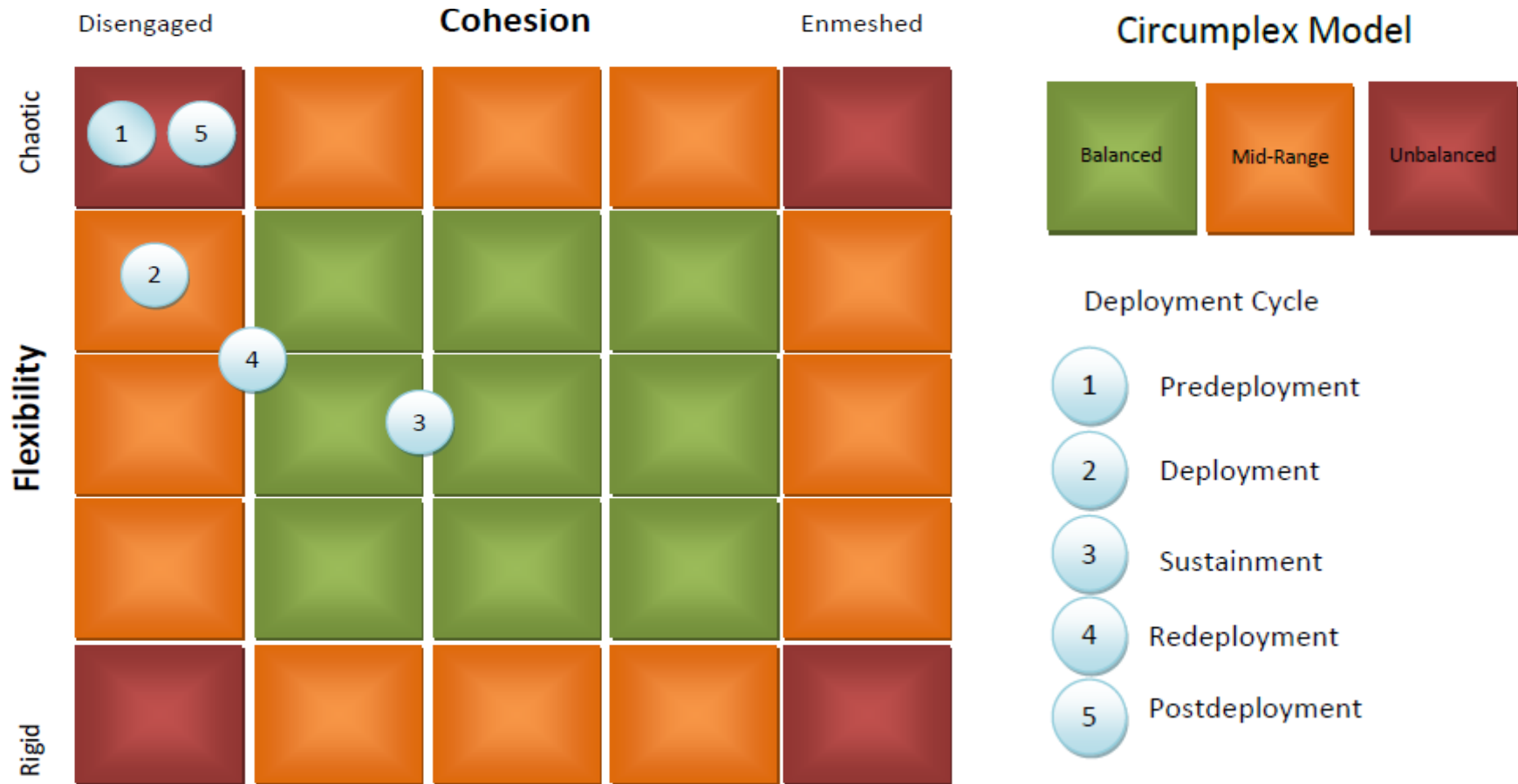
- Invitation to 7000 ADF members and their current and former partners (Timor-Leste-deployed and comparison)
- **Questionnaire with validated measures**

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment



Pincus, SH, House, R, Christenson, J, Adler, LE

Circumplex Family Systems Model



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Focus Group participants



- 17 participants, female, aged 20-52 years
- 82% married to the ADF member
- 47% with children under 18 years of age
- 13/17 partners of Army personnel
- Partner deployments to Timor, Middle East, South Pacific & Africa



Predeployment
Veteran just about
to leave home



Pre-Deployment (several weeks to a year)

Characterised by denial and anticipation of loss.

Common experience include: long training hours for military member, getting affairs in order, mental and physical distance, and arguments.



Deployment

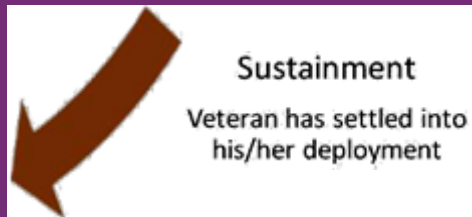
Veteran has just recently left the family home and is now on deployment

Deployment (1st month)

Characterised by roller coaster of emotions and may be unpleasant and disorganised.

Common experiences include: mixed emotions/relief, disoriented/overwhelmed, numb/sad/alone.





Sustainment (2nd month through)

Characterised by: Establishing new sources of support and new routines.

Common experiences include: relying on new sources of support, establishing new routines and feeling more in control, independent and confident.

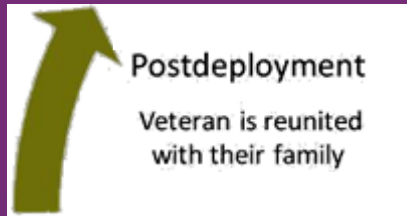


Redeployment (Last Month)

This is the last month before return – characterised by intense anticipation, often with mix of emotions.

Common experiences include; anticipation of homecoming, excitement, apprehension, energy bursts and difficulty making decisions.





Post-Deployment (3-6 months after)

Starts with homecoming and time frame varies from family to family.

Common experiences include: honeymoon period, loss of independence for the spouse, need for one's own space, renegotiating routines and reintegrating into the family.

Risk & Protective Factors



- **Social support** (friends, family, military unit, military community, local community etc)
- **Communication with deployed member**
- **Age and stage of life** (pregnancy, children, ages of children)
- **Personal circumstance** (work status, family style)

Aim to translate these factors into specific questions on survey

Positive Outcomes



Increased Autonomy

Personal development

Strengthening of relationships

Where to next



- Complete focus group analysis
- Integrate findings into quantitative survey
- Conduct survey
- Final report to DVA mid 2011

Long term aims



To assist DVA and other key stakeholder in understanding any implications of the research finding for their programs and service delivery.

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Questions?



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