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Support for the 21st Century Reserve Force

Insights on Facilitating Successful Reintegration for Citizen Warriors and Their Families

Laura Werber, Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Karen Chan Osilla, Elizabeth Wilke, Anny Wong, Joshua Breslau, Karin E. Kitchens

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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Preface

Since 2001, the National Guard and Reserve have been utilized at unprecedented levels to fill key operational capabilities in overseas contingencies, especially in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. For many guard personnel and reservists, this has resulted in multiple deployments as well as longer deployments, often placing a strain on their families, especially as these citizen warriors try to reintegrate back into their civilian lives after returning from deployment. This project used a survey and interviews about the reintegration experiences of guard and reserve families to better understand how these families are doing, the challenges they confront, the strategies and resources they use to navigate the reintegration phase of the deployment cycle, and what could be done to ensure that readjustment following deployment proceeds as smoothly as possible. This report should be of interest to policymakers, service members and their spouses, resource providers, and others concerned with how to improve support for guard and reserve families.

This research was sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs and conducted within the Forces and Resources Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community. For more information on the Forces and Resources Policy Center, see http://www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri/centers/frp.html or contact the director (contact information is provided on the web page).

Questions and comments regarding this research are welcome and should be directed to the leaders of the research team, Laura Werber (Laura_Werber@rand.org) or Agnes Gereben Schaefer (Agnes_Schaefer@rand.org).

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Summary

Although many studies have examined the impact of deployment on military families, few have assessed the challenges that guard and reserve families experience during reintegration. This report aims to fill that gap. The goals of our research were to better understand how these families are doing,[1] the challenges they confront, the strategies and resources they use to navigate the reintegration phase of deployment, and what could be done to ensure that readjustment following deployment proceeds as smoothly as possible.

Reintegration Framework

In our study, we regarded reintegration success as a multifaceted concept. Accordingly, we focused on three different areas that we believe are key to understanding and characterizing reserve component families' reintegration success:

- family well-being
- resource usage
- military career implications.

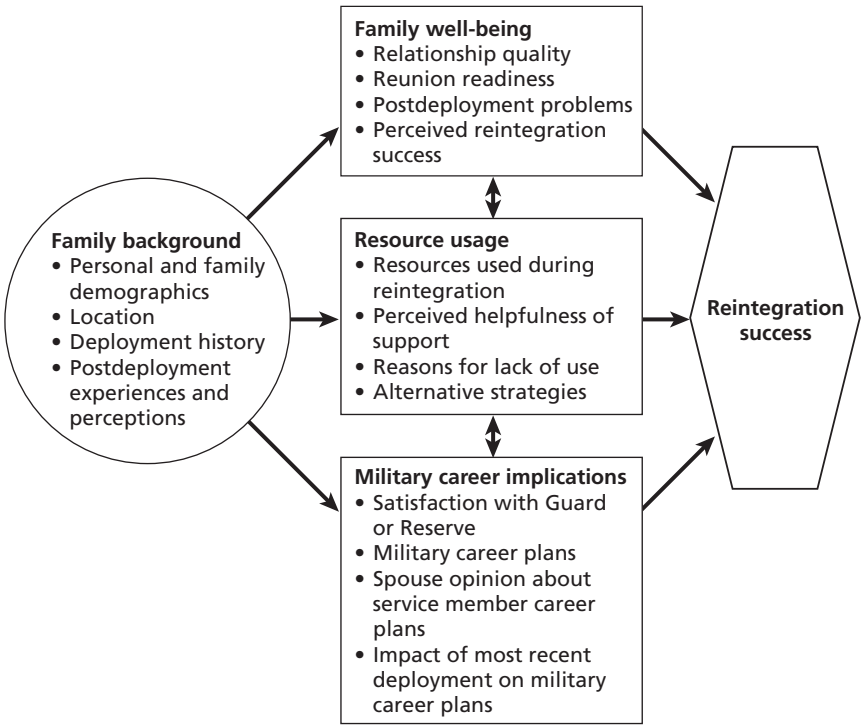
These domains could be interrelated—and likely are. For instance, family well-being may be both an influence on families' use of support resources and a consequence of such usage. Similarly, family well-being

[1] Throughout this report, *families* refers specifically to service members and their families.

and resource usage could both come to bear in a decision to continue guard or reserve service. Figure S.1 illustrates how these factors come together in the conceptual framework that underlies our analysis. Its development was informed by previous work conducted by the project team and shows the interrelationships that we considered between these factors in our current study. This framework also informed the development of our survey instrument and interview protocols.

This study included service members and spouses from all six U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) reserve components. The multifaceted data collection effort included a literature review of relevant policy, a web survey completed by reserve component service members and spouses, in-depth telephone interviews with reserve component mem-

Figure S.1
Conceptual Framework for Guard and Reserve Family Reintegration Success



RAND *RR206-S.1*

bers and spouses, in-person and telephone interviews with resource providers, and an assessment of DoD survey instruments. A synthesis of the data obtained from these sources culminated in the findings and recommendations presented here.

Achieving Reintegration Success

Our analysis identified a number of factors that relate to reintegration success. These factors include whether the family felt ready for deployment, perceptions that communication between the service member and family members during deployment was adequate, perceptions that communication from the unit or Service following deployment was adequate, and comfortable family finances. Our analysis also indicated that when the service member deployed with his or her own unit and returned home without a physical wound, physical injury, or psychological issue, readjustment tended to go more smoothly.[2] In addition, interviewees felt that aspects of their family situation, such as prior deployment experience and the family's closeness, accounted for their smooth readjustment following deployment. They also described proactive steps they took to ensure that reintegration went well, such as good communication during and after deployment, activities for the family to engage in together, and the use of the reintegration-oriented resources. It seems clear that family initiative is key to successful reintegration. DoD can build on this knowledge by taking steps to empower families to be active, effective architects of their own reintegration success.

Yet, reintegration can be a time of diverse problems for families, especially soon after homecoming. Evidence from our web survey and family interviews indicates that the most prevalent problems experienced by study participants related to the service member's mental or emotional health, the service member's civilian employment, medical concerns and health care frustrations, and relationship problems with one's spouse or partner. Our findings show that families indicating

[2] Here, *physical wound* refers to a combat-related injury, distinct from other types of injuries sustained during a deployment.

that they were not ready at all for the service member's deployment were more likely to report some of these problems, including those related to the service member's mental or emotional health and relationship problems with one's spouse or partner. In essence, families experiencing challenges during reintegration tend to have the opposite circumstances or experiences from those that are associated with positive reintegration experiences—whether they be financial struggles, the service member not deploying with his or her own unit, returning with a physical or psychological injury, living far from the member's drilling unit, or a host of other factors. These findings suggest that efforts to bolster family readiness at the outset of the deployment cycle and reaching out to families soon after the service member returns home may be especially effective forms of support. In addition, they imply that certain populations may benefit from increased attention or tailored support.

Reintegration Resources and Their Use

A vast array of resources, which we characterize as the "web of support," is available to assist reserve component families during reintegration. We identified five main types of organizations that contribute to this web of support:

- government organizations (including DoD and other federal organizations, as well as state and local governments)
- private for-profit organizations
- private nonprofit organizations
- faith-based organizations
- informal resources, including family, friends, and social networks.

The types of services offered, a second dimension of this web, tend to fall into the following areas:

- education
- employment

- family relationships
- financial issues
- medical concerns and health care
- legal issues
- mental health
- social networks
- spiritual support.

Altogether, the breadth of organizations and resources available to guard and reserve families is considerable.

More important than the amount of resources available is an understanding of the types of reintegration support that families find useful and how accessible these resources are. Our survey and interview participants most frequently cited using federal resources to aid with reintegration and found these resources helpful. This finding is both important and timely as the federal government considers where to cut federal spending. In particular, our survey and interview participants most frequently cited using unit-based resources to prepare for the service member's reunion with his or her family, and these resources were frequently perceived as helpful. Families also emphasized that private organizations, faith-based organizations, and state and local organizations were helpful in providing support as well. We learned that informal resources are used by almost half of guard and reserve families and that some families use these informal resources—such as family, friends, and social networks—in lieu of formal resources. These insights point to two specific areas where DoD might leverage existing resources to expand and enhance support: unit-based resources and informal networks. But it also suggests more generally that an improved understanding of the web of support, including gaps and redundancies, will enable DoD to better leverage existing programs and target its own resources to fill important gaps.

Despite the breadth of resources available, we identified a number of challenges that arise in supporting guard and reserve families. From the perspective of service members and spouses, there are a number of reasons why families do not use available resources, including lack of awareness, a perception that no one has reached out to them, difficulty

accessing resources, and concern about the quality of the resources. DoD efforts to improve the uptake of support resources should address these barriers to resource utilization.

Resource providers also face barriers in providing support to families, perhaps the most significant of which is that reserve component families tend to be geographically dispersed and often do not live near a military installation, so some populations are hard to reach. In addition, there is considerable concern about stigma in the military community that often inhibits service members from seeking help. There is also a lack of coordination across the web of support. Further, many providers do not have a good understanding of how effective their programs are. Providers are turning to creative solutions to overcome these barriers, such as using online tools, hiring retired military personnel who are able to build trust with service members, and experimenting with new ways to coordinate with other providers. But there is also a role for DoD. With a better understanding of these challenges, it is possible to identify ways that DoD can better support the provider community and, in turn, guard and reserve families. These insights have shaped the recommendations offered herein.

Implications for the Military Services

Reintegration success is related to military career preference. DoD regards a successful reintegration experience for the service member and his or her family as critical to a mission-ready, effective Reserve Component. Our research offers support for this premise by suggesting that families that have a smooth readjustment following deployment not only enjoy such positives as increased family closeness and a stronger marriage or domestic partnership but also have favorable views regarding the service member's continued service in the Guard or Reserve. We found that families that felt reintegration was going well also (1) planned a longer military career for the service member, (2) reported that the spouse or partner favored the service member staying in the Guard or Reserve, and (3) felt that the most recent deployment had a favorable influence on continued military service.

Conversely, we found that four types of problems were associated with the military career plans of reserve component personnel: service member civilian employment, relationships, spouse or partner mental or emotional health, and child well-being. These problems were associated with shorter planned tenure or being more undecided about future guard or reserve career plans. Similarly, problems with service member mental or emotional health, health care or medical issues, one's relationship with a spouse or partner, and financial/legal issues factored into the spouse or partner's opinion about continued service. Families that indicated one of these problems were more likely to note that the spouse or partner did not favor the service member staying in the Guard or Reserve. Finally, reporting health care issues or a relationship problem was associated with less-favorable views toward the most recent deployment. These findings may have important implications for military readiness if the problems and patterns described in this report are more prevalent in the Guard or Reserve as a whole.

Recommendations

Our findings point to a number of recommendations for improving DoD support to guard and reserve families. They fall into two areas: (1) actions DoD could take to improve its own support resources for families and (2) actions that DoD could take to improve the broader web of support.

Improving DoD Support Resources

While significant responsibility for successful reintegration falls on service members and their families, there are actions DoD can take to facilitate this process—from providing information on how to prepare for reintegration to enhancing opportunities for guard and reserve families to learn from each other's experiences. We offer a robust set of specific recommendations in six broad areas.

1. Emphasize Early Preparation for Reintegration

Promoting reintegration preparation earlier in the deployment cycle is critical. DoD should encourage families to use the time before and during deployment to prepare for reintegration. DoD should also explore opportunities to reach families sooner after demobilization—even before the first Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) postdeployment event. Our survey findings suggest that some reintegration problems begin to emerge in this early period after demobilization, so reaching families during demobilization and soon after could have a positive effect on successful reintegration. Remote support via mail or the Internet during deployment, or voluntary programs within the first few weeks after reunion, could be useful. Finally, family finances are associated with a number of problems during reintegration and may affect reintegration success. Thus, DoD should promote financial planning for families and expand efforts to increase awareness of financial resources and the need for this type of planning.

2. Ensure That Family Members Are Involved in the Reintegration Process

To increase the likelihood of a smooth readjustment after deployment, DoD should also ensure that family members are involved in the reintegration process. It is particularly critical to engage spouses because they are often the primary means of support upon which service members rely. DoD should consider doing more to engage spouses before the service member returns home. This might involve increasing contact from the service member's unit, allowing more interaction at the demobilization site, and using informal resources as a means to provide information to spouses about reintegration and support services. In addition, our findings suggest that good communication during deployment (as perceived by study participants) helped with reintegration. DoD should continue and even expand efforts to facilitate family communication during deployment. Ensuring that families have the technology to communicate via whatever means works best for them may facilitate successful reintegration.

3. Shape Perceptions About Reintegration

When service members and their spouses understand what to expect during reintegration and can plan accordingly, the likelihood of a successful experience may improve. Thus, DoD should shape perceptions about reintegration and, in doing so, recognize that there is no single "right" way to reintegrate. One important aspect of shaping perceptions is to take continued steps to remove any perceived stigma associated with self-care and emphasize that seeking out support resources is not a barrier to career advancement. In addition, DoD should recognize and praise reintegration success. Toward this end, an effective approach could be to disseminate successful reintegration strategies used by families. Our findings suggest that families are eager to learn from one another about how to successfully navigate the deployment cycle.

4. Make Additional Refinements to the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

The results of our survey and interviews suggest that a majority of service members and spouses find these events beneficial. But study participants also offered insight on ways the program could be improved to optimize their experiences. DoD should consider making it easier for families to participate in these events. While some families enjoy the travel, others would find it easier to participate if the events were closer to home. Conducting more YRRP events during drill weekends is something with which DoD could experiment. Increasing opportunities for family members to interact with one another during these events is another promising step. Second, DoD should allow families to customize their YRRP experience to a greater degree—such as by altering the schedule to fit with the timing of a service member's deployment cycle, allowing service members to opt out of some events after their first deployment or substitute other events (such as the Army Strong Bonds program), or expanding opportunities to participate in elective sessions that are most pertinent to their needs. Finally, DoD should increase ways to elicit feedback from service members and their families to learn from these events' successes and failures and continually improve them for both family participants and resource providers.

5. Ensure That Units Have the Resources They Need to Support Families

DoD should provide units with the resources they need to support families. Given the importance of adequate communication to successful reintegration, DoD should work with units to ensure that they have the resources needed to reach out to families in a *personal* way—something families expect both during and after deployment. Units should also equip someone to serve as a point person to whom families can turn for information on resources. This person could serve as a "clearinghouse," guiding families to where they can find the resources they need. Not only would such a service aid families, but it would provide useful information to DoD about the types of resources families need and use most, which, in turn, could help identify gaps in available resources.

6. Refine Ways to Learn About the Experiences of Guard and Reserve Families

DoD should continue to refine the ways it collects information about the reintegration experiences of guard and reserve families. Even as DoD wants to understand more about family reintegration experiences, it must do so in a way that minimizes survey burden. Administering short surveys on a small number of related topics to different samples of service members and spouses is one possible approach. It is also important to demonstrate to families the value of their feedback and how it results in concrete changes to policy. We also believe that DoD should add additional questions and focus areas to the set of surveys associated with the reintegration and deployment experience more broadly. We offer specific suggestions in the body of this report, but responses to such questions would provide insight into the support resources that families use and why, which, in turn, could inform decisions regarding resource allocation for DoD support programs. Finally, DoD should consider ways to supplement surveys with other data, such as conducting interviews or focus groups with service members and their families, as well as collecting information from those who interact with guard and reserve families on a daily basis.

Improving the Broader Web of Support for Families

One important insight from our work is the fact that DoD does not have to "do it all" in providing support for reserve component families in conjunction with the deployment cycle. As we have described earlier, there is a vast web of support resources available to these families, provided by government and private-sector entities, by faith-based and other nonprofit organizations, and through informal networks. But DoD can play a valuable and important role in improving awareness of and access to these services and in working with providers to facilitate coordination, enhance resource use, and improve resource effectiveness. In doing so, DoD could gain a better understanding of how to most effectively direct its own family support resources. Our recommendations focus on five areas.

1. Target a Broader Audience to Support Families

Both DoD and non-DoD resource providers should target a broader audience to reach more family and friends and to disseminate information on how they can better support guard and reserve families. Given our findings about the degree to which guard and reserve families rely on nongovernmental resources, DoD should recognize their role in supporting these families and leverage such resources to facilitate information dissemination—especially to hard-to-reach populations. DoD should also build and promote community capacity, which, in turn, could lead to heightened awareness and involvement in reintegration. Community members are valuable assets who can work with military and civilian leadership to support guard and reserve families. Employers can also play a role. Although some service members experienced problems with civilian employment after mobilization, others found employers helpful and accommodating. DoD should continue its efforts to honor employers who support reserve component personnel and their families through various employer-recognition rewards.

2. Identify Gaps and Overlaps in the Web of Support

The web of support could be a powerful force multiplier in providing support to guard and reserve families, and DoD should leverage the ongoing efforts of other organizations. The first step in doing so efficiently would be to develop an inventory of resources—perhaps using

network analysis techniques—and then identify gaps and overlaps in support resources. With this information, DoD can more effectively target its own resources.

3. Facilitate Coordination Across Resource Providers

Our research indicated that coordination among providers does occur to some extent, but DoD can help expand the level of interaction between different types of resource providers and build on existing interactions. Again, network analysis could help identify the most promising areas to target. Another effective role for DoD could be to promote efforts to organize local resource providers, which can also contribute to building community capacity. A starting point would be to capitalize on initiatives that are already in place, such as the Joining Community Forces program sponsored by Michelle Obama and Jill Biden. In addition, DoD should consider hosting or promoting networking opportunities among resource providers. This would allow providers to learn about one another, as well as increase DoD's own awareness of resources available to service members and their families. These networking events can also be used to encourage providers to share best practices, which, ultimately, should lead to improved support.

4. Work with Providers to Address Reasons for a Lack of Resource Use

DoD should work with providers to address barriers to resource utilization. Specifically, it should work with providers to target specific populations that may not be able to access resources, such as families that live far from military installations, are economically disadvantaged, or lack access to online resources. Reaching out to these populations at different points during the deployment cycle can improve support. Similarly, DoD could work with providers to increase awareness (as several previous recommendations have touched on) by leveraging informal resources, such as social networks, or engaging the public. DoD should explore the possibility of developing a system for credentialing providers to mitigate concerns among service members and their families about using non-DoD resources. And finally, to help families find resources, DoD, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Vet-

erans Affairs should continue to refine the National Resource Directory by including more nongovernmental organizations, adding more areas of focus (e.g., financial resources), and ensuring that it is easy for families to navigate.

5. Encourage Resource Providers to Develop and Learn from Measures of Effectiveness

For resources to be useful to guard and reserve members and their families, they need to be effective. But many resource providers do not use formal measures of effectiveness. It is in DoD's interest to help providers develop and share these measures because they could improve available support. An important first step is to convey to resource providers the value of assessing how well they are doing in meeting the reintegration needs of guard and reserve families. For example, effectiveness metrics can indicate to the providers themselves, as well as to other stakeholders (e.g., prospective clients, potential funding sources), how well programs meet the reintegration-related needs of the guard and reserve families that turn to them. Such measures also can help identify areas of support that are in need of improvement and best practices that may be shared with other resource providers.

Final Thoughts

This study is one of the most comprehensive examinations to date of the reintegration experiences of reserve component personnel and their families. We acknowledge that limitations in our data collection—most notably, the underrepresentation of the U.S. Army Reserve and Army National Guard among our survey and interview participants—mean that the results presented in this report cannot be used to generalize about the experiences of the entire Reserve Component. However, despite these limitations, we believe that the research presented here is rich with insights that can improve support to members of the Guard and Reserve and their families during the deployment cycle, particularly the reintegration phase.

The findings that emerged from our survey and interviews led to a robust set of recommendations—steps that DoD can take not only to improve its own support programs but also to facilitate improvements in the resources provided by others. Given the number and diversity of these resources, the recommendations are as detailed and specific as possible. But stepping back, we have identified a number of themes that can usefully guide resource providers, both within and outside of DoD, as they take steps to improve their programs.

- *Effective communication is critical.* The importance of communication—within families, between the Services and families, between DoD and providers, and among providers—cannot be overstated. It is fundamental to successful reintegration and touches on nearly every aspect of our research.
- *Preparation is essential to success.* Preparing for all phases of deployment is an essential element in successful reintegration and an underlying theme throughout this report. Preparation during the various stages of mobilization—in identifying means of communication, in financial planning, and in developing support systems, for example—can ease the challenges faced by guard and reserve families. Hand in hand with preparation is awareness—knowing what to expect. While much of the preparatory burden falls on reserve component personnel and their families, DoD also has a role in facilitating this process.
- *DoD does not need to do it all.* Opportunities for collaboration with resource providers outside DoD abound and can best be leveraged if steps are taken to improve coordination between DoD and outside providers, among providers of all types, and between providers and families. Such steps will ultimately enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of support to reserve component members and their families.
- *One size does not fit all.* There is no "recipe" for reintegration. Adequate and effective support needs to be tailored to the needs of the Reserve Component and individual families. This concept applies not only to DoD programs and to how units interact with service

members and their families but also to the full network of support providers.

While this work sheds light on the reintegration experiences of the guard and reserve families that participated in our study, opportunities exist to learn more about the reintegration phase of the deployment cycle. The needs of reserve component families are continually evolving and, consequently, merit ongoing monitoring and research. Similarly, changes to the web of support, the gaps and overlaps in resources, and how that network of providers interacts also warrant observation. Although military operations in Afghanistan are winding down, these issues will remain important over the longer run because the Reserve Component will likely be called upon again to support emergency and wartime missions. Moreover, those service members who have deployed over the past decade and their families may confront longer-term challenges that have yet to appear and deserve the nation's continued support.

Acknowledgments

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Thomas L. Bush offered useful insights and references in a formal peer review.

We also benefited from the contributions of many RAND colleagues. Margaret Harrell played an important role in the formative stages of the project and offered helpful feedback on a draft version of the report. Julie Newell, Tania Gutsche, and Bas Weerman introduced us to the benefits of MMIC™ (Multimode Interviewing Capability), which we used to field the web survey. Rena Rudavsky helped manage the survey recruitment process, and Maritta Tapanainen provided graphic art support for the study recruitment materials. Racine

Harris contributed to the project's literature review. Mollie Rudnick, Beth Katz, and Nicole Schmidt conducted interviews with spouses and service members and assisted in analyzing those interview data. Lou Mariano and Elizabeth Bodine-Baron shared their expertise of statistical and network analyses, respectively. Anita Chandra provided a constructive formal peer review. Laura Zakaras and Barbara Bicksler assisted in the dissemination of the findings, and Lauren Skrabala skillfully edited the report itself. Michelle McMullen and Donna White provided administrative support.

Finally, we note that we could not have completed this work without the candid participation of many reserve component service members and spouses who dedicated their time to answer our questions and share their experiences in confidential web surveys and telephone interviews. We are similarly appreciative of the resource providers who participated in interviews at YRRP events and via telephone.

We thank them all but retain full responsibility for the objectivity, accuracy, and analytic integrity of the work presented here.

Abbreviations

DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
ESGR	Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve
FRG	Family Readiness Group
FY	fiscal year
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office
H2H	Hero 2 Hired
JFSAP	Joint Family Support Assistance Program
MFLP	Military Family Life Project
NIMS	National Incident Management System
OCONUS	outside the continental United States
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
TAMP	Transitional Assistance Management Program
USERRA	Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act
VA	U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VFW	Veterans of Foreign Wars

VOAD	National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
YRRP	Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Since 2001, the Reserve Component has been utilized at unprecedented levels to fill key operational capabilities in overseas contingencies, especially in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.[1] More than 800,000 reserve component members have been activated since September 11, 2001. As a result of these increased demands, the Reserve Component has shifted from its traditional role as a strategic reserve (used only in times of war to augment active forces) to an operational reserve in which reserve forces participate routinely in ongoing military missions. Consequently, many members of the Reserve Component who once served as "weekend warriors," training one weekend a month and two weeks a year, now often experience multiple overseas deployments over the course of their military careers. Many times, those deployments are in combat situations, for long periods of time, or in rapid succession.

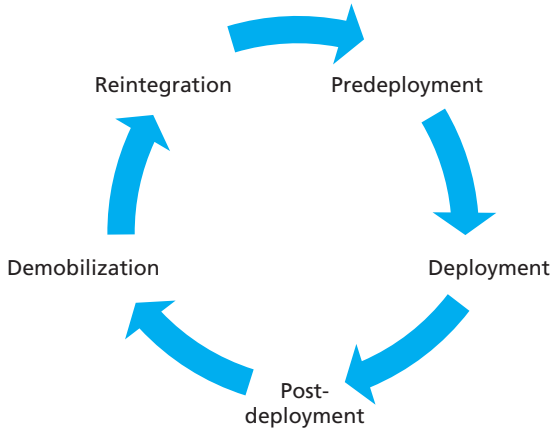
This shift in operational tempo has challenged guard and reserve families as they experience more deployments and try to navigate their way through the deployment cycle.[2] As depicted in Figure 1.1, the deployment cycle for the National Guard and Reserve consists of five phases: (1) predeployment, (2) deployment, (3) postdeployment, (4) demobilization, and (5) reintegration.

The reintegration phase of the deployment cycle can be particularly challenging for these families because, unlike personnel in the

[1] Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, *Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force*, Washington, D.C., October 2008.

[2] Throughout this report, *families* refers to service members and their families.

Figure 1.1
Deployment Cycle for the National Guard and Reserve



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense, *Military Deployment Guide: Preparing You and Your Family for the Road Ahead*, Washington, D.C., February 2012, p. 5.
RAND *RR206-1.1*

Active Component, guard personnel and reservists must return to their civilian jobs, hence the term "citizen warrior." This can create unique challenges related to employment, health care, and other issues. In addition, some reserve component families live long distances from military installations and the support services that those installations offer.

Study Purpose

Although many studies have examined the impact of deployment on military families,[3] few have assessed the challenges that reserve com-

[3] See, for example, Laura Werber, Margaret C. Harrell, Danielle M. Varda, Kimberly Curry Hall, Megan K. Beckett, and Stefanie Stern, *Deployment Experiences of Guard and Reserve Component Families: Implications for Support and Retention*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-645-OSD, 2008; Anita Chandra, Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo, Lisa H. Jaycox, Terri Tanielian, Bing Han, Rachel M. Burns, and Teague Ruder, *Views from the Homefront: The Experiences of Youth and Spouses from Military Families*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, TR-913-NMFA, 2011; Amy Richardson, Anita Chandra, Laurie T.

ponent families experience during reintegration.[4] This report aims to fill that gap. We collected primary data from guard and reserve service members and spouses, as well as from resource providers, to better understand how these families are doing, the challenges they confront postdeployment, the strategies and resources they use to navigate the reintegration phase of deployment, and what could be done to ensure that readjustment following deployment proceeds as smoothly as possible. This report should be of interest to policymakers, reserve component personnel and their families, resource providers, and others concerned with how to improve support for guard and reserve families.

Background

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Reserve Component of the U.S. armed forces comprises the Reserves (the Army Reserve, the Navy Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, and the Air Force Reserve) and the National Guard (the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard).[5] The role of the reserve components is to "provide trained units and qualified persons available for active duty in the armed forces, in

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Martin, Claude Messan Setodji, Bryan W. Hallmark, Nancy F. Campbell, Stacy Hawkins, and Patrick Grady, *Effects of Soldiers' Deployment on Children's Academic Performance and Behavioral Health*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1095-A, 2011; Abigail H. Gewitz, Christopher R. Erbes, Melissa A. Polusny, Marion S. Forgatch, and David S. DeGarmo, "Helping Military Families Through the Deployment Process: Strategies to Support Parenting," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, Vol. 42, No. 1, February 2011; and William R. Saltzman, Patricia Lester, William R. Beardslee, Christopher M. Layne, Kirsten Woodward, and William P. Nash, "Mechanism of and Resilience in Military Families: Theoretical and Empirical Basis of a Family-Focused Resilience Enhancement Program," *Clinical Child and Family Psychological Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3, September 2011.

[4] See, for instance, Lisa A. Gorman, Adrian J. Blow, Barbara D. Ames, and Philip L. Reed, "National Guard Families After Combat: Mental Health, Use of Mental Health Services, and Perceived Treatment Barriers," *Psychiatric Services*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2011; Betty Pfefferbaum, J. Brian Houston, Michelle D. Sherman, and Ashley G. Melson, "Children of National Guard Troops Deployed in the Global War on Terrorism," *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress and Coping*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2011.

[5] During peacetime, the Coast Guard Reserve falls under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. In wartime, or when the President directs, Coast Guard assets and person-

time of war or national emergency, and at such other times as the national security may require, to fill the needs of the armed forces whenever . . . more units and persons are needed than are in the regular components."[6] Members of the Reserve Component are assigned to one of three categories: (1) the Ready Reserve, (2) the Standby Reserve, and (3) the Retired Reserve. The Ready Reserve consists of personnel from the National Guard and Reserve who may be called to active duty to augment the Active Component in the event of war or an emergency. Three distinct elements make up the Ready Reserve: (1) the Selected Reserve, (2) the Individual Ready Reserve, and (3) the Inactive National Guard. The Selected Reserve is regarded as so critical to initial wartime missions that it has priority over all other reserves. This is the portion of the Reserve Component that includes personnel who regularly drill and train on a part-time basis—the citizen warriors who typically spend one weekend a month and two weeks a year preparing to support a wartime or emergency mission. The Selected Reserve is made up of two distinct types of forces: the National Guard and the Federal Reserve forces.[7] As indicated in Table 1.1, in 2011, the personnel strength of the DoD Selected Reserve was 847,934.

It is important to note that there are distinctions between the Reserves and the National Guard. Unlike the Reserves, which are federal assets, the National Guard serves a dual role as both a federal and state asset. The National Guard of the United States is made up of 54 separate National Guard organizations: one for each state, and one each for Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. With the exception of the District of Columbia (which is always under federal control), each National Guard organization is controlled by its respective governor. However, guard personnel can

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nel can be assigned to support the U.S. Navy, in which case they are managed by DoD leadership.

6 U.S. Code, Title 10, Armed Forces, Section 10102, Purpose of the Reserve Components.

7 Office of the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, *Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Component, Volume I: Executive Summary and Main Report*, Washington, D.C., April 5, 2011.

Table 1.1
Breakdown of the DoD Selected Reserve, 2011

Component	Number of Personnel
Air Force Reserve	71,321
Air National Guard	105,685
Army Reserve	204,803
Army National Guard	361,561
Navy Reserve	64,792
Marine Corps Reserve	39,772
Total	847,934

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense, *2011 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community*, Washington, D.C., updated November 2012.

also be called to federal active duty, at which time they fall under the control of the President of the United States.

Given that guard personnel and reservists transition between their military careers and their civilian ones, they and their families often confront unique challenges related to health care, employment, and other issues. For example, when guard personnel and reservists are called to federal active duty for more than 30 days, or when they are mobilized for a contingency operation, they are entitled to receive medical benefits for themselves and their family members under TRICARE.[8] However, until 2004, nonactivated reserve component members had limited access to TRICARE for themselves and no access for their families.[9] In addition, guard personnel and reservists sometimes face obstacles in their employment as a result of multiple or lengthy deployments. To address these issues, the Uniformed Services

[8] Guard and reserve personnel may be eligible for active-duty health and dental benefits for up to 180 days before active service begins. In addition, under the Transitional Assistance Management Program (TAMP), guard and reserve members have continued access to TRICARE for 180 days following release from active duty.

[9] Lawrence Kapp, *Reserve Component Personnel Issues: Questions and Answers*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, updated January 18, 2006, p. 21.

Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) replaced the Veterans' Reemployment Rights Act. USERRA was enacted in 1994 and revised employment protections for veterans and members of the Reserve Component. Among other things, USERRA stipulates that returning service members have the opportunity to be reemployed in the job that they would have attained had they not been absent for military service, with the same seniority, status, pay, and benefits.[10]

The challenges confronting guard and reserve families have recently received increased attention on the public policy agenda and in a number of high-profile initiatives, including Joining Forces, which is spearheaded by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden. In addition, Congress has made a number of significant changes in reserve component pay and benefits. The most significant of those changes are (1) establishing premium-based access to TRICARE Standard for non-activated reservists, (2) extending access to TRICARE Reserve Select to all members of the Selected Reserve and their families (including those who are unemployed or self-employed), (3) creating a new educational benefit for reserve component personnel who have been mobilized since September 11, 2001, (4) providing an additional payment of up to $3,000 per month for certain reserve component personnel who experience a reduction in income while activated, and (5) lowering from 140 days to 31 days the threshold of eligibility for full basic allowance for housing for reserve component personnel called to active duty for a reason other than a contingency operation.[11] In addition, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act of 2003 (which amended and renamed the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940) protects service members—including reserve component members—who are called to active duty against rental property evictions, mortgage foreclosures, insurance cancellations, and government property seizures to pay tax bills.[12]

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[10] Public Law 103-353, Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, October 13, 1994.

[11] Kapp, 2006, pp. 21–25.

[12] Pub. L. 108-189, Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, December 19, 2003. See Estela I. Velez Pollack, *The Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (P.L.108-189)*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 20, 2004.

Family Readiness Enables Military Readiness

Given the increased operational tempo of the first decade of the 21st century, providing support services to returning reserve component service members and their families as members prepare for deployment, are deployed, and return from deployment is especially important for many reasons, not the least of which is military readiness (i.e., the ability of the military to successfully carry out its mission). Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates emphasized the role that families play in military readiness and the sacrifices they make:

> Our nation owes a great deal to what I call "the power behind the power"—the families of all those who are serving. While our men and women in uniform may be called to pay the ultimate price, their families, particularly their spouses, make a considerable sacrifice as well.[13]

In 2001, DoD committed to ensuring and promoting general family well-being as part of a "new social compact" that recognized the tremendous sacrifice of military families.[14] The Social Compact outlined a 20-year strategic plan for ensuring that DoD's performance goals for quality of life keep pace with the changing expectations of the U.S. workforce and address the needs of the Reserve Component, as well as military families that do not live on installations, as is the case for the majority of reserve component families. The Social Compact also outlined plans for improving the relationships between reserve component personnel, employers of these personnel, and DoD. The 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* echoed this commitment, noting that DoD has "a critical and enduring obligation to better prepare and support families during the stress of multiple deployments."[15]

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[13] Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense, "Military Spouses Day (Washington, DC)," transcript of speech delivered on Military Spouses Day, Washington, D.C., May 6, 2008.

[14] Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, *A New Social Compact: A Reciprocal Partnership Between the Department of Defense, Service Members, and Families*, Washington, D.C., 2002.

[15] U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 2010, p. 52.

This commitment to military families is strongly reinforced in several DoD strategic plans regarding personnel. For instance, one of the strategic goals in the Office of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness *Strategic Plan for FY 2012–2016* is the promotion of the well-being of the "total force," including individuals, their families, and communities.[16] Consistent with this plan, the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy formulated and continues to update its strategic plan for fiscal years (FYs) 2012–2016 on a quarterly basis to guide its family readiness programs.[17]

Its strategic goals as they pertain to family readiness include the following:

> Ensure excellence in educational opportunities and engagement to encourage a culture of life-long learning within the military community to develop and empower them to be contributing 21st century citizens;
>
> Improve the well-being and resilience of the individual, their families and communities to contribute to a ready force;
>
> Transform policies, services and service delivery to meet the needs of the 21st century military community;
>
> Create collaborative partnerships and leverage resources.[18]

One of the main drivers of DoD policy is the recognition that strong military families are a strategic enabler and important to military readiness.[19] If service members are distracted by family issues,

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[16] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, *Fiscal Year 2012–2016 Strategic Plan*, Washington, D.C., February 2011, p. 4.

[17] U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress on Plans for the Department of Defense for the Support of Military Family Readiness, Fiscal Year 2011*, Washington, D.C., January 24, 2012, p. 1.

[18] DoD, 2012a, p. 1.

[19] Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, "Mission," August 12, 2011.

their ability to focus on their mission may diminish. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen emphasized in 2010 that family support "is vital to everything that we do."[20] This connection between strong families and military readiness is reflected in DoD guidance, including DoD Instruction 1342.22, *Military Family Readiness*, which outlines that "personal and family life shall be incorporated into organizational goals related to the recruitment, retention, morale, and operational readiness of the military force."[21] The guidance goes on to state that family readiness programs shall "promote military recruitment and retention, and support commanders' ability to maintain a mission-ready force."[22] DoD has also noted that "the Department's ability to assist [reserve component] service members and their families to prepare for separations during short- and long-term deployments is paramount to sustaining mission capabilities and mission readiness."[23]

Study Approach

We regard reintegration success as a multifaceted concept, and, accordingly, our analytic approach focused on three different areas that we believe are key to understanding and characterizing reserve component families' reintegration success:

- *Family domain:* This includes family background, such as family demographics, location, deployment characteristics, perceptions of their deployment experience, and postdeployment needs, as well as measures of family well-being, such as postdeployment problems and perceived reintegration success.
- *Resource usage domain:* This includes resource attributes, such as resource types and the needs addressed, as well as measures related

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[20] Carmen L. Gleason, "Mullen Cites Importance of Families, Leadership," Armed Forces Press Service, February 19, 2010.

[21] DoD Instruction 1342.22, *Military Family Readiness*, July 3, 2012, section 4, para. a.

[22] DoDI 1342.22, 2012, section 4, para. d, subpara. 3.

[23] Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, 2008, p. 14.

to program usage: awareness, utilization both before reunion and postdeployment, perceived program helpfulness, reasons for not using programs, and strategies used in lieu of formal programs.
- *Military career domain:* This includes factors associated with military career implications, such as satisfaction with the most recent deployment and with guard or reserve service more generally, service member career plans, spouse opinion regarding those career plans, and the effect of the most recent deployment on spouse support and service member career plans.

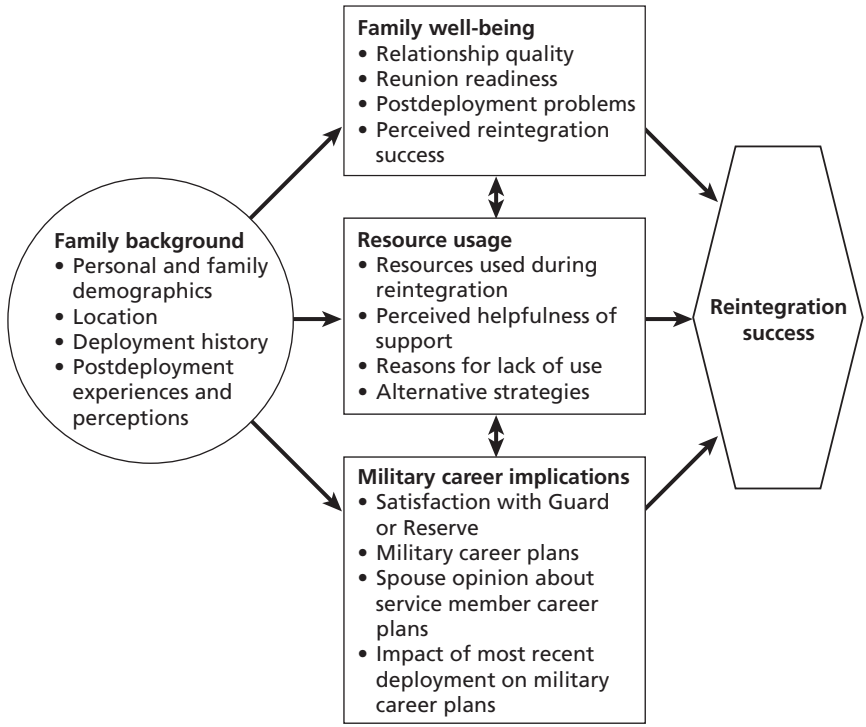
While we have presented these areas separately, we recognize they could be interrelated—and they likely are. For instance, family well-being could be both an influence on families' use of support resources and a consequence of such usage. Similarly, family well-being and resource usage could both come to bear in a decision to continue guard or reserve service. Figure 1.2 illustrates this conceptual framework that guided our research and shows both the factors we sought to measure in the study and the interrelationships we intended to examine. This framework also informed the development of our survey instrument and interview protocols. The framework was informed by previous work the project team has conducted on the deployment experiences of guard and reserve families.[24]

Our study of the reintegration experiences of guard and reserve families relied on several sources of information. We began by reviewing the existing research on the reintegration experiences of reserve component families, DoD policy regarding family support, federal and state legislation designed to support reserve component families, and survey instruments used to collect information from active and reserve component service members and spouses about their reintegration experiences.[25] This review allowed us to identify the gaps in the literature on the reintegration experiences of these families.

[24] See Werber et al., 2008.

[25] We reviewed 17 survey instruments and analyzed the types of questions asked in these surveys, with the aim of identifying gaps and offering suggestions regarding how DoD can

Figure 1.2
Conceptual Framework for Guard and Reserve Family Reintegration Success



RAND *RR206-1.2*

Based on that analysis, we developed a web survey and an in-depth interview protocol to collect the perspectives of reserve component service members and spouses about their reintegration experiences. In addition, we interviewed resource providers to gain their perspectives regarding reintegration, including their views on guard and reserve families' reintegration experience and issues related to supporting those families. While there are many surveys that collect feedback from service members and spouses, one of the strengths of our study is the collection of rich interview data, with open-ended ques-

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better identify the reintegration needs of guard and reserve families. Our approach to this analysis is described in Appendix A, and the results are presented in Chapter Seven.

tions that encouraged participants to describe in detail, using their own words, what reintegration was like for them. Next, we describe our survey and interview samples. For the technical details of our web survey and interview methodology and analysis, see Appendix B.

Web Survey

Given the time-sensitive nature of the study (i.e., the need to survey people soon after the service member returned home), we worked closely with representatives from each of the six DoD reserve components to reach guard personnel and reservists soon after they returned home from an OCONUS (outside the continental United States) deployment. The exact approach varied by component, but for each component except the Navy Reserve, component representatives identified units with personnel returning home from deployment during our data collection time frame. From that point, we reached out to unit commanders to explain our research and request their support. Next, we provided each commander (or a designated contact, such as a family readiness officer) with the web address for the survey, an access code, and suggested email text to use when announcing the study about one month after service members returned home. Our approach for the Navy Reserve was somewhat different, given that a large proportion of personnel deploy as Individual Augmentees, which made a unit-focused approach less feasible. For this group, we received contact information for personnel returning from an OCONUS deployment during our study time frame and sent letters via U.S. mail to Navy reservists on a rolling basis, with the intention of reaching them after they had been home approximately one month. In both the email language and the letter sent to Navy reservists, a description of the study was provided that included who was sponsoring the research and emphasized that participation was both voluntary and confidential.

This approach was not as successful as we had hoped. Although our recruitment approach did not enable us to compute precise response rates, the number of survey responses we received simply did not yield sufficient interview volunteers for our study. Ultimately, we extended both the time frame for recruiting and the timing of the survey. For instance, instead of limiting participation to those who reported that a

service member had been home for three to six weeks, we allowed individuals who reported a three- to nine-week period to take the survey. We also requested that unit commanders or their designees send noncoercive reminders to take the survey. After reaching out to numerous units and individual personnel over the course of an 11-month period (April 2011 through February 2012), we obtained responses from 174 service members and 18 spouses, representing 192 households. A breakdown of respondents, by reserve component, is provided in Table 1.2

Interviews

Follow-Up Interviews

Initially, we sought to conduct 600 interviews with service members and spouses (one person per household), including 100 interviews for each of the six DoD reserve components. At the outset of our study, the primary way we recruited interview participants was via the web survey. Specifically, at the end of the survey, we asked respondents if they would be interested in participating in a follow-up telephone interview approximately five months later. Survey respondents did not have to agree to participate in this interview to submit their survey. Collecting information at two points during reintegration was intended

Table 1.2
Breakdown of Survey Responses, by Component

Component	Number of Survey Responses
Air Force Reserve	19
Air National Guard	78
Army Reserve	17
Army National Guard	0
Navy Reserve	77
Marine Corps Reserve	1
Total	192

SOURCE: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families.

to provide us with a better understanding of how family challenges vary over time and for whom. However, we did not obtain a sufficient number of interview volunteers through our survey; our final tally after the 11-month survey window was 52 interview volunteers, and we conducted interviews with 40 of them. Table 1.3 illustrates the breakdown of our follow-up interview volunteers. We attempted to interview all who volunteered, but some could not be reached via telephone or email, even after multiple attempts. Accordingly, we worked with our research sponsor to identify other ways to obtain interview volunteers and opted to recruit participants at DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) events.

YRRP Interviews

From February to May 2012, we attended 14 YRRP events, including at least two for each DoD reserve component.[26] At each event, RAND had a table set up in the area designated for resource providers so that we could interact with event attendees to hand out information about our study, answer questions, and provide an easy way for potential interview participants to sign up for a telephone interview to be conducted at a later date. During some events, we were also provided with an opportunity to make a short presentation about the study to generate interest. While this approach proved more successful than the web survey–based recruitment strategy, we did not reach our original target number of interview volunteers. In total, 207 people at YRRP events volunteered for an interview, and we conducted interviews with 127 of them. We attempted to interview all volunteers who met our two sampling criteria: the service member either had dependents or had been in a relationship with a partner for at least two years, and he or she had been home from an OCONUS deployment for three to six months. Some volunteers did not meet these criteria, and some could not be reached via telephone or email after they volunteered. A breakdown of our YRRP interview sample is provided in Table 1.4.

[26] We attended YRRP events in the following states: California (two events), Colorado, Florida, Georgia (two events), Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio (two events), Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Vermont.

Table 1.3
Breakdown of Interview Volunteers from Web Survey

	All Volunteers			Proportion of Volunteers Interviewed		
Category	All	Service Members	Spouses	All	Service Members	Spouses
Overall	52	45	7	40 (77%)	36 (80%)	4 (57%)
Service member component						
Army National Guard	0	0	0	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Air National Guard	8	8	0	5 (63%)	5 (63%)	0 (N/A)
Army Reserve	6	6	0	4 (67%)	4 (67%)	0 (N/A)
Air Force Reserve	2	2	0	2 (100%)	2 (100%)	0 (N/A)
Navy Reserve	36	29	7	29 (81%)	25 (86%)	4 (57%)
Marine Corps Reserve	0	0	0	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Service member personnel type						
Officer	20	17	3	18 (90%)	16 (94%)	2 (67%)
Enlisted	32	28	4	22 (69%)	20 (71%)	2 (50%)
Gender						
Male	36	36	0	30 (83%)	30 (83%)	0 (N/A)
Female	16	9	7	10 (63%)	6 (67%)	4 (57%)

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: Figures in parentheses are the percentage of interview volunteers in each category who ultimately participated in an interview. N/A = not applicable.

Table 1.4
Breakdown of Interview Volunteers from YRRP Events

	All Volunteers			Proportion of Volunteers Interviewed		
Category	All	Service Members	Spouses	All	Service Members	Spouses
Overall	207	147	60	127 (61%)	91 (62%)	36 (60%)
Service member component						
Army National Guard	30	16	14	12 (40%)	5 (31%)	7 (50%)
Air National Guard	40	32	8	32 (80%)	26 (81%)	6 (75%)
Army Reserve	42	36	6	27 (64%)	23 (64%)	4 (67%)
Air Force Reserve	58	36	22	31 (53%)	18 (50%)	13 (59%)
Navy Reserve	12	7	5	8 (67%)	4 (57%)	4 (80%)
Marine Corps Reserve	25	20	5	17 (68%)	15 (75%)	2 (40%)
Service member personnel type						
Officer	23	15	8	20 (87%)	12 (80%)	8 (100%)
Enlisted	184	132	52	107 (58%)	79 (60%)	28 (54%)
Gender						
Male	136	135	1	85 (63%)	84 (62%)	1 (100%)
Female	71	12	59	42 (59%)	7 (58%)	35 (59%)

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: Figures in parentheses are the percentage of interview volunteers in each category who ultimately participated in an interview.

Provider Interviews

For resource providers, our intent was to conduct key informant interviews with a purposive sample of organizations that spanned a variety of organizational types and topic domains of importance to guard and reserve families and represented a variety of geographic regions. We also took advantage of our attendance at 14 YRRP events to conduct "mini-interviews" with providers on-site as time permitted. Due to the nature of the YRRP events, providers were frequently interacting with service members and families or presenting material to attendees; therefore, this second type of interview ranged from very brief discussions to longer interactions. For both types of provider interviews, we initially selected organizations we met at YRRP events that either had specific services for guard and reserve families or were very knowledgeable or passionate about family reintegration issues. Second, we used a snowball sampling approach by asking these representatives to name other organizations that would be relevant to our study. Finally, where there were gaps in a topic domain, we conducted an Internet search to locate additional organizations. In total, we conducted 84 interviews with resource providers (28 in-depth key informant interviews by telephone and 56 "mini-interviews" on-site at YRRP events). Table 1.5 shows the type of resource providers interviewed, and Table 1.6 lists their areas of focus. Note that many of the resource providers whom we interviewed focus on multiple areas.

Analysis

For an in-depth review of our data analysis, see Appendix B. We used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze our data. We recorded and transcribed all interviews with service members and spouses and then employed qualitative software to code all interview transcripts. We used statistical methods to analyze both the survey and interview data. Due to differences in how we collected the data (web-based survey or telephone-based interview), as well as differences in important background characteristics, such as the length of time the service member was home from deployment, we analyzed each data source separately. We also examined many secondary sources, including policy documents, DoD survey instruments used to collect feed-

Table 1.5
Types of Resource Providers Interviewed

Organization Type	Number of Interviews
Federal	31
Private nonprofit	26
State	12
Private for-profit	8
Faith-based	5
Informal	2
Total	84

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with resource providers.

Table 1.6
Areas of Focus of Resource Providers Interviewed

Area of Focus	Number of Interviews
Employment	34
Financial issues	31
Family relationships	28
Mental health	26
Education	24
Legal issues	5
Social network	5
Spiritual support	5
Medical concerns and health care	3

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with resource providers.

back from service members and spouses, legislation intended to support military families, and educational material distributed by resource providers. Finally, we synthesized our findings from across the various data sources.

As we discuss further in Chapter Two, our survey and interview samples are not representative of the Reserve Component as a whole, and for that reason, our findings should be interpreted cautiously. Although we cannot use our analysis to generalize about the experiences of the entire Reserve Component or all resource providers, this study provides one of the most comprehensive portraits to date of the reintegration experiences of guard and reserve families—their successes, challenges, and needs.

Organization of This Report

The next chapter offers an overview of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of reserve component families in our sample and points to distinctions between this sample and reserve component families as a whole. The next two chapters focus on the reintegration experiences of the service members and spouses we surveyed and interviewed. Chapter Three describes their views of the reintegration experience, focuses on the factors that families believed contributed to successful reintegration, and discusses the implications of these findings for military readiness. Chapter Four focuses on challenges: It identifies the key problems that returning service members and their families faced after deployment.

The next three chapters focus on the services available to help families reintegrate. Chapter Five presents a typology of the "web of support" that is available to reserve component families, and Chapter Six identifies the resources families seek out when they return to civilian life and what services they felt were helpful. Chapter Seven identifies challenges to supporting reserve component families and includes the perspectives of both providers and families. This chapter also includes our assessment of topics and questions that could be

added to DoD's efforts to collect data on the reintegration experiences of guard and reserve families.

Chapter Eight presents advice for other families, resource providers, and DoD regarding how to ensure that reintegration goes smoothly. The final chapter offers conclusions and the authors' recommendations to DoD about how to improve support for guard and reserve families after deployment. Appendix A includes details on our assessment of survey instruments used to collect information from reserve component service members and spouses about their reintegration experiences, as well as recommendations for additional topics and questions that should be included in DoD data collection efforts. Appendix B features an in-depth description of how the family web survey, family interviews, and provider interviews were conducted and analyzed.

CHAPTER TWO

What Do Guard and Reserve Families Look Like?

In this chapter, we describe the families represented in our web survey and interviews, including the personal characteristics of the service members and spouses who participated in our study and their families' attributes and deployment experiences. In doing so, we set the context for the findings presented in subsequent chapters and provide a basis for comparison to the broader Reserve Component. Although we cannot generalize from our web survey and family interviews about the full Reserve Component, it is still helpful to consider how those who participated in our study compare to the reserve component population.

Comparison with the Reserve Component

Before delving into a comparison of how our survey respondents and interview participants resemble the overall DoD reserve component population, it is important to clarify the portion of the Reserve Component that serves as our referent. In our study, we focused on the portion of the Selected Reserve that falls under DoD during both peacetime and wartime: the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Navy Reserve.[1] Accordingly, we compare our survey and interview samples

[1] During peacetime, the Coast Guard Reserve falls under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. In wartime, or when the President directs, Coast Guard assets and personnel can be assigned to support the U.S. Navy, in which case they are managed by DoD leadership.

to the DoD Selected Reserve described in Chapter One. This is the portion of the Reserve Component that includes personnel who typically spend one weekend a month and two weeks a year preparing to support a wartime or emergency mission. Table 2.1 shows how our web survey respondents and participants from both of our interview groups (follow-up and YRRP) compare to the DoD Selected Reserve in terms of reserve component and personnel type. The table also provides detail on how the service members and spouses in our three samples compare to their Selected Reserve counterparts. In terms of reserve component comparisons, our samples are markedly different from the overall DoD Selected Reserve in that the Navy Reserve is overrepresented and, despite multiple, diverse recruitment efforts, the Army National Guard is underrepresented. Overall, our samples include

Table 2.1
Demographic Comparison of Study Participants to DoD Selected Reserve

Component and Personnel Type	% of Overall DoD Selected Reserve (N = 847,934)	% of Web Survey Participants (N = 192)	% of Follow-Up Interview Participants (N = 40)	% of YRRP Interview Participants (N = 127)
All participants[a]				
Army National Guard	43	0	0	9
Air National Guard	12	41	13	24
Army Reserve	24	9	10	21
Air Force Reserve	8	10	5	25
Marine Corps Reserve	5	1	0	13
Navy Reserve	8	40	73	6
Officer	15	31	45	16
Enlisted	85	69	55	84

SOURCES: DoD, 2012c; 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

[a] Spouses in the sample were affiliated with their service member's reserve component and pay grade for the purposes of these statistics.

personnel from air-, land-, and sea-related operations, thereby providing a wide range in the nature of combat operations and deployment experiences. Our study also includes both enlisted families and officer families. Although the YRRP interview sample closely resembles the Selected Reserve, the web survey and follow-up interview samples (a subset of the web survey sample) have notably larger proportions of officers than does the Selected Reserve as a whole.

Individual Characteristics

Given the potential influence of gender-, age-, and family-related characteristics in shaping the issues and challenges faced by reserve component families, it is important to understand the nature of these attributes in our sample and how they compare with the entire DoD Selected Reserve. As Table 2.2 shows, our participants tended to be older, married, and more highly educated than reservists and guard

Table 2.2
Individual-Level Characteristics of Study Participants Compared with DoD Selected Reserve

Characteristic	Breakdown of Overall DoD Selected Reserve (N = 847,934)	Web Survey Participants (N = 192)	Follow-Up Interview Participants (N = 40)	YRRP Interview Participants (N = 127)
Service members		(N = 174)	(N = 35)	(N = 90)
Female service members	18%	14%	14%	7%
Age 25 or younger	34%	4%	6%	21%
Average age of officers	39.8	42.8	43.9	40.5
Average age of enlisted personnel	30.7	39.1	41.9	34.2
College degree (bachelor's degree or higher)	20%	50%	66%	36%

Table 2.2—Continued

Characteristic	Breakdown of Overall DoD Selected Reserve (N = 847,934)	Web Survey Participants (N = 192)	Follow-Up Interview Participants (N = 40)	YRRP Interview Participants (N = 127)
Service members (cont.)				
Married	48%	83%	89%	76%
Single parent[a]	9%	7%	8%	4%
Average number of children, per parent[a]	2.0	1.9	1.3	1.2
Spouses		(N = 18)	(N = 5)	(N = 37)
Male spouses	12%	0%	0%	3%
Age 25 or younger	14%	11%	0%	19%
Average age	36.1	37.8	40.8	33.8
College degree (bachelor's degree or higher)	N/A	56%	60%	46%
Average number of children under 18, per parent	N/A	1.7	1.6	1.5

SOURCES: DoD, 2012c; 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: Spouses in the sample were affiliated with their service member's reserve component and pay grade for the purposes of these statistics.

[a] For the overall Selected Reserve, children include minor dependents age 20 or younger and dependents age 22 and younger enrolled as full-time students. In the RAND samples, children include those under the age of 18 living at home at least half-time.

personnel in the Selected Reserve. For example, the average age of enlisted personnel in the Selected Reserve was 30.7, while comparable figures from our samples ranged from 34.2 to 41.9. The proportion of female service members in our study was lower than that in the Selected Reserve as well. The web survey and follow-up interview participants more closely matched the Selected Reserve in terms of the

proportion of service members who are single parents and the average number of children per parent.

The spouses in our study were roughly the same age as those in the overall Selected Reserve, but nearly all were female. Although 12 percent of the spouses married to reservists and guard personnel are male, only one male spouse participated in an interview. Data were not available from DoD to compare the education level or number of children of the spouses from our samples against the Selected Reserve, but we included these details for our samples to show how the spouses in our study compare across the three samples, as well as how they compare to the service members we surveyed and interviewed.

Family Characteristics

Table 2.3 and Figures 2.1 and 2.2 provide additional details on the families that participated in our study. Table 2.3 lists family demographics pertaining to marriage, parental status, and prior military experience; deployment-related experiences, including the amount of time the service member had been home at the time of our study, the length of the most recent deployment, whether the service member sustained any sort of wound or injury, physical or psychological; and information about where the families reside. We have combined the responses of service members and spouses in these tables and figures, so each family is represented by one entry. We were not able to make comparisons with the DoD Selected Reserve here because DoD does not publish most of these details.

Most of the families in our study included couples that were either married or in a relationship for more than two years (92–99 percent), and the majority of families had children under the age of 18 (62–75 percent). In addition, while the majority of service members had prior active component service, fewer spouses had prior military service in either the Active Component or the Reserve Component. The three samples differed significantly in terms of how long the service member had been home from deployment at the time of data collection. Web survey respondents reported that the service member had been home

for just over a month, on average (4.9 weeks). The similar figure for those who participated in a follow-up interview was 28.9 weeks, or roughly seven months. Interview participants recruited at YRRP events indicated that the service member had been home for 21.1 weeks on average, or closer to five months. The majority of families had experienced multiple deployments (55–63 percent). Note that those figures are higher than comparable proportions from other recent surveys of the Reserve Component: In both the January 2011 and January 2012 Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members, 49 percent of respondents reported multiple deployments since September 11, 2001. The three groups in our study varied more in terms of the length of the most recent deployment and whether the service member deployed with his or her own drill unit. Perhaps due to the large number of Navy reservists in our study, the majority of web survey respondents and follow-up interview participants reported that the service member did not deploy with his or her own drill unit. Finally, 13–20 percent of participants reported that the service member sustained a physical wound or injury during the most recent deployment,[2] and 19–35 percent noted that the service member experienced psychological issues stemming from the most recent deployment.[3] In both cases, follow-up interviewees reported the highest incident rates.

Table 2.3 and Figure 2.1 also offer insights regarding study participants' residence. Reserve component families' geographic dispersion, and their distance from military installations in particular, has been cited in other research as an impediment to support.[4] This may be the case with our sample as well, given that the majority of families in our study did not live within 25 miles of either the service member's

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[2] Here, *physical wound* refers to a combat-related injury, distinct from other types of injuries sustained during a deployment.

[3] Survey respondents and YRRP interviewees were asked whether they (or their spouse) returned home with psychological issues as a result of the deployment and either indicated "no" or provided one of three affirmative responses: "yes, mild issues"; "yes, moderate issues"; or "yes, severe issues." (Follow-up interview participants were not posed this question a second time.) The frequencies reported in Table 2.3 represent the sum of all three types of affirmative responses.

[4] Werber et al., 2008.

Table 2.3
Family-Level Characteristics of Study Participants

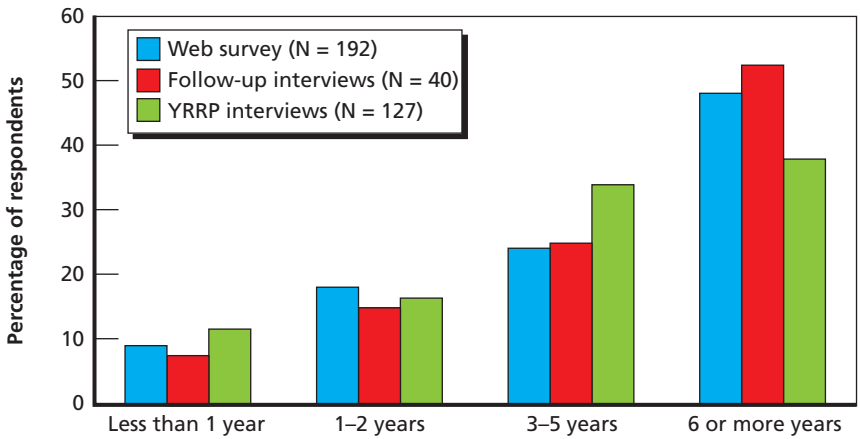
Characteristic	Web Survey Participants (N = 192)	Follow-Up Interview Participants (N = 40)	YRRP Interview Participants (N = 127)
Family demographics			
Married or in relationship for two years or more	92%	93%	99%
Children under age 18 living at home at least half-time	70%	75%	62%
Service member with prior active component experience	75%	73%	51%
Spouse with prior military experience	11%	20%	14%
Deployment experience			
Amount of time service member had been home from deployment at time of data collection (average number of weeks)	4.9	28.9	21.1
Service member had repeat OCONUS deployments	63%	55%	61%
Service member's most recent deployment was 1 year or longer	30%	50%	28%
Length of service member's most recent deployment (average number of months)	8.5	10.6	8.3
Service member deployed with own drill unit	43%	25%	66%
Service member sustained physical wound or injury during most recent deployment	15%	20%	13%
Service member has psychological issues stemming from most recent deployment	19%	35%	19%

Table 2.3—Continued

Characteristic	Web Survey Participants (N = 192)	Follow-Up Interview Participants (N = 40)	YRRP Interview Participants (N = 127)
Family residence			
Reside within 25 miles of drill unit	63%	21%	29%
Reside at least 100 miles away from drill unit	23%	21%	22%
Reside within 25 miles of nearest military installation	45%	41%	48%
Reside at least 100 miles away from nearest military installation	7%	11%	9%

SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

Figure 2.1
Family Tenure at Current Residence



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

RAND *RR206-2.1*

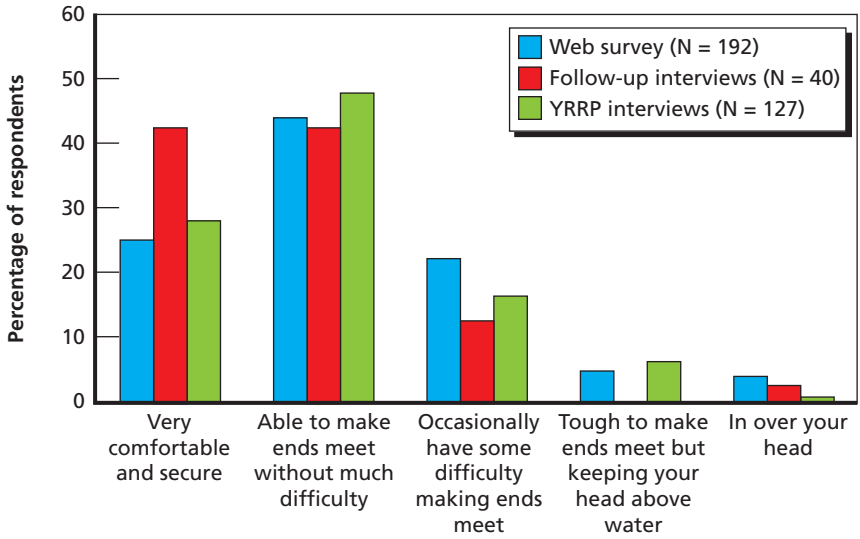
drill unit or the nearest military installation. The one exception was the web survey sample: Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that their family lived within 25 miles of the service member's drill unit.

Another notable feature of family residence is that most our participants had been living at their current residence for a number of years. Reserve component families differ from active component families not only in their distance from military installations and other DoD infrastructure but also in their embeddedness in the local community. Unlike many active component families, which relocate on a regular basis due to service members' Permanent Change of Station moves, guard and reserve families do not have a similar pressure from the military to relocate. As shown in Figure 2.1, roughly half of web survey respondents and follow-up interviewees reported living at their current residence for six years or more, as did 38 percent of YRRP interviewees. In contrast, only about 10 percent of study participants resided at their current location for less than one year.[5]

Figure 2.2 illustrates another important characteristic that is likely to affect families' reintegration experience: their financial situation. During their survey or interview, participants were asked which of five descriptions best characterized their family's financial situation, ranging from "very comfortable and secure" to "in over our heads." Most participants from all three samples were faring well financially: They indicated that their family was either "very comfortable and secure" or "able to make ends meet without much difficulty." Conversely, fewer than 10 percent of participants in our three samples selected the "tough to make ends meet" or "in over your head" options. This is another way our study participants differed from those in recent, larger data collection efforts. Specifically, 25 percent of web survey respondents, 43 percent of participants in follow-up interviews, and 28 percent of interview participants recruited at YRRP events reported that their family was "very comfortable and secure," whereas only 14 percent of participants in the January 2011 Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members and only 18 percent of the spouses who com-

[5] For conciseness, we use the term *study participants* to refer to both individuals who completed RAND's web survey and those who participated in a telephone interview.

Figure 2.2
Family Finances



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

RAND *RR206-2.2*

pleted the 2012 Survey of Reserve Component Spouses selected the same response option.[6] Moreover, larger proportions of respondents in both these Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)–administered surveys were struggling financially (i.e., the "tough to make ends meet" and "in over your head" categories).

[6] As noted earlier in this chapter, the web survey, follow-up interview, and YRRP interview samples differed in notable ways, such as the average length of time the service member had been home from deployment at the time of data collection, the proportion of service members who deployed with their drill unit, and the proportion of respondents affiliated with different reserve components. In addition, survey data were collected using a web survey, while interviews were conducted via telephone. These sources of variation, and others, could account for differences in family finances and other measures reported here. Largely due to limitations posed by the sample size and project scope, we did not conduct analyses to examine differences between the samples.

Conclusion

Our web survey and interview samples differ in notable ways from the overall DoD Selected Reserve, and, at the individual level, study participants differ from their counterparts in the Reserve Component as well. For example, the Navy Reserve was overrepresented in our study, and the Army National Guard was underrepresented. Since Navy Reserve members tend to deploy more frequently as Individual Augmentees than do other reserve component personnel, they and their families do not receive the same type of unit-based support that personnel who deploy with their drill unit typically do. This, in turn, could affect the views of how adequate support from the military has been. In addition, our study included a greater proportion of officers than are in the overall guard and reserve population. Compared with service members in the Reserve Component, service members in our study were older and more highly educated, on average, and a greater proportion were married and male. It is possible that enlisted personnel, younger service members, and those with less education experience reintegration differently. Gender was also a key difference between the spouses in our sample and the overall population of reserve component spouses: Only one of the spouses who participated in our study was male, compared with 12 percent of reserve component spouses. The families in our study also tend to have more experience with repeat deployments and to be more comfortable financially than the families of recent Status of Forces survey respondents. Taken together, these differences may have influenced the findings based on data from guard and reserve families. While our results may be generalizable to families with characteristics similar to those included in our study, additional research is needed to determine the extent to which our findings may apply to guard and reserve families with different characteristics, such as families with female service members, those with more dire family finances, or those who have prior experience with deployments and reintegration.

CHAPTER THREE

What Factors Relate to Successful Reintegration?

In this chapter, we consider what reintegration "success" means from the perspective of guard and reserve families themselves. First, we share self-reported assessments of how well reintegration has gone for service members, spouses, and children, comparing our participants with respondents to other surveys. Next, we identify family characteristics related to a favorable readjustment experience, such as family readiness for deployment, adequate communication, and comfortable family finances. We then turn our attention to families' own explanations for why reintegration has gone well or very well and close the chapter with a discussion of the potential implications of a successful reintegration experience, including what it means for continued service in the Guard or Reserve.

Family Perceptions of Reintegration Success

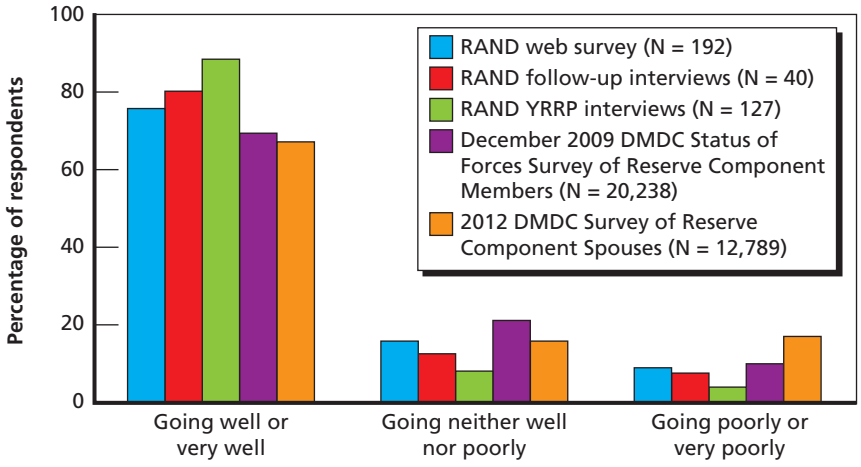
We asked all study participants (both web survey respondents and interviewees) how well readjustment was going for them personally and, as applicable, for their spouse or partner and children.[1] To capture their assessments, we posed a question that had been included in several large-scale DMDC surveys of reserve component service members or spouses. It featured a five-point scale, ranging from "very well" to "very poorly" with a neutral midpoint. The responses to this question

[1] Questions posed to service members used the term *significant other* to refer to an individual with whom the service member had been in a relationship for at least two years.

are shown in Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 for service members, spouses and partners, and children, respectively. For comparison purposes, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 also include responses from the most recent DMDC surveys that included the same question (December 2009 for reserve component service members and 2012 for reserve component spouses); Figure 3.3 includes responses from the most recent DMDC reserve component service member survey (spouses were not posed a question about child readjustment).

The responses were relatively uniform across all three RAND samples and all family members: The vast majority of our study participants reported that readjustment was going well or very well. Compared with the DMDC survey samples, our study participants as a whole had more favorable views of their families' reintegration experience. The proportions of RAND study participants who reported that readjustment was going well or very well were greater than comparable proportions from the DMDC reserve component service member and spouse surveys, and the proportions of RAND study participants who

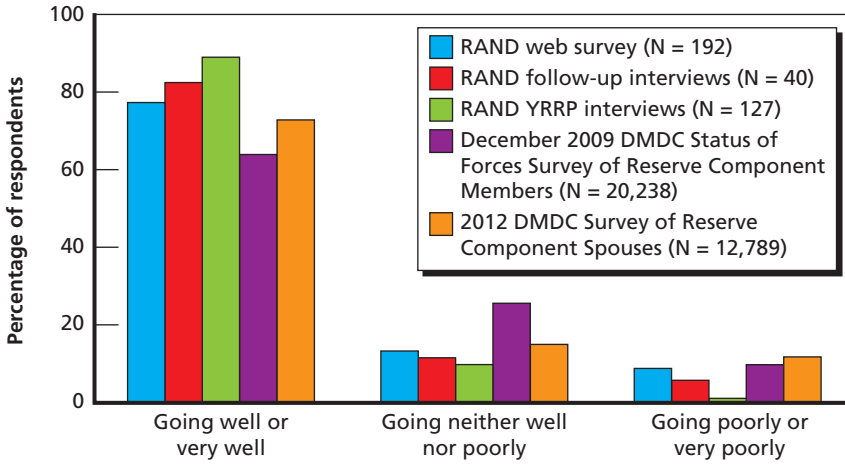
Figure 3.1
Perceptions of Service Members' Reintegration Success



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families; 2009 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members; 2012 DMDC Survey of Reserve Component Spouses.

RAND *RR206-3.1*

Figure 3.2
Perceptions of Spouses' or Partners' Reintegration Success



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families; 2009 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members; 2012 DMDC Survey of Reserve Component Spouses.

NOTE: Only spouses and service members with either spouses or partners were asked this question (178 web survey respondents, 37 follow-up interviewees, and 126 YRRP interviewees).

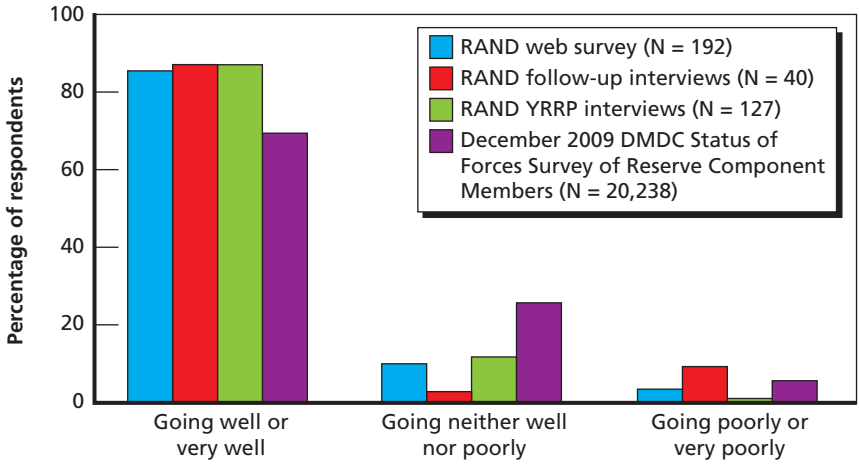
RAND *RR206-3.2*

felt that readjustment was going poorly or very poorly were typically lower. These findings afford us the opportunity to learn about the factors associated with successful reintegration and the reasons the families themselves believe that reintegration has proceeded smoothly.

Factors Associated with Reintegration Success

Our survey and interview samples were sufficiently large to conduct statistical analyses on associations between perceived reintegration success and such factors as where families lived, their financial situation, characteristics of the most recent deployment (e.g., length, communication between the service member and the family), the service member's psychological or physical issues stemming from deployment, and communication from the service member's unit or Service following

Figure 3.3
Perceptions of Children's Reintegration Success



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families; 2009 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members.

NOTE: Only spouses and service members with children under the age of 18 living at home were asked this question (134 web survey respondents, 30 follow-up interviewees, and 79 YRRP interviewees).

RAND *RR206-3.3*

deployment. In Table 3.1, which displays the results of our analyses, an "X" indicates a statistically significant relationship between a factor and study participants' assessments of how well reintegration has proceeded for different family members. Given that we are focusing on reintegration success in this chapter, the factors listed in Table 3.1 are framed in positive terms. For example, participants who indicated that their family had been ready for the most recent deployment were more inclined to report that reintegration was going well for all family members than were participants who felt that their family had not been ready for the deployment. Whether the service member deployed as part of his or her drill unit (as opposed to deploying on his or her own, as in the case of Individual Augmentees) seemed to have implications for readjustment success as well: Families whose service member deployed with his or her drill unit were more likely to report that reintegration was going well for the spouse. The perceived adequacy of

Table 3.1
Factors Associated with Guard and Reserve Families' Readjustment Success

	Successful Readjustment		
Characteristic	**Service Member**	**Spouse**	**Child**
Family was ready for deployment[a]	X	X	X
Service member deployed with own unit		X	
Adequate communication with family during deployment[a]	X		
Adequate communication from unit or Service postdeployment[b]	X	X	
Service member returned without psychological issue	X	X	X
Service member returned without physical wound or injury	X	X	X
Comfortable family finances	X	X	X

SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: An "X" denotes a statistically significant relationship at $p < 0.05$ between a readjustment rating and a factor in at least one of three data sources: web survey, follow-up interviews, or YRRP interviews.

[a] These factors were measured in the web survey instrument only.

[b] This factor was not measured in the web survey instrument.

communication, both during deployment between the service member and the family and after deployment from the service member's unit or Service also appear to be important to self-reported reintegration success. Those who felt that communication with the family was adequate *during* deployment were more inclined to report that the service member was readjusting well following his or her deployment, and those who regarded communication from the military *after* deployment as adequate tended to indicate that reintegration was going well for both the service member and the spouse. The remaining three characteristics listed in Table 3.1 were significantly related to readjustment success for everyone in the family. Not surprisingly, families whose

service member did not return home with a physical injury, physical wound, and/or psychological issue were more likely to report that readjustment was going well for every family member. Similarly, families that were very comfortable and secure financially were more likely to report that readjustment was going well, whereas families in more trying financial circumstances did not view reintegration as favorably.

How Families Account for Reintegration Success

In addition to our statistical analyses, we gleaned insights about successful reintegration during our interviews, in which we asked service members and their spouses why they gave the readjustment ratings that they did. The reasons they offered fall into two broad categories:

- aspects of their family situation
- strategies they used to ensure that reintegration went well.

Since interview participants were not asked to indicate which reasons were most important or most effective in their opinion, nor could we independently assess the impact of these explanations, we opted to present them all. This may help identify groups that are more in need of support during reintegration than others and suggest "best practices" that guard and reserve families may employ to aid with reintegration.

Family Situation

We found that prior deployment experience, the family's closeness, the age of children, removing the burdens of deployment, and the absence of change from predeployment circumstances were regarded by interviewees as factors that affected how well readjustment was going for their families. Prior experience included a combination of repeat deployments, the spouse's current or prior military service, and exposure to the military lifestyle through other family members. As one service member explained, "My wife's a military brat, and I've been deployed before. So we sort of know what to expect" (Respondent F020, Navy

Reserve O-5).[2] Interviewees who made remarks of this nature felt that retracing one's steps or knowing what to do from previous trial and error accounted for a successful reintegration experience following the most recent deployment.

Another notable protective factor was the family's closeness. Remarks about family closeness pertained to having not only a good marriage but also a loving bond among all family members. As one spouse we interviewed stated, "I think it's going over well because we love each other so much" (Respondent F024, Navy Reserve E-5's spouse). Another told us, "I think [readjustment is going well because] we just have a really strong relationship and [we had] really strong family ties before he left" (Respondent Y0100, Air National Guard O-3's spouse). The age of the children was also highlighted as a factor: Some interviewees noted that very young children were too young to fully understand that their father or mother had been gone for an extended period of time (or why) and would readjust easily because they quickly forget that he or she had been away. As one guardsman told us about his children:

> They're young, they don't really know exactly what all is going on. We used Skype, so I was able to talk to my oldest quite a few times. He just thought I was on vacation. (Respondent Y0117, Air National Guard E-6)

Other interviewees suggested that it was older children, especially teenagers, who were well equipped to readjust to their service member parent's return home because they were more mature.

The end of deployment also brought a reduction in the family's stress that some interviewees attributed as a reason why readjustment was going well. As the remarks below illustrate, interview participants

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[2] After each quotation, a unique identifier indicates the interview in which the comment was made. The same identifier is used to denote the same interview throughout the report, but it does not have significance nor can it be used to identify the participants. These numerical identifiers are used to convey the extent to which evidence is present in multiple interviews. We also include relevant demographic information; for example, we note the reserve component with which the interviewee is affiliated.

noted that removing the burdens of deployment provided both physical and psychological relief:

> [My return home] relieved the stress of my wife being a single parent, a de facto single parent with three kids while working as a major in the Army. So I relieved that stress off of her by reassuming the job of taking care of our kids. And it was a benefit for the kids because they had their father back. And it was good for me, too. So coming back off of deployment and returning to my regular job has been a mental burden relieved for me because my deployment job was far more stressful than my civilian job. (Respondent F014, Army Reserve O-4)

> My wife had to take care of the kids by herself, so now that I'm back, she has less stress . . . and she's very appreciative of that. (Respondent Y0134, Air National Guard E-6)

> My wife [has] a tremendous sense of relief that I'm home and not in Afghanistan. . . . She's more relaxed and I think she was on edge during my deployment. She really would get stressed out when I would go to Pakistan or when I would travel. And she just didn't like the idea that I had potential for physical harm, so it is a great relief on her part and I think she's just very happy about that. (Respondent F001, Navy Reserve E-5)

Interview participants also highlighted the absence of change from predeployment circumstances as easing reintegration. This category of explanations included remarks about returning seamlessly to the same situation and the same routines that the family had before the most recent deployment. When asked why reintegration was going well, these participants shared observations like "nothing has changed" or things were "back to normal." They also acknowledged the absence of problems that might make reintegration more challenging, as follows:

> I was able to just like take off my camis [camouflage attire] and put on my civilian attire and go right back into the working force without any problems at all. It's not like I was never gone, but it's

> kind of like I've never gone. (Respondent Y0047, Marine Corps Reserve E-3)

> We have no financial problems, no kids. It's just us. I have a job. . . . We have no real difficulties. Less problems, less worries. Maybe if I couldn't find a job, or we had kids, it would be different. (Respondent Y0057, Army Reserve O-3)

> [Readjustment is going well] because there haven't been any real deleterious or negative events or disruptions or anything like that. I'm couching that statement on a negative, I guess. The absence of anything. (Respondent F048, Navy Reserve E-6)

Note that some who appreciated the absence of problems also mentioned that a smooth readjustment was facilitated by the fact that the service member returned from deployment without any sort of injury or wound. As one guardsman told us,

> I think it's [going well] because of my mental state. I just kept a very positive mental state and . . . I did a lot of self-determination over there so I came back. And I worked out a lot, too, so I came back in a really good physical and mental state. (Respondent Y0142, Air National Guard E-5)

Family Strategies for Reintegration Success

In addition to these circumstances, families also identified deliberate strategies they used to ensure a good outcome with respect to reintegration: what interviewees regarded as good communication during and after deployment, plans for time together as a family, and use of the support resources available to them. Perceived good communication was mentioned most often, by about 20 percent of interviewees, and included communication with the service member during deployment as well as good dialogue between family members once the service member returned home. This is consistent with a finding we noted earlier in this chapter: the statistically significant relationship between the perceived adequacy of communication during deployment and service member readjustment. Interview participants who felt that communi-

cation during deployment was key to their reintegration success conveyed that this communication could benefit both the service member and the family members still at home. As one spouse explained, reintegration was going well

> because we pretty much talked—we talked about every day or every other day, sometimes once a week depending on the missions that they had. He knew everything that was going on. I knew what I could know while he was deployed. And then, when he came home, it was just normal. We just start back like normal. (Respondent Y0089, Army Reserve E-6's spouse)

Interview participants also mentioned the different types of technology that facilitated this type of communication. Skype was frequently mentioned, but other information technology–based tools, such as video conferencing, email, and web chat, were also identified as useful. The following remarks exemplify this theme:

> Even in a deployed area, you know, there is technology from Skyping to email to, you know, maybe phone communication once a month or once a week or . . . as need be, but definitely keep that line of communication open because that definitely helped me out. Because of the time difference, I was able to pretty much talk to my wife almost every day if need be. I was able to speak to my kids, [not] relying on just a letter, so when you have different forms of communication, I think that makes the transition from beginning, during and getting ready to return home. . . . [It] is a great reliever there. (Respondent Y0138, Air National Guard E-6)

> I know Skype and stuff like that made it a lot easier. When we had to deploy on the submarine, we didn't have any of that. So when I came home, my little one was kind of like, "Who are you?" He's my oldest now, but he was little when I got deployed, and [now] Skype made it different because they can at least see me and hear my voice. (Respondent Y0156, Navy Reserve O-4)

Some interview participants described using alternative forms of communication when frequent communication was neither possible nor preferred:

> I just think communication is the key to anything. I think that it probably depends on how people handle it while they're gone. . . . You know, I saw a lot of people doing the Facetime or the Skyping, and you know it's almost like they didn't leave. . . . People are glued to the [cell phone]—I was kind of glad I didn't get a cell phone over there, and I only called my ex-boyfriend, twice a week. At first, it was once [a week] and he wasn't [happy with that, so] he kind of asked for more, but I was happy with just once a week. But it just, you know, we emailed every day. He did this blog, which was nice, so I got to keep up with him and he'd got a dog and, you know, just his everyday life and it was so nice, like, I felt close to him doing that, so I think that that helped with the transition back. (Respondent Y0142, Air National Guard E-5)

> I know that sounds crazy, but we chose not to use Skype or a videoconferencing call of any sort while he was deployed. So we stuck with 15-minute phone calls that they're allotted and email and written postcards and honestly, that improved our communication better than it has been in my marriage since probably the first five years. But a lot of that is just the simple act of actually writing down your thoughts, and also, to be honest, the emotional separation of knowing somebody's that far away and being reminded that they are there, I think visually you're just reminded again and again and again, whereas in writing and on emails, it's easier to keep the separation. And so for us anyway, it made it so that our communication was about the necessary things, but it also helped us to improve that kind of communication in our life. (Respondent Y0152, Navy Reserve O-4's spouse)

> There's avenues [of communication] depending on the individual. The first time we were deployed, I tried to write a letter every day even if I wasn't able to mail it because of where I was sometimes. But I'd write it every day and put the date on the back of it so, when she got like five or six letters at one time, she could read the oldest one and go through. And I mainly focused in on what my

> plans were after I returned; a little about what I was doing day to day, but mostly on the future once we were back together. And this time I had a little more access to phones and Internet. Mostly the phones, I was able to call and talk to her a little more often than last time. But I still sent letters as well. (Respondent Y0010, Army Reserve E-6)

One of the points conveyed by these statements is that the appropriate frequency, form, and content of communication may vary according to the family, and we did not observe patterns in terms of how "good communication" was defined. While many interview participants extolled the benefits of "constant communication," we also heard from service members, in particular, that too much communication during deployment could be challenging, especially if it focused on seemingly trivial details of life at home. As one reservist explained, "I'd get these phone calls like, 'The pipe has a leak,' or 'The faucet has a drip.' And I'll be like, 'Really?! What can I do? I'm 13,000 miles away'" (Respondent Y0056, Army Reserve O-2).

Good communication that helped with readjustment continued after the service member returned home. As the comments that follow illustrate, having open, honest, ongoing dialogue was perceived as an important factor in reintegration success:

> Everybody's communicating their feelings and it's like there's no hidden agendas and no hidden feelings and everybody's able to express themselves well. In between talking about what I did over there and what I do here and kind of showing the correlation between the two, everybody kind of understands how it was a good thing to be there and not a bad thing. I think communication is the biggest thing. (Respondent F045, Navy Reserve O-3)

> I guess it gets a little bit better each time I get back as far as communication and being able to talk about things that are bothering us or that we're having a hard time with. And that just, I guess, helps the transition. (Respondent Y0004, Air Force Reserve E-6)

A second strategy used by families to create a smooth reintegration experience was creating time for the family to be together. This

included not only family vacations but also, as these remarks show, efforts to carve out time for the family in everyday life:

> I think it [reintegration success] has to do with us communicating while I was deployed and also us trying to do things together. On the weekends or on Friday nights, we do . . . family movie night or something. So I think that has helped quite a bit. (Respondent F036, Navy Reserve O-4)

> We do a lot of family activities together. Most of the time when we make our plans, it's always a family thing. When we have dinner, whenever we eat, whenever we have breakfast, it's always a family environment. We go to church. Everything is not individualized, it's all family involved. (Respondent Y0033, Air Force Reserve E-6)

> We linger after dinner, we have a lot of fun talking. We make a point that dinner is always together, the TV is shut off. We can have music, but that's it, and we talk about what we've done and they invite their friends home to spend time with us. (Respondent Y0213, Air National Guard, O-5)

Finally, a small number of interview participants cited making use of resources available to them during reintegration as a reason why reintegration was going well or very well. This included not only YRRP events, where we recruited many of our interview participants, but also other military-sponsored resources—those offered within the community (e.g., through church), and nonspecific videos, books, and other materials intended to guide a family through the reintegration period following deployment. These resources are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Benefits of Successful Reintegration

As we discussed in Chapter One, DoD regards a successful reintegration experience for the service member and his or her family as critical to a mission-ready, effective Reserve Component. Our research offers

support for this premise by suggesting that families that have a smooth readjustment following deployment not only enjoy such positives as increased family closeness and a stronger marriage or domestic partnership but also have favorable views regarding the service member's continued service in the Guard or Reserve.

Strengthening of Family Bonds

When asked about the benefits experienced during reintegration, interview participants tended to mention a strengthening of family bonds, including increased family closeness and a stronger relationship with one's spouse or partner. As the following remarks illustrate, families grew closer as a result of time together, good communication, and a renewed appreciation for one another after time apart:

> I think coming back from deployment after being away. It makes you appreciate those that are close to you and . . . you kind of decipher who your true friends are and your true loved ones. My family keeps in touch and makes an effort to be there [and] you kind of can figure out the people who aren't necessarily true friends. And I think, my family, it brought us closer together. My coming home gave an opportunity for everyone to come together and spend dinners together and be together. (Respondent F017, Army Reserve E-5)

> [A positive is] the perspective associated with being gone for so long and realizing how important just spending time together and doing things together and then also the ability to prioritize based on that perspective. Where before I might have stayed at work longer or done something else, now I choose to do things that are, in my perception, more important, such as spending time with my kids or my wife. (Respondent F052, Navy Reserve O-5)

> I think every time we [service members] come back, you get a good chance to re-get to know each other. It's not only a bad thing, but it also makes all your relationships stronger with your parents and with your significant other, wife or husband, and . . . I think it makes it stronger in the long haul. It might be made more difficult when you first get back, but it definitely makes

> the ties stronger after you work through any issues. (Respondent Y0087, Army Reserve E-6)

As the last quotation suggests, interview participants also noted improvements to their marriage or domestic partnership. While, at times, such remarks were made in conjunction with family relationships more generally, some interview participants focused instead on how aspects of the deployment—especially getting reacquainted after the service member returned home—led to better relationship dynamics with their spouse or partner:

> Our communication has gotten better. We've grown closer. And it seems like the small things that used to irritate us don't necessarily irritate us anymore. I don't know. We've just grown closer. (Respondent Y0043, Air Force Reserve E-5's spouse)

> I'd say during the deployment, we both kind of got concerned as far as we didn't get to communicate as much or talk. . . . Like I said, the talking and stuff was a really big part of our relationship, so due to communication problems over there, we couldn't talk as much. But I think that once he got home I would say that our relationship is probably stronger than it's ever been. I don't know, you learn to appreciate the smaller things a lot more. (Respondent Y0091, Army Reserve E-4's spouse)

> I think, because we realize that we've got things to work on, it [reintegration] gives us almost an excuse to work on them instead of just letting them fester because we can both recognize that something's there instead of letting it go. . . . In the past, if there was something, we'd just kind of brush by it. But I think it gives us an excuse to realize that we have something to work on. (Respondent Y0061, Army Reserve E-5)

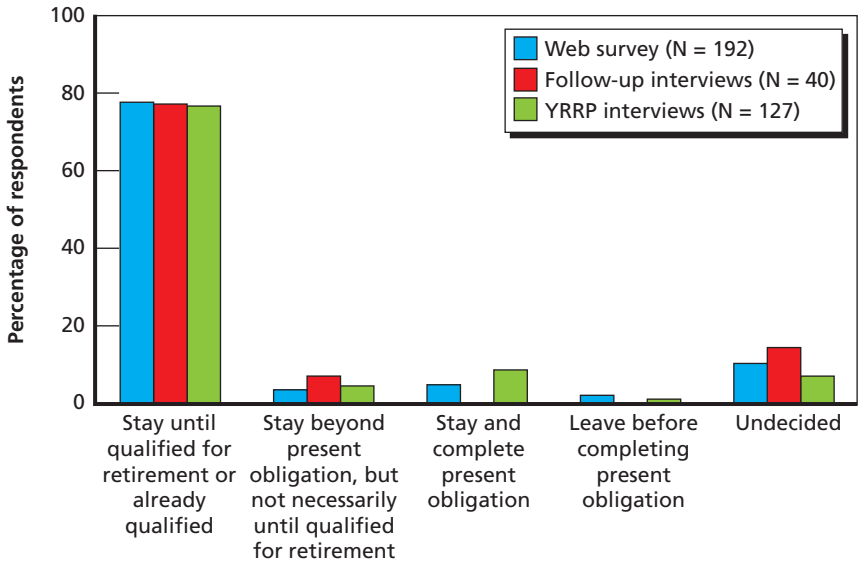
Favorable Attitudes Toward Guard or Reserve Career

Turning our attention to military readiness and effectiveness, the survey and interviews closed with a series of questions pertaining to the service member's career in the Guard or Reserve. Specifically, ser-

vice members were asked how satisfied they were with their career in their specific reserve component (e.g., Air National Guard, Army Reserve). Approximately 80 percent of service members from all three samples indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their career in their specific reserve component. In addition, both spouses and service members were asked about the service member's planned tenure in the Guard or Reserve, what the spouse's opinion was regarding continued service, and the impact of the most recent deployment. The responses to these three questions are provided in Figures 3.4 through 3.6.

Most service members had favorable views toward reserve component service. As depicted in Figure 3.4, just over three-fourths of study participants from all three samples reported that the service member planned to stay in the Reserve Component until he or she was eligible for retirement or he or she was already qualified for retirement.

Figure 3.4
Service Members' Military Career Plans

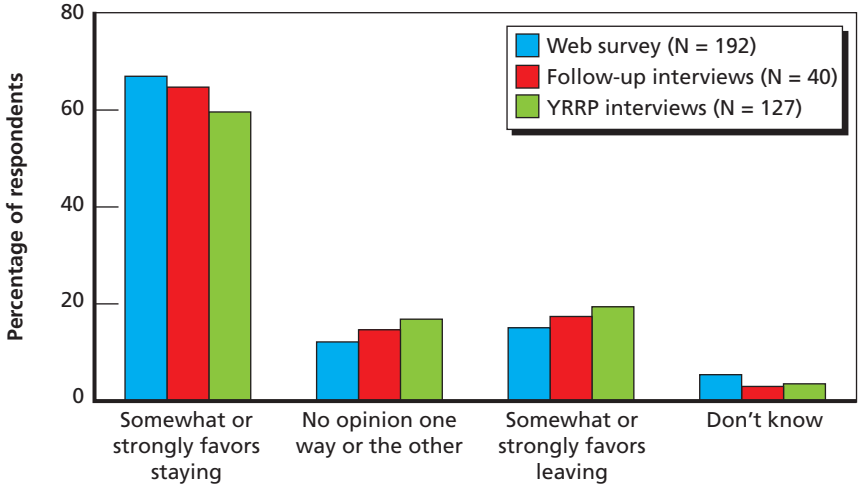


SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

RAND *RR206-3.4*

Figure 3.5 shows responses to a second measure of career intentions, spouse opinion regarding the service member's guard or reserve career. Spouses who took the web survey or participated in an interview were asked whether they thought the service member should stay in or leave the Guard or Reserve, and service members were asked a similar question with respect to the views of their spouse or partner. Spouse opinion was somewhat more mixed toward continued service in the Reserve Component: Although the majority of participants indicated that they or their spouse favored the service member remaining in the Guard or Reserve, 12–17 percent of participants indicated a neutral spouse opinion, and 15–19 percent indicated that the spouse or partner favored the service member leaving the Guard or Reserve. As a whole, service members and spouses also expressed less support for staying in the Reserve Component as a result of the most recent deployment (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.5
Spouse Opinions Regarding Service Member's Guard or Reserve Career

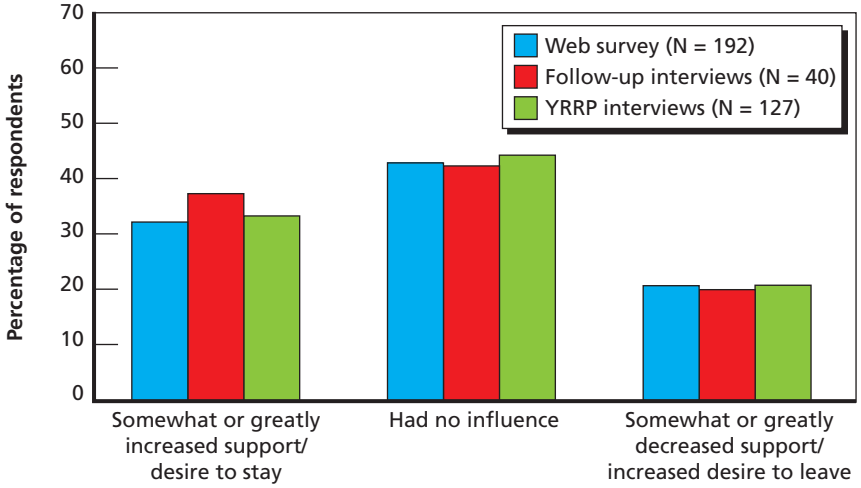


SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: The figure includes responses from the spouses in our samples and responses from service members about their spouse or partner's opinion. The service members and spouses in our study were not married to one another; thus, each response represents a different family.

RAND *RR206-3.5*

Figure 3.6
Impact of Most Recent Deployment on Views Toward Continued Service in the Guard or Reserve



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: Numbers do not sum to 100 percent because 4 percent of web survey respondents and 2 percent of YRRP interviewees selected "Don't know" as their response.

RAND *RR206-3.6*

The neutral view garnered the most responses in all three samples (43–44 percent), and 20–21 percent of participants had a negative view toward the most recent deployment, with the service members in our samples indicating that it increased their desire to leave the Guard or Reserve and spouses noting it decreased their support for their service member's career.

Our research suggests that families' perceptions of how well readjustment has proceeded are associated with these retention-related attitudes. Table 3.2 summarizes the results of our analysis. An "X" in a cell denotes a statistically significant association between the readjustment rating for a particular family member and a specific retention-related attitude. In most cases, we found a significant link between perceived readjustment success for a family member and attitudes toward continued service in the Guard or Reserve. Put another way, families that

Table 3.2
Associations Between Perceptions of Readjustment Success and Retention-Related Attitudes

	Successful Readjustment		
Retention-Related Attitude	**Service Member**	**Spouse**	**Child**
Service member's military career plans		X	X
Spouse opinion regarding service member's guard or reserve career	X	X	X
Impact of most recent deployment on guard or reserve career plans (service members) or career support (spouses)	X	X	

SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: An "X" denotes a statistically significant relationship at $p < 0.05$ between a readjustment rating and a retention-related attitude in at least one of three data sources: web survey, follow-up interviews, or YRRP interviews.

felt that reintegration was going well also (1) planned a longer military career for the service member, (2) reported that the spouse favored the service member staying in the Guard or Reserve, and (3) felt that the most recent deployment had a favorable influence on continued military service. While these findings suggest that families' reintegration experiences have important implications for military readiness and effectiveness, additional research is required to determine whether these findings are true for the overall Reserve Component, not just our study sample.

Conclusion

The results of our web survey and family interviews indicate that the majority of study participants believed that reintegration had been successful; at the time of their survey or interview, they reported that readjustment was going well for themselves, their spouse or service member, and their children. Comparable figures from recent large-scale surveys administered by DMDC suggest that our sample has fared particularly

well in this regard. We found that factors related to reintegration success include the family feeling ready for deployment, adequate communication with the family during deployment, adequate communication from the unit or Service following deployment, and comfortable family finances. This last factor, family financial situation, may help explain why our study sample reported higher rates of readjustment success than did DMDC survey respondents: As noted in Chapter Two, the families in our study were, as a whole, more comfortable financially as well. Our analysis also indicated that when the service member deployed with his or her own unit and returned home without a physical wound, physical injury, or psychological issue, readjustment tended to go more smoothly.

When asked to explain why they felt reintegration was going well or very well, the service members and spouses we interviewed discussed how aspects of their family situation, including prior deployment experience, the family's closeness, their children's ages, the lifting of deployment-related burdens, and the sense that life has returned to predeployment circumstances, influenced their assessment. They also identified strategies they used to ensure that reintegration went well, including what they considered to be good communication during and after deployment, plans for time together as a family, and the use of the support resources available to them.

These findings are important because not only do families that have a successful reintegration experience report such benefits as stronger family bonds, but they also tend to have favorable views toward the service member's continued service in the Guard or Reserve. It is possible that these outcomes may be mutually reinforcing. We examined reserve component career plans using several measures and documented a relationship between these retention-oriented attitudes and perceptions of reintegration success. Moreover, an understanding of the factors related to successful readjustment and the strategies that families use to achieve this outcome can inform efforts to help guard and reserve families in the future. For example, ensuring that families are ready for deployment at its outset, facilitating various forms of good communication throughout the deployment cycle, and providing families with the tools to manage their finances effectively may all

contribute to reintegration success. In addition, sharing reintegration "best practices" used by guard and reserve families may both illustrate concrete strategies that they can proactively implement and convince other families of their utility.

CHAPTER FOUR

What Are the Main Challenges Guard and Reserve Families Face After Deployment?

As we discussed in Chapter Three, the majority of study participants reported that readjustment was going well or very well. Yet, other families in our study were less satisfied with their postdeployment experiences, and comparable data from a larger study (DMDC's 2012 Survey of Reserve Component Spouses) were not quite as positive. Understanding the challenges faced by those who feel that reintegration has not gone well can help identify opportunities for improved reintegration support. Insights about the problems that more successful families confronted—and potentially surmounted—can be of value in this regard as well.

Accordingly, we begin this chapter with the most prevalent problems mentioned in the survey and family interviews, including service member mental or emotional health, medical concerns and frustrations with health care, civilian employment difficulties, and relationship problems with one's spouse or partner. We then describe individual and family characteristics that were related to citing these problems, including family finances, family readiness for the deployment, communication, service member physical wounds or injuries, service member psychological issues, and some residence characteristics. In closing, we discuss how these problems may have negative implications for families' readjustment and military readiness.

Most Prevalent Problems Cited by Guard and Reserve Families

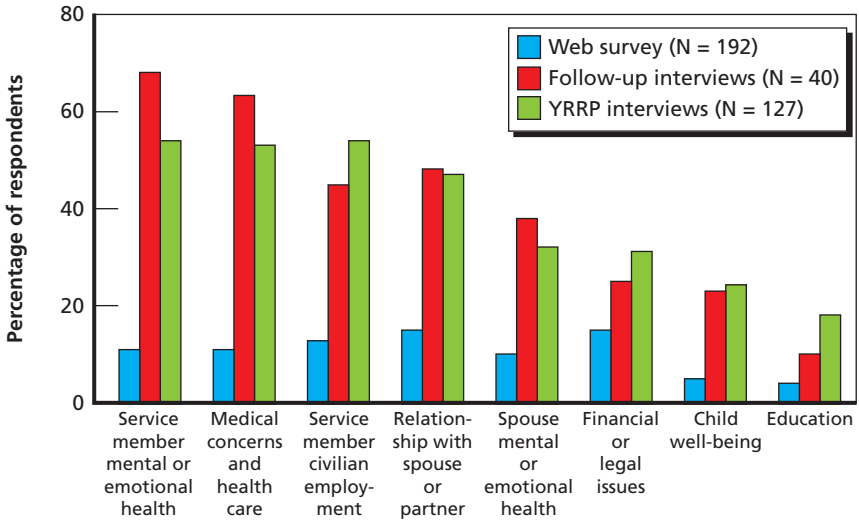
In both our web survey and interviews with spouses and service members, we included a series of questions intended to assess the extent to which different types of problems were experienced by guard and reserve families. In the web survey, we presented respondents with a list of problems (e.g., employment, health care, service member well-being) and asked them to select the problems that they or their immediate family were currently experiencing. A follow-up question asked the respondent to indicate which of those problems they regarded as severe. In our interviews, we followed a similar line of questioning, but in an open-ended format: We reviewed a list of potential problems with participants and asked them to describe in their own words what a specific problem or challenge was like for their family. In both the web survey and the interview, participants were also invited to describe any postdeployment problems they experienced that were not included in our list. Figure 4.1 summarizes their answers; the types of challenges these families faced are displayed from left to right in order of how frequently they were cited (based on average frequencies with which they were mentioned across the three samples). Overall, problems were cited more frequently by interview participants than web survey respondents, but we do not know whether this is because families experienced fewer problems earlier in the reintegration period,[1] the survey and interview samples differed demographically, or differences in data collection procedures biased participants.[2]

Across the survey and interviews, four categories of problems were cited frequently (i.e., by more than 40 percent of the interviewees): the service member's mental or emotional health, health care or

[1] Recall that web survey respondents reported the service member being home for 4.9 weeks on average, compared with 28.9 and 21.1 weeks, on average, for follow-up interviewees and YRRP interviewees, respectively.

[2] The survey was conducted via the Internet, with problems presented on-screen for the respondent to review and select as applicable, while the interview was conducted via telephone, with an interviewer posing questions based on a list of the same problems presented in the survey.

Figure 4.1
Reintegration Problems Cited by Survey and Interview Participants



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

RAND *RR206-4.1*

medical issues, service member's civilian employment, and relationship with a spouse or partner. These problems are described in the next section, presented in order of their prevalence among our study participants (based on average frequencies with which they were mentioned across the three samples). Families also reported experiencing problems related to the spouse's mental or emotional health, financial or legal issues, child well-being, and education, but to a lesser extent. During our review of the literature and data collection instruments, we did not find a large-scale assessment of either the problems or the needs that guard and reserve families have following deployment, so we could not determine whether our study participants experienced these problems more or less frequently than other guard and reserve families.

Service Member Mental or Emotional Health

Eleven percent of survey respondents cited problems with service member well-being, but more than half of our interview partici-

pants mentioned this problem, making it the most frequently mentioned problem among those interviewed. In addition, as noted in Chapter Two, 19 percent of survey respondents, 35 percent of follow-up interviewees, and 19 percent of YRRP interviewees indicated in response to a multiple-choice question that the service member had psychological issues stemming from the most recent deployment. During interviews, we asked participants to discuss service member mental or emotional health concerns more broadly. The responses that fall into this category suggest a range of severity, from relatively mild sadness and anxiety to more severe mental or health difficulties that required medical attention. Rather than include only the more severe issues, we opted to capture the full range of experiences. We found that these issues tended to be manifest as trouble sleeping and feelings of anxiety and stress. Interview participants described sleep problems as difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep that stemmed from a combination of factors, such as adjusting to a new time zone, experiencing nightmares, and getting used to sharing a bed with another person. As one service member explained,

> In the beginning when I got home, it was odd sharing a bed again. I got used to sleeping in a twin-sized bed with nobody else, so it was hard to adjust to that, you know? It was hard to adjust the sleep schedule and the fact that, I mean, a lot of that had to do with before when we'd sleep there was someone always on guard, so it was odd to be back in the States and just go to bed and nobody'd be up. (Respondent Y0169, Marine Corps Reserve, E-4)

Feelings of anxiety and stress were often mentioned in conjunction with being overwhelmed. As the comments below illustrate, transitioning from a focus on work-related events in theater to what was perceived as a larger variety of issues requiring the service member's attention proved difficult at times:

> Stress-wise, it's just been difficult kind of trying to reintegrate, I suppose, and balance everything in thinking I have time for everything when there aren't enough hours in the day between

> work and having a child and family life and taking care of all the extra responsibilities at home. Anxiety-wise, I think mostly just, in public places sometimes, just too many people and overstimulated and needing some quiet time. (Respondent Y0094, Army Reserve E-5)

> The number of things that are going on that need to be taken care of and the pressure from family to focus on their needs can be overwhelming at times. Having spent eight months in theater with only myself and my coworkers to worry about, now there's, you know, any number of things going on, and so that's just been difficult to deal with at some times. Just causes stress for myself and for my wife, but nothing that's dramatic, but it is surprising how much of an impact that has had. (Respondent F052, Navy Reserve O-5)

In a related vein, in an explanation of why she felt her service member's readjustment was going poorly, one spouse we spoke with described a challenge he faced with a basic household task, grocery shopping:

> I sent him to the grocery store yesterday, and he was gone for two hours and he came back with like three bags of groceries. Because he just couldn't figure out what to buy. And I know that that's a very common thing for these guys to be overwhelmed with choices. (Respondent Y0159, Navy Reserve E-4's spouse)

At times, service members also felt anxious about being in crowded places, such as on public transportation or in restaurants or retail outlets. Additional sources of stress or pressure that were mentioned during interviews included employment, housing, and health or medical issues.

In the discussion of service member emotional or mental health issues, personality or mood changes were identified as another common concern. Both spouses and service members noted such changes as impatience or being shorter-tempered than prior to deployment. As one guard member told us,

> I got a short temper now—not towards [my wife]. I don't get that short-tempered towards her, but towards other people. I used to be a pretty calm and fair-weathered dude and now . . . once I get mad, that just ruins the day. (Respondent Y0105, Army National Guard E-4)

Some spouses mentioned that they had to "tip-toe" around their service member or weather an unexpected, uncharacteristic outburst, as illustrated by the following remark:

> The remote suddenly stopped working. We were watching some program the other day [that] we were enjoying, and he was trying to fix it. And usually [he] is just kind of mild-mannered, you know, and then all of a sudden I could see in his face, and I could see that he's struggling to control, and I touched him gently, I said, "[Name], it's okay. It's just the remote. You're not back in Afghanistan. It's really okay." . . . So, yeah, I see that, frustration/anger more easily, but not outbursts so much as the building. Whereas before, you know, eh, big deal, it's not working, let's move on. (Respondent Y0232, Air National Guard E-6's spouse)

Other service member mental and emotional health issues mentioned less frequently by our interview participants included frustration that no one understands the service member, grief over the loss of a friend or loved one, withdrawal or depression, and post-traumatic stress.

Medical Concerns and Health Care

Most interview participants (63 percent of those who completed a follow-up interview and 53 percent of YRRP interviewees) and 11 percent of survey respondents cited problems related to medical concerns or health care provision. Since the two were often discussed simultaneously, we analyzed and present them together as well. One of the more prominent health care themes related to TRICARE. While, occasionally, an interviewee mentioned problems finding a health care provider that accepted TRICARE, more comments pointed to the difficulty of transitioning from one health insurance plan to another. Families

described transitions to and from civilian employer-provided or other private health insurance, and from TRICARE Prime (available when the service member is on active duty) to TRICARE Reserve Select (available when the service member is demobilized). In a related vein, some interview participants noted confusion on the part of health care providers when distinguishing between TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Reserve Select. Family members talked about the time and effort they put into ensuring continuity of care and to correcting billing-related discrepancies. The remarks that follow illustrate these issues:

> A lot of [health care providers] go ahead and say, "Oh yeah I'll take TRICARE," but . . . they don't understand the difference [between TRICARE Prime and Reserve Select]. And the service member always gets stuck with the bill because . . . you call and you ask and you tell them and they say, "Oh, yeah, yeah, we're TRICARE." (Respondent F010, Navy Reserve E-6's spouse)

> There's a few snafu where we were dropped off of TRICARE, but, you know, I know the system well enough and kind of what to do to get it fixed, so it wasn't too much of a problem. It's frustrating when it happens. It adds stress to . . . your life and for some families. . . . I know that a lot of them went through a lot of stress over all of that. (Respondent Y0111, Air National Guard O-5's spouse)

> Well, we are still on TRICARE and for some reason my oldest daughter didn't get transferred correctly, so they weren't paying any of her bills and they kept saying that she had another provider, so I had to jump through a lot of hoops regarding getting her straightened out, saying that, no, she only has TRICARE. And then a couple of times, because we're on the TRICARE extension [TAMP], you can have up to six, nine months after—I can't remember what it is—but they dropped us. And so then I had to call and say no, we're on [TAMP] and so it just doesn't seem like the regular TRICARE. And then the extension that you get when your husband's been deployed: Like, those two pieces haven't communicated because I've gone into the office and

> they say, oh, well, you're not on TRICARE anymore. (Respondent Y0131, Air National Guard E-6's spouse)

> I know when [name] first deployed, they didn't even have anything for the reservists, the part-time reservists. So I know they have made inroads with TRICARE. So but what I think they should do is they really should have it that the family is covered consistently, because, you know, yes, you have the option of then buying it when he's off the orders versus when he's on the orders, and then he's got prolonged coverage for family when he's been deployed overseas. But can you imagine how exhausting that it is trying to stay up with it? Oh, I've got it this month, but I don't have it that month. I'll pay for it this month, and now I'm on it, so I don't pay for it that month. It gets really ridiculous! (Respondent Y0232, Air Force Reserve E-6's spouse)

As the last comment suggests, there are problems associated with the "seamlessness" of transitions and the complexity related to moving between different statuses of military duty. We did also hear from interview participants who acknowledged improvements to TRICARE for guard and reserve families, as well as from those who experienced few if any difficulties in using TRICARE to meet their health care needs.

In a related vein, we found that interview participants were occasionally confused about the health care–related benefits provided through TRICARE or by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Service members and spouses noted that TRICARE and the VA system of benefits were complex and somewhat difficult to navigate, and that the information they received was lacking in terms of timing, clarity, or both. For example, we noted comments such as following:

> We were trying to get [onto] the regular TRICARE and . . . the TRICARE guy was talking, and I have no clue what he was talking about. Like he was talking like I've been selling health insurance for five years. But we don't have to do it yet, I just found out, so I guess I have like a month to learn about what he said. We want to keep TRICARE, but trying to do that was very confusing with the TRICARE guy that we got. (Respondent Y0072, Air National Guard E-4's spouse)

> Understanding the VA benefits was a little bit confusing at first. One of the things specifically—which I only found out in the second Yellow Ribbon since coming back—is that I'm able to go and use the VA system even for non–deployment-related issues and just pay copays. I didn't realize that with the earlier Yellow Ribbon. It's kind of a complex system, so it's kind of hard to get all of the information out, especially if it's someone who has just come from the military recently and never worked with that part of the system before. (Respondent Y0052, Army Reserve E-6)

Interview participants also mentioned some confusion about what medical facility to go to or what health care provider they should see for such health matters as flu shots and urgent care. A small number of interview participants indicated that they decided to use civilian health insurance instead because it was perceived as easier to understand and had fewer administrative hurdles to cross. There were some remarks about problems related to civilian health insurance, but very few.

A final, relatively prevalent theme concerned physical illness, injuries, or wounds for which the service member (or, less frequently, the spouse) required care. This includes not only injuries sustained during deployment, such as a concussion, broken limb, or burns, but also those that developed or became more severe after the service member returned home. This latter category included back pain, persistent respiratory problems, and, in one case, a self-inflicted injury. Still others noted health challenges, such as cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes, that they did not perceive as stemming from the recent deployment yet required medical care during the reintegration period.

Service Member Civilian Employment

About half of the interview participants and 13 percent of survey respondents indicated that civilian employment problems were a challenge during reintegration. Some of the employment-related concerns discussed during interviews were unemployment, issues related to the service member's current employment, and the effect that psychological issues, a physical wound, or physical injury had on the service member's employment. With respect to unemployment, some interview participants noted that the service member left or lost a job prior

to being deployed and struggled to find a new job after being demobilized. Others explained that although the service member ostensibly had a job to return to following deployment, he or she was laid off shortly thereafter, often as part of a larger reduction-in-force effort, and had to look for—or was still looking for—a new source of income in addition to dealing with other reintegration issues.

Some service members who were employed at the time of our interview also encountered problems with their work. Some were issues related to career outcomes: Interview participants described situations in which the service member did not return to a position that he or she perceived to be equivalent to the one held prior to deployment, did not receive a promotion, or lagged in some way with respect to pay raises or professional development. Some of these issues were regarded as USERRA violations, and, as we discuss further in Chapter Five, some service members sought the assistance of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a DoD program that seeks to resolve potential USERRA violations and recognize supportive workplaces.

Another issue related to ongoing employment pertained to the service member's work hours. Some service members were not working as many hours as desired or as many hours as they did prior to deployment. Other interview participants described situations in which service members found it difficult to make health care–related appointments, fulfill family responsibilities (such as child care), and resume military service as a deactivated member of the Guard or Reserve. As the following comments illustrate, at times, service members felt that their employers were subtly holding their active-duty service against them:

> I had some issues. When I was getting back into the reserve side, [my management] would make me work extra days whenever I'd go on my reserve weekends, which I thought wasn't politically correct because they knew I was in the Reserve up front. (Respondent 6030, Navy Reserve E-5)

> My schedule is sporadic, so I'm not on a set schedule. They complain when I take off for drill. They complain when I just want to take a regular day off for myself. So basically, when I came back,

> I was working five days a week and sometimes seven days a week. And they were complaining like, "Oh, you can't be doing this. There are other people on the schedule." (Respondent Y0067, Army Reserve E-4)

A somewhat distinctive concern that interviewees mentioned about service members' employment was that they did not find their work fulfilling. Changes to the nature of the work or to the service members themselves meant that the work was less fulfilling than it had been prior to deployment. The following remarks convey this sentiment:

> It's the same work [as before deployment]. I teach adults with disabilities. But it doesn't really take a whole lot of my mind. When I was deployed, I was the command career counselor and the education person, and I used my mind and did a lot of work and a lot of research, and it was rewarding to me to be able to do that. Now that I'm back here, it's not. It's like mindless. . . . I'm patient, but I lost some of the patience that was necessary to work with this population. I feel a little disconnected . . . like there's no fit, at this point. (Respondent F010, Navy Reserve E-6)

> The hardest part has been coming back and getting fulfilling work. Basically—and I think this happens to a lot of people—when I left, the organization had to continue on and other people took on my responsibilities. They sort of distributed my tasks and, now, reassuming those responsibilities is difficult because other people are doing them or they didn't get done. And so there's a reluctance to restart some of those things because the organization was functioning fine without them. (Respondent F052, Navy Reserve O-5)

Finally, we also learned that some service members faced employment challenges due to psychological issues, physical wounds, or injuries sustained during deployment. Twenty-seven percent of YRRP interviewees and 11 percent of the follow-up interview group who indicated the service member had a psychological and/or physical impediment as a result of his or her deployment also noted that the condition

affected the service member's civilian employment. As one interview participant told us,

> Number one is [that I] can't remember a whole lot, as much as I used to. Number two is, physically, I'm not able to do some of the things that I used to do. And three is I get so tired faster. (Respondent F026, Navy Reserve E-8)

Other examples we heard included a police officer who was no longer able to go on patrol because of a knee injury, a construction surveyor who had a hard time with the loud and sudden noises so common on a job site, and more general references to difficulties concentrating, paying attention to detail, or accommodating different management styles.

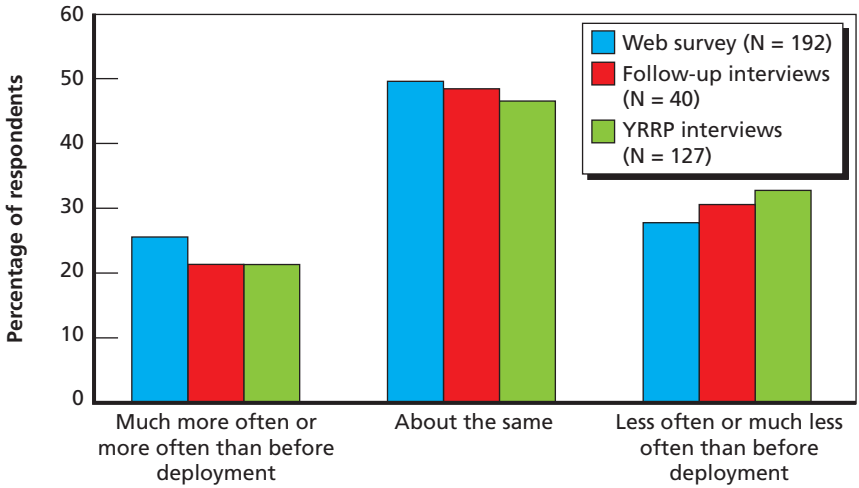
Relationship with Spouse or Partner

Approximately half of the interview participants and 15 percent of survey respondents indicated that they had problems in the relationship with their spouse or partner. In addition, as shown in Figure 4.2, roughly one-fifth to one-fourth of study participants in a relationship indicated that they experienced problems in their relationship "much more often or more often than before deployment."

The interviews provide a better understanding of the nature of these relationship problems. When asked to elaborate on sources of friction within their relationship, interview participants tended to discuss difficulties related to negotiating each person's role in the household, those pertaining to getting reacquainted with one another, and perceived changes in their spouse's or partner's personality. As the comments below demonstrate, both service members and spouses noted role clarification–related issues:

> There are still instances . . . where my wife feels like she's got to do everything. There's still a couple instances where the kids forget I'm here and I can do stuff, because they spent the 14 months prior developing a dynamic without me around. (Respondent Y0050, Army Reserve E-4)

Figure 4.2
Comparison of Relationship Problems Before and After Deployment



SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

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> As a former fighter pilot, as an Air Force pilot, I would have to say that I'm kind of the alpha male, if you will, and when I leave my wife has to take over everything, and there are a thousand decisions that have to be made every day. Not just like, "What church are we going to attend?" It's "What are we having for dinner?" and "What is little Johnny going to eat?" and "Do I need an oil change in the car?" And then she has to take all of that over, and when I come home, there's a little bit of friction about, okay, who's the silverback here? (Respondent Y0213, Air National Guard O-5)

> Sometimes it was hard for me to let him take charge. . . . I'd been in charge for a few months, so it was hard for me to let go of some things. (Respondent Y0039, Air Force Reserve E-6's spouse)

These comments also refer to another theme we noted when examining relationship problems: the need for spouses and partners to become reacquainted with each other. Interview participants described

needing to get used to being part of a couple again, better understanding each other's perspectives, and to establishing and maintaining good communication. Some interview participants likened the situation to dating someone new or starting the relationship anew, which had some benefits but also presented obstacles. As one reservist succinctly stated,

> When you leave [for deployment], you're one way, and you know your significant other very well. And then you're gone, and everybody adapts different ways of handling things individually when you're separated for such a long period of time. Then you come back and there's a certain period of getting to know each other again. So you argue significantly more when you first come back, because it's almost like starting over again. You have to relearn everything about each other. (Y0087, Army Reserve E-6)

At times, this process of getting reacquainted was made more difficult by perceptions of personality changes. While comments of this nature generally addressed how the service member returned home from deployment a different person, there were also remarks about how the spouse who stayed behind had evolved into a different person. The comments that follow convey both sentiments:

> Before deployment, we were on the same level as far as how outgoing we were, which was more reserved. But after deployment, I seemed to be a little more outgoing. She [the respondent's spouse], not so much; so, when we're in a social event, it's a little different. It's a little awkward nowadays because I want to actually talk to people . . . versus just observe, even though, before deployment, we were kind of about the same. (Respondent F012, Army Reserve E-4)

> I mean, it's been 16 months, so it's just been really tough, and we've both changed a lot. (Respondent F033, Navy Reserve O-2's spouse)

> She [the respondent's spouse] says I did change, but then I tell her that I didn't change. So, for me, I didn't change. . . . I was still the

> same before I left, but because of separation she forgot who I was. (Respondent Y0044, Air Force Reserve E-5)

Other sources of relationship problems that were mentioned by a small number of interview participants included the relationship ending (e.g., break-up, divorce) and anger or resentment on the part of the spouse who did not deploy.

Additional Problems

Other problems shown in Figure 4.1 were cited less frequently. For example, spouse mental and emotional health issues may have been mentioned less frequently because the vast majority of study participants were service members, and financial problems might have been less of a concern because so many of the families in our study were financially comfortable and secure.

Four types of problems were highlighted:

- The spouse's mental and emotional health issues discussed during interviews included mood swings or changes, trouble sleeping, and anxiety about the service member's well-being.
- Some financial and legal issues were directly related to reserve component service, such as military pay issues and travel reimbursement delays. Others included adjusting to a lower household income postdeployment, difficulty paying bills, or needing to deal with unexpected expenses.
- Child well-being concerns tended to be about children's emotional health, behavior, or performance in school.
- Very few interview participants (10 percent of the follow-up interview sample and 18 percent of YRRP interviewees) discussed education problems for themselves or their spouse, but those who did described such challenges as making the time for education in light of other demands, accessing or transferring GI Bill benefits, satisfying school enrollment and paperwork requirements, and finding the financial resources to pay for school-related expenses.

How Problems Evolve During Reintegration

Because there are few studies of postdeployment problems, particularly for guard and reserve families, we turned to our interviews to offer tentative insights about how difficulties surface and evolve after deployment. Although methods-related limitations affected our ability to examine changes over time using statistical techniques, comments shared by interview participants revealed that problems do indeed vary in intensity throughout the reintegration phase. This suggests both a need for future research to better understand the trajectory of different postdeployment problems and an opportunity to hone the timing of resource provision.

Qualitative evidence from our interviews indicates that several of the problems that families experience are very pressing soon after the service member returns home and then tend to be resolved or wane in severity over a period of several weeks or months. Specifically, interview participants explained that problems related to service member civilian employment, service member emotional or mental health, spouse emotional and mental health, child well-being, and financial issues related to military pay were most compelling early in the reintegration phase:

- With respect to civilian employment, failure to be reinstated promptly to a position similar to the one held prior to deployment was a problem that emerged soon after returning from deployment, if at all. This was also the case for service members who were unemployed after being deactivated or felt a need to find different or additional employment.
- Psychological difficulties, such as irritability and a lack of concentration that impeded one's ability to work, tended to be at their worst soon after deployment. Service members reported that these impediments diminished after a few weeks or months. Service members and spouses mentioned during interviews that trouble sleeping and anxiety, to the extent that they occurred at all, were at their worst soon after the service member returned home. Sleeping problems, in particular, seemed to improve within a few weeks or months, though some interviewees reported continuing

insomnia or a need for medication even at the time of their interview (about four to six months postdeployment).
- Problems related to child well-being tended to be most salient during this time as well: Some children were standoffish or withdrawn around their service member parent upon homecoming, while others were viewed as overly attached and fearful that the parent would leave again for an extended period. Both types of reactions seemed to diminish over time, at least according to the experiences shared by some of the parents we interviewed.
- Financial issues of a military nature, such as pay discrepancies and reimbursement delays, were especially problematic early in the reintegration period.

While none of the families in our study experienced all these problems following deployment, the intersection of multiple problems meant that the period after the service member's homecoming was an especially challenging time. Note that this is the same period during which the Guard and Reserve have the least amount of contact with service members and their families because reserve component personnel have a break from drills and other military service for 90 days following demobilization.

The trajectories of health care or medical problems and relationship concerns varied more, implying that helping families avoid or navigate these issues may be a bit more complex. Evidence from our interviews suggests that, particularly for service members who return home from deployment with a wound or other physical injury, there may be problems related to health care in the early part of the reintegration phase as they attempt to obtain access to care and to coordinate medical appointments in conjunction with a return to civilian employment and civilian life more broadly. Health care–related problems were also reported at points when families transitioned from one insurance plan to another, whether it was from TRICARE Prime to TRICARE Reserve Select or from a TRICARE-based plan to private, civilian medical coverage. Although our data are limited, relationship problems appeared least likely to follow a standard arc or course. As the following remarks illustrate, some couples experienced friction

almost immediately after reunion, some enjoyed a relatively long "honeymoon" period before facing interpersonal challenges, and still others reported an ebb and flow of problems as the service member slowly reintegrated into civilian life:

> Right now, we don't have any problems. Usually, once I get back from deployment, it's a little rough for maybe a month or two and we'll have some problems and then, after that, it's okay. (Respondent Y0004, Air National Guard E-6)

> By the time he came home, it was great having him home for probably, like, the first month, and we since then kind of started going through some of these emotional issues where I'm kind of hurting because I'm wanting him to express his feelings and he's not. (Respondent Y0189, Air National Guard E-5's spouse)

> It was great when he came home, but we're butting heads a lot more right now. Not on the same page. (Respondent Y0130, Air Force Reserve E-5)

> Well, now, [the marriage is] actually better. I mean a lot of this has got to do with when you first come back—the first four months after you come back, it is a very difficult transition that they did not tell you about. And anybody you talk to now, they go, "Oh, yeah, they didn't tell you to expect that the first four months it's going to be a rocky road?" But I would say it's better now. . . . But during deployment and right after I get back, it's not an easy transition. (Respondent Y0018, Air Force Reserve O-5)

> Well, [marital friction] comes on in phases and it does come and go in phases. I mean, I feel like when it rains it pours. Like, when I first got back it seemed like every minute, like, it was just terrible and, you know, now it's just, you know, every so often, but sometimes we just get in a stretch of, you know, like a week and it's just like, oh, my God, we just can't spend any time with each other because everything that's coming out of my mouth is bothering you and vice versa. (Respondent Y0092, Army Reserve E-4)

Factors Related to Reintegration Problems

To better understand the types of families in need of reintegration support, we also sought to identify factors related to the challenges just described. Our survey and interview samples were sufficiently large to conduct statistical analysis that would reveal associations between reintegration problems and such factors as where families lived, their financial situation, characteristics of the most recent deployment (e.g., length, communication between the service member and the family), service member psychological or physical issues stemming from deployment, and communication from the service member's unit or Service following deployment. The results of our analyses are summarized in Table 4.2. An "X" in a cell denotes a statistically significant relationship between a factor and a specific problem. For example, family readiness for the most recent deployment was associated with service member emotional or mental health problems, relationship issues, spouse emotional or mental health problems, and child well-being concerns. Specifically, service members and spouses who indicated that their family had not been ready at all for the service member's deployment were more likely to report each of the aforementioned problems than were participants who indicated that their family had been ready for the deployment. Aspects of the most recent deployment were also associated with reintegration problems. For instance, families that experienced a deployment of one year or longer were more likely than those who experienced a shorter deployment to report problems related to service member emotional or mental health, spouse emotional or mental health, and financial or legal issues than those who experienced a shorter deployment. In addition, participants who indicated that the service member did not deploy with his or her own drill unit (e.g., as an Individual Augmentee) reported a higher rate of service member emotional or mental health problems.

Inadequate communication during and after deployment also reduces the chances of successful reintegration. As Table 4.2 shows, insufficient communication was associated with multiple problems, both during and after deployment. Not surprisingly, physical or psychological injury to the service member was also linked to reintegra-

Table 4.1
Factors Associated with Guard and Reserve Families' Postdeployment Problems

	Postdeployment Problems							
Factor	**Service Member's Mental or Emotional Health**	**Medical Concerns and Health Care**	**Service Member's Civilian Employment**	**Relationship with Spouse or Partner**	**Spouse's Mental or Emotional Health**	**Financial or Legal Issues**	**Child Well-Being**	**Education**
Insufficient family readiness for deployment[a]	X			X	X		X	
Service member did not deploy with own unit	X							
Deployment length of one year or longer	X				X	X		
Inadequate communication with family during deployment[a]	X		X	X		X	X	
Inadequate communication from unit or Service postdeployment[b]	X	X			X	X		
Service member with psychological issue	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Service member with physical wound or injury		X			X	X		

Table 4.1—Continued

Factor	Postdeployment Problems							
	Service Member's Mental or Emotional Health	Medical Concerns and Health Care	Service Member's Civilian Employment	Relationship with Spouse or Partner	Spouse's Mental or Emotional Health	Financial or Legal Issues	Child Well-Being	Education
Long distance from drill unit			X			X		
Long distance from nearest installation						X		
Challenging family finances			X	X	X	X	X	X

SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: An "X" denotes a statistically significant relationship at $p < 0.05$ between a problem and a factor in at least one of three data sources: web survey, follow-up interviews, or YRRP interviews.

[a] These factors were measured in the web survey instrument only.

[b] This factor was not measured in the web survey instrument.

tion difficulties. Interview participants who indicated that the service member had a psychological issue stemming from deployment were more likely to cite all the problems, except for those pertaining to child well-being and education.

Families that lived far from the service member's drill unit or the nearest military installation were also more inclined to report problems. Those who lived 100 miles or more from the drill unit or installation tended to report problems with the service member's civilian employment and financial or legal issues more frequently than did those who lived closer, while interviewees who lived within 25 miles of the nearest military installation were less inclined to mention financial or legal issues than those who live farther away.

Finally, financial difficulties seemed to play a role in experiencing or reporting postdeployment problems: Those who indicated that their family had financial struggles (e.g., selected the "in over our heads" option) were more likely to mention problems with service member civilian employment, the relationship with one's spouse or partner, spouse emotional or mental health, financial or legal issues, child well-being, and education.

Implications for Military Career Intentions

Although most study participants experienced successful reintegration and were favorably inclined to continue service in the Guard or Reserve, we found that even in a group of families doing so well overall, experiencing certain problems was related to a tendency to believe that readjustment was not going well and to neutral or negative views regarding continued service in the Guard or Reserve. In analyses not reported here, we determined that many of the problems discussed in this chapter were significantly related to perceptions that readjustment was not going well for the service member, the spouse, or children. This is consistent with the conceptual framework for successful reintegration that we presented in Chapter One. Table 4.2 summarizes the analysis that we conducted for questions related to military career intentions: the service member's planned tenure in the Guard or Reserve, the

Table 4.2
Associations Between Perceptions of Reintegration Problems and Retention-Related Attitudes

Reintegration Problem	Service Member's Guard or Reserve Career Plans	Spouse's Opinion Regarding Continued Service in Guard or Reserve	Impact of Most Recent Deployment on Guard or Reserve Career Preferences
Service member mental or emotional health		X	
Medical concerns and health care		X	X
Service member civilian employment	X		
Relationship with spouse or partner	X	X	X
Spouse mental or emotional health	X		
Financial or legal issues		X	
Child well-being	X		
Education			

SOURCES: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families; 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

NOTE: An "X" denotes a statistically significant relationship at $p < 0.05$ between a problem and an attitude in at least one of three data sources: web survey, follow-up interviews, or YRRP interviews.

spouse's opinion regarding the service member's continued service, and the impact of the most recent deployment on guard or reserve career preferences. An "X" denotes a statistically significant association, this time between a specific problem and a career intention–related measure. Interestingly, we found fewer associations between reintegration problems and career plans than we reported in the last chapter between reintegration success and career plans. It is possible that the relationship is an indirect one in this case: Perhaps some problems influence guard or reserve career plans through their impact on perceptions of readjustment success, which were more consistently related to military career intentions.

We found that four types of problems were associated with the military career plans of reserve component personnel: (1) problems with service member civilian employment, (2) relationship problems, (3) spouse mental or emotional problems, and (4) children's readjustment problems. These problems were associated with shorter planned tenure or being more undecided about guard or reserve career plans. Similarly, experiencing problems with service member mental or emotional health, health care or medical issues, one's relationship with a spouse or partner, and financial or legal issues was related to spouse opinion: Those who indicated one of these problems were more likely to note that the spouse did not favor the service member staying in the Guard or Reserve. Finally, reporting health care issues or a relationship problem was associated with less-favorable views toward the most recent deployment. If the problems described in this chapter are more prevalent in the Guard or Reserve as a whole, these findings may have important implications for military readiness.

Conclusion

Evidence from our web survey and family interviews indicates that the most prevalent problems experienced by study participants include service member mental or emotional health concerns, service member civilian employment challenges, medical concerns and health care frustrations, and relationship problems with one's spouse or partner. Additional problems that were cited by fewer participants include those pertaining to spouse mental or emotional health concerns, child well-being, financial or legal issues, and education.

In most if not all of these cases, problems ranged not only in their prevalence but also in their severity. For example, some study participants reported mild anxiety, while others noted difficulties sleeping that required medical treatment. Similarly, some service members were unemployed after being demobilized, while others' employment problems had to do with returning to a job they found less fulfilling after serving in an overseas deployment.

Our interviews also provided qualitative insights on how problems may evolve over the course of reintegration. We heard that problems related to service member civilian employment, service member emotional or mental health, spouse emotional and mental health, and child well-being, as well as financial issues related to military pay, were most compelling early in the reintegration phase. While none of the families in our study experienced all these problems following deployment, the intersection of multiple problems meant that the period after the service member's homecoming was an especially challenging time. This suggests that either proactively preparing families during deployment for the initial reintegration period or reaching out to families soon after the service member returns home may be especially effective. Note, however, that such immediate support may be stymied by the break from military service (including drills) that reservists and guard personnel typically have following deployment.

To identify other ways to improve reintegration support, we also looked at the types of families in our study that tended to report post-deployment problems. We found that families that indicated that they were not ready for deployment were more inclined to report problems, suggesting that efforts to bolster family readiness at the outset of the deployment cycle may have long-term benefits. Several aspects of the deployment itself were also related to a tendency to mention problems, including the service member's deploying independent of his or her drill unit, deploying for one year or longer, returning home from deployment with a wound or other physical injury, and experiencing psychological issues stemming from deployment. Although it may be difficult at times to discern when a psychological issue has developed, other potential "red flags," such as a lengthy deployment or physical wound or injury, may be more readily apparent, thereby providing an opportunity to pinpoint support to those who may need it more. Similarly, we learned that families that live far away from the service member's drill unit or a military base tended to cite some problems, suggesting that this group may also benefit from increased attention or more tailored support. Finally, inadequate communication with the family during deployment, insufficient communication from the service member's unit following deployment, and more dire family finances were all

associated with a propensity to cite problems; in each case, actions can be taken to prevent those circumstances from occurring.

Helping guard and reserve families avoid or quickly resolve problems during reintegration is important for two primary reasons. First, families that encounter such problems also tended to think that readjustment had not been going well. If families do not have a successful reintegration experience, this may be problematic from a Social Compact standpoint. In addition, our analysis shows that experiencing problems postdeployment has negative implications for military career intentions. This suggests that developing strategies to circumvent reintegration problems and directing resources to reintegration support can both promote family well-being and ensure military readiness.

CHAPTER FIVE

What Resources Are Available to Help Guard and Reserve Families Reintegrate?

Since the beginning of military action in Iraq and Afghanistan, a large number of resource providers have emerged to support guard personnel, reservists, and their families in a variety of issues related to reintegration. ADM Michael Mullen, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has called this array of providers "a sea of goodwill."[1] This ever-evolving constellation of resource providers comprises both governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as informal resources, such as family, friends, and online social networks. One of the objectives of this study was to develop a better understanding of the depth and breadth of resource providers that assist reserve component families during the reintegration phase of the deployment cycle. We characterize this array of resource providers as the web of support for citizen warriors and their families.

In this chapter, we describe what this web of support looks like and offer preliminary insights into how it operates. In addition, we present an overview of some of the principal organizations that provide support to guard and reserve families. We do not in any way endorse the organizations mentioned in this overview; rather, we list them as a means of illustrating the range of resources available to guard and reserve families. Finally, we discuss some of the challenges and opportunities that this large and evolving web of support poses for DoD's efforts to assist guard and reserve families during reintegration. In the next chapter, we discuss which of these support resources guard and

[1] Michael Mullen, "Honoring Life on Memorial Day," *Washington Times*, May 26, 2008.

reserve families find most useful and, in Chapter Seven, we examine some of the challenges to supporting guard and reserve families.

The "Web of Support" for Guard and Reserve Families

The past decade has seen an explosion in organizations committed to supporting military service members and their families. In addition to federal, state, and local government agencies, other types of organizations—including a host of nongovernmental organizations and informal resources—have emerged to support service members and their families. This web of support has become so extensive and intertwined that it can be overwhelming to those trying to utilize the support resources that are available to them, those trying to manage these resources, and those trying to improve support resources. As Admiral Mullen noted, "The challenge . . . is how do you connect that sea of goodwill to the need?"[2]

To develop a better understanding of the web of support for guard and reserve families, we reviewed the literature and conducted an online search for resources available to them, and we asked service members, spouses, and resource providers, about these resources. What we found is that the web of support is extensive and continually evolving; therefore, it is difficult—if not impossible—to develop a comprehensive compendium of organizations that provide resources to families. However, our findings from our interviews with service members, spouses, and resource providers do offer important insights into the general characteristics of the web of support and how organizations within the web interact.

In analyzing the kinds of organizations that provide support for guard and reserve families, we found that support consists of nine main types of services:

- referrals
- training or instruction

[2] John Kruzel, "Brain Injury Warrants Urgency, Mullen Says," Armed Forces Press Service, November 4, 2009.

- social activities
- monetary or material support
- informal emotional or social support (e.g., support from peers)
- child care
- professional counseling
- professional nontherapeutic services
- medical treatment.

We also found that the web of support is composed primarily of the following types of organizations:

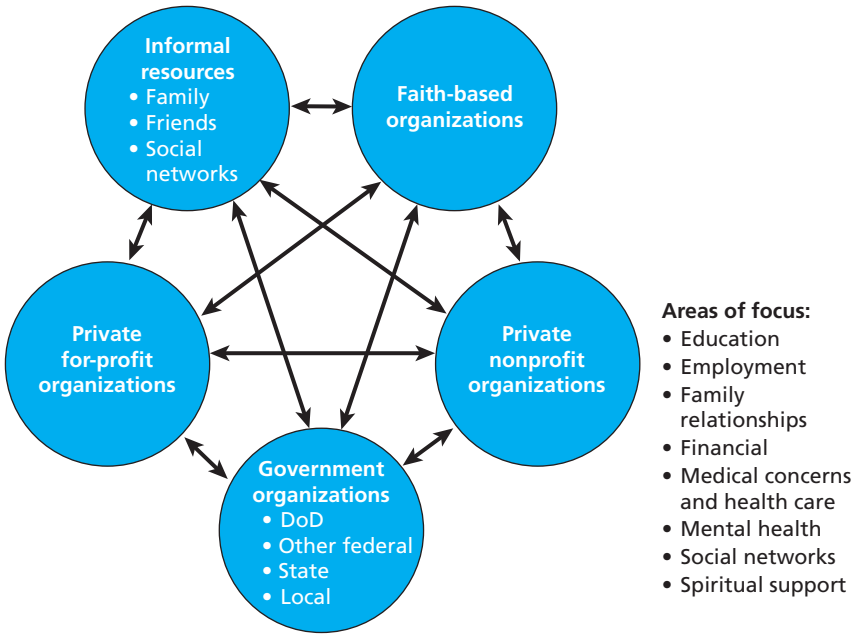
- government organizations (including DoD and other federal organizations, state governments, and local governments)
- private for-profit organizations
- private nonprofit organizations
- faith-based organizations
- informal resources (including family, friends, and social networks).

As discussed later in this chapter, our interviews with resource providers indicate that these organizations collaborate with each other to varying degrees. Our findings also indicate that support resources for reserve component families largely focus on the following areas:

- education
- employment
- family relationships
- financial issues
- medical concerns and health care
- legal issues
- mental health
- social networks
- spiritual support.

Figure 5.1 illustrates our conceptual framework of the types of organizations that make up the web of support for reserve component families and the intertwined relationships among them.

Figure 5.1
Conceptual Framework of the Web of Support for Reserve Component Families



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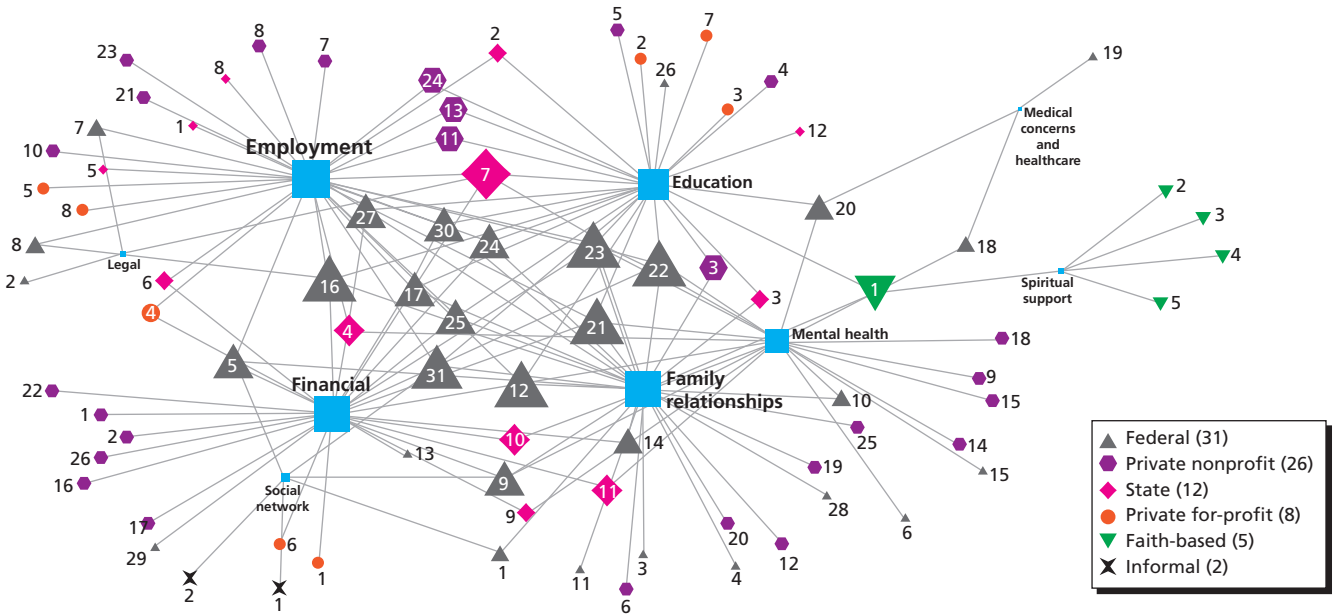
As the figure indicates, the web of support is complex. In an attempt to gain some insight into the relationships among resource providers and the services they offer, we interviewed resource providers that support guard and reserve families. In total, we conducted 84 interviews with resource providers that either had a presence at one of the YRRP events that a member of the RAND study team attended or that responded to our request to learn more about how resource providers support service members with regard to the problems that spouses and service members tended to mention during our interviews (summarized in Chapter Four).[3] Accordingly, our sample is not representative of either the types of organizations that support guard and reserve

[3] Additional details about how the provider interviews were conducted and analyzed are provided in Appendix B.

families or the areas of support on which they focus; our sample is tilted toward providers that attend YRRP events and those that provide assistance related to service member civilian employment and other problems our data suggest were of particular concern to guard and reserve families. For example, about one-third of our interviews were with federal resource providers, but it is unclear, if not unlikely, that federal organizations constitute one-third of the web of support for guard and reserve families.

Figure 5.2 illustrates the universe of providers with whom we spoke. It shows the types of organizations included in our interview sample and their areas of focus. Note, however, that it does not show linkages *between* the specific organizations in our sample. Because our interviews were conducted on a not-for-attribution basis, we have not identified providers by name. Instead, we assigned a unique identifier to each organization that includes the type of organization and a number (e.g., Nonprofit Provider 2). The figure features the nine areas of focus mentioned earlier (e.g., employment, mental health, family relationships), denoted by blue squares that vary in size based on the number of organizations that provide support in that area. For example, 32 of the organizations in our sample offer support related to employment; at the other end of the spectrum, three organizations address medical concerns and health care. Other areas that were commonly addressed by many of the organizations in our sample include financial matters, family relationships, and education. Similarly, different shapes are used to distinguish between six types of providers—federal, state, private nonprofit, private for-profit, faith-based, and informal—and the size of these shapes varies based on the number of areas of support an organization covers. Most of the organizations in our sample (50) focus on one area, and seven organizations, including Federal 12 and State 7, cover five areas of focus with their programs and services. In addition, the figure highlights the fact that many organizations in our sample span several different areas of focus, and some types of organizations cluster in certain areas of focus. For instance, state-level providers tended to focus on employment issues, and private for-profits tended to focus on education, employment, and financial issues.

Figure 5.2
Web of Support: Provider Interviews, by Organization Type and Areas of Focus



SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with resource providers.

NOTE: Blue squares, indicating areas of focus, vary in size based on the number of organizations that provide support in that area. The shapes representing organizations vary in size based on the number of areas of focus they cover with their programs and services. The number of interviews for each organization type is listed in the legend.

RAND *RR206-5.2*

Figure 5.2 illustrates the complexity of the web support and makes clear how challenging it can be for guard and reserve families to navigate it. These challenges are compounded by the geographic dispersion of guard and reserve families, as well as the lack of coordination among providers in the web of support. These challenges are described in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

Next, we discuss the various types of organizations in the web of support and provide examples of organizations within each category. As mentioned previously, our inclusion of specific organizations in this overview does not indicate our endorsement. Rather, we list them as a means to illustrate the range of resources available to guard and reserve families.

Government Resources

DoD Resources

DoD's extensive support resources are often among the first to which reserve component families from across the Services turn. DoD resources touch on all of the areas of focus illustrated in Figure 5.1, and they intentionally vary in their scope. For instance, some DoD resources, such as ESGR and TRICARE, focus on very specific areas of support to reserve component families—in this case, employment and health care, respectively. ESGR is a program that assists reserve component members in resolving conflicts with their employers that may be related to their military obligations. TRICARE is the military's health care system. Similar examples include DoD's Hero 2 Hired (H2H) program and Joint Family Support Assistance Program (JFSAP). H2H is an employment program that assists reserve component members with employment opportunities. It provides job listings, education and training resources, virtual career fairs, a mobile app for smartphones, a Facebook-based application, and networking opportunities.[4] JFSAP specifically targets families that do not live near a military installation and focuses on bringing them family services. One of

[4] See Hero 2 Hired, homepage, undated.

the goals of JFSAP is to "create a 'high-tech, high touch' web-enabled community to connect military families with each other and with supportive resources 24/7."[5]

Other DoD providers offer a broad range of support or provide information or referrals. For instance, DoD's YRRP is a legislatively mandated program intended "to support the Services in providing National Guard and Reserve members and their families with critical support, information, services, and referrals throughout the entire deployment cycle (pre, during and post) to maximize successful transitions as Service members move between their military and civilian roles and to create strong, resilient military families."[6] Accordingly, YRRP events are held at various points throughout the deployment cycle, including predeployment, during deployment, 30 days after demobilization, 60 days after demobilization, and 90 days after demobilization. In FY 2012, 2,028 YRRP events were held across the United States, providing information and resources to almost 248,252 service members, family members, and others who support them.[7] It is important to note that there is variation in the implementation of YRRP across Services and units (e.g., in some Services, attendance is mandatory at all events; in others, it is voluntary). However, in most cases, YRRP events are one to two days and feature a series of speakers who focus on specific topics related to the deployment cycle (e.g., employment, mental health). In addition, resource providers are also present at YRRP events so that service members and their families can interact with them. Not surprisingly, given the large number of YRRP events held annually, the majority of our interview participants told us that they found many resources through the YRRP events. For instance, according to one reservist's spouse,

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[5] Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, "Joint Family Support Assistance Program (JFSAP) Overview," briefing, c. 2010.

[6] Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, *Annual Advisory Board Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2011*, Washington, D.C., March 2012, p. 2.

[7] Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, *Annual Advisory Board Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2012*, Washington, D.C., February 2013, p. 2.

> Attending the Yellow Ribbon events were wonderful. Going to those classes really helped give us some ideas on things we can improve in our family and it also gave me contact information of people in case I *did* need to contact somebody about a problem or things like that. (Respondent Y0015, Army Reserve O-2's spouse)

Military OneSource is another DoD resource provider that focuses on a broad range of support. Its services include a call center and Internet-based support, personal nonmedical counseling, help with income taxes and other financial services, spouse education and career support, educational materials on a variety of topics, and a social media hub.[8] Our interview participants were most familiar with Military OneSource as a resource for counseling, referrals, and general information about reintegration:

> Military OneSource did provide plenty of counseling. I made the initial call to them and someone spoke with me about what's normal, what's not normal. Is the frustration normal? Is it her or is it me?–type thing. (Respondent F012, Army Reserve E-4)

> The Military OneSource website—I just thought that was a really neat website that I didn't really know was available. Like, they've got all kinds of books and all kinds of stuff, like I thought it was more of a fun kind of assistance, you know, that I didn't really know about before I deployed. (Respondent Y0214, Air National Guard E-5's spouse)

> There's just so much content [on Military OneSource's website] that's accessible for almost any need that you have. (Respondent Y0058, Army Guard E-6)

In addition to the DoD-wide organizations mentioned here, support services are also available at the individual Service level, as well as at the unit level. For instance, the Navy has a network of 81 Fleet and Family Support Centers worldwide that provide deployment support for sailors and their families, including assistance with personal and

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[8] Military OneSource, "About Military OneSource," web page, undated.

family wellness education and counseling, emergency preparedness and response, crisis intervention and response, military and personal career development, financial education and counseling, and spouse employment.[9] One of our interview participants told us of a very positive experience with a Fleet and Family Support Center:

> The only person I received some assistance from, and that's when he was coming home, was the Fleet and Family services. . . .They did an amazing job. They were wonderful. . . . They were like so sympathetic. . . . "Are you okay? What can we do for you?" I got treated the way I wanted to be treated. (Respondent F024, Navy Reserve E-5's spouse)

In addition, each Navy Operational Support Center has a Command Individual Augmentee Coordinator to support mobilized reservists and their families.[10] This is particularly important because such a large percentage of Navy reservists deploy as Individual Augmentees, rather than as units. The Air Force offers support through its Psychological Health Advocacy Program, through which regional mental health teams assist Air Force reservists and their families with psychological issues.[11] In addition, the National Guard Psychological Health Program offers support to Army and Air National Guard members.[12]

All the Services also have a range of support services at the unit level. For instance, units across the Services have chaplains who provide spiritual support to service members and their families. In addition, units have Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) or their equivalent,[13]

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[9] See Commander, Navy Installations Command, "Fleet and Family Support Program," web page, undated.

[10] See U.S. Navy Reserve, "Deployment Information for Our Families," web page, undated.

[11] See U.S. Air Force Reserve Command, Psychological Health Advocacy Program, homepage, undated.

[12] See National Guard Bureau, Psychological Health Program, homepage, undated.

[13] The equivalent of FRGs in the Marine Corps Reserve used to be known as Key Volunteer Networks but are now called Family Readiness Programs. The Navy has ombudsmen who reach out to families during and after deployment, as well as through the Navy's Fleet and Family Support Program.

which are networks of service members and their families. These groups provide a source of support and a network through which information can be disseminated. Our interview participants discussed the reassuring role that these unit-level resources played in their reintegration:

> Our Family Readiness Center, I know their number and they're available if we had to use them, but I didn't have to use them at all. They're good guys down there. (Respondent Y0202, Navy Reserve E-7)

> I know that the FRG was available and that was at least a good help, especially to my family. They keep in contact. (Respondent F017, Army Reserve E-5)

> The FRG is constantly active within the unit with family day, with sending care packages, things of that nature. (Respondent F049, Air National Guard E-6)

The Army's Strong Bonds program is another example of a unit-based program that is led by Army chaplains. It focuses on building individual and family readiness through relationship education and skills training and consists of off-site retreats that allow couples and families to reconnect.[14]

Other Federal Resources

In addition to the DoD resources mentioned above, many other federal agencies provide support to guard and reserve families. For instance, the VA provides health care and educational benefits to reserve component families. It operates 300 Vet Centers across the country that provide a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to veterans to help them readjust to civilian life.[15] The U.S. Department of Labor provides support through various programs, including the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) program, which

[14] See U.S. Army, Strong Bonds Program, homepage, undated.

[15] See U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Vet Center, homepage, undated.

helps veterans and reserve component members find employment.[16] DoD, the VA, and the Department of Labor also operate the National Resource Directory, an online clearinghouse of information related to, among other things, benefits and compensation, education and training, employment, family and caregiver support, health, homeless assistance, housing, and transportation and travel.[17] Our interviews indicate that the VA is used for counseling, GI benefits, and health care issues:

> I use the VA site a lot just to look up stuff about VA loans and do the loans and GI Bill. (Respondent F017, Army Reserve E-5)

> The folks at the VA, they've been helping me with my medical issues that were deployment-related and I got a new primary care [manager] over there, so that's been taken care of . . . but mostly it's just moral support and stuff like that. (Respondent Y0168, Marine Corps Reserve E-3)

In addition to the programs listed here, agencies across the federal government have programs in place to help support guard and reserve families.

State and Local Resources

State and local governments have many programs in place to assist reserve component families. In some cases, local resource providers take it upon themselves to offer support to military families:

> Our sheriff would call the house and see if we needed anything, you know, if the wife needed anything fixed or if anything broke or if she needed anything. (Respondent Y0200, Air Force Reserve E-6)

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[16] See U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Program (VETS), homepage, undated.

[17] See National Resource Directory, homepage, undated.

State resources are particularly important to guard personnel because they have dual status as both a federal and state asset, as described in Chapter One. The National Guard Bureau provides support resources to members of the National Guard and their families, especially through its Family Program.[18] The department of veterans affairs (or its equivalent) in each of the states is another state resource available to reserve component members and their families These state agencies can be a vital conduit for service members and their families between federal and local resources. Our interviews with service members, spouses, and providers indicated that many states are now focusing resources on employment and financial issues in response to the economic downturn.

Nonprofit and For-Profit Resources

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute, as of March 2012, 40,848 nonprofits that specifically support service members and veterans were registered with the Internal Revenue Service.[19] Some of the most-recognized resources in this category include benevolent organizations, such as the American Red Cross, the American Legion, American Veterans (AMVETS), United Service Organizations (USO), and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Several participants told us about the support they received from the American Legion and the VFW:

> The Legion just is really supportive. . . . When I got off the plane they were there. The Patriot Guard Riders [were] there, the VFW was there, everybody just saying thank you. (Respondent Y0065, Army Reserve E-4)

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[18] See National Guard Bureau, Family Program, homepage, undated.

[19] See Nancy Berglass and Margaret C. Harrell, *Well After Service: Veteran Reintegration and American Communities*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, April 2012, p. 9.

> The VFW is something that I was doing beforehand. They provide the venue for a league that I'm in, a dart league . . . and, I mean, they're there if you have questions. I'm about to go ahead and join lifetime membership just because they're so supportive and I want to be supportive, as well. (Respondent F049, Air National Guard E-6)

Other notable resources in this category include nonprofit business organizations, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which organizes a series of hiring fairs across the country for service members.[20] Military family advocacy organizations, such as the National Military Family Association, are another resource in this category. Finally, we found that numerous for-profit organizations provide support to guard and reserve families. In particular, we found that for-profit education-focused organizations (including Essential Knowledge and for-profit universities, such as the University of Phoenix) are prolific and, as shown in Table 5.1, also provide support related to employment and finances. The network of for-profit and nonprofit resources in this category plays a significant role in the web of support, not only because there are so many of them but also because they augment the resources provided by federal, state, and local governments.

Faith-Based Resources

Our interviews with service members, spouses, and resource providers indicated that faith-based resource providers offer an important and somewhat unique source of support to guard and reserve families. Specifically, these organizations offer various types of spiritual support. For instance, faith-based providers told us,

> We have a military wives' bible study that we started last fall. The group leader is a mom whose daughter and son-in-law are in the military. We've put the word out citywide at the VA and elsewhere to invite other wives. The group has grown from two

[20] See U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Hiring Our Heroes, homepage, undated.

> to three wives to 15–16, and they are very close. (Faith-Based Provider 2)

> We market through churches and community organizations. We train them to help them identify what their needs are and help them. The resources we put together to help them. . . . They can read the manual and a member of a family—it's designed for a wife or mother, for them to recognize things when they come back and have trauma they don't recognize. (Faith-Based Provider 3)

The role that these providers play in supporting service members and their families is illustrated below:

> [Our church] provided spiritual and emotional support, you know, just extending that open hand and caring . . . letting you know that . . . people are praying for you, that kind of thing. (Respondent Y0092, Army Reserve E-4)

Resource providers that were cited by our interviewees included clergy, religious congregations, and organizations, programs, or projects sponsored by a religious congregation. These resource providers often reach out to reserve component service members and families to provide a spiritual home and support during the reintegration process. They tend to focus on integration into the congregation or faith community, and they also offer one-on-one services that address needs that are specific to reintegration, especially spiritual support.

Informal Resources

Informal resources include family and friends and other social networks. The role that these informal resources play in supporting reserve component families is often ignored or underestimated. However, we found that our interview participants rely heavily on these resources. In some cases, our interviewees said that they did not need to use formal support resources because informal resources provided the support they needed:

> I guess I didn't really think I needed support from [an outside provider] because I'm pretty close to my family and—yeah, I guess if I did get stressed out, I would just go out with my friends and stuff. And didn't feel like I was like overwhelmed where I needed a support group. (Respondent Y0003, Air Force Reserve E-5's spouse)

Family and Friends

Family members and friends are often the first resources that reserve component families turn to for support during and after a deployment. Therefore, their importance in the web of support should not be underestimated. These friends and family are a potential force multiplier in DoD's efforts to support reserve component families, especially because so many reserve component families do not live on or near a military installation. According to one interviewee,

> We don't live near a base. . . . My fiancée lives an hour and 15 minutes away from the nearest person who was deployed with me. So her support is her school friends and the neighbors. Her family is her emotional support, too. That's her support community. (Respondent Y0057, Army Reserve O-3)

Some of our interview participants said that they relied on friends and family in lieu of formal government or nongovernmental resources:

> Where we live is a pretty close-knit community, so our families are really, really close. Pretty much it's just been—I don't think we've really used any of the military resources as so much just, you know, family and friend connections that we used prior to the deployment. That always works really well for us. (Respondent Y0091, Army Reserve E-4's spouse)

Other interview participants told us about the importance of having friends who are in the military because they understand what military life is like:

> Well, luckily, I have a lot of extended family and regular family that are military, so there's been lots of people that have been in here before me, and they've all, you know, pointed me in the right direction, and they've put me into different things that I need to do, you know. Especially, like, they're the ones that say, "Hey, you probably better get your TRICARE transition over before your 180 days runs out, so you don't have a lapse in TRICARE coverage," or "Hey, did you take care of, you know, getting your medical insurance done?" So they've done a lot before me, so I've had a lot of previous knowledge. So they've made sure I didn't make some of the same mistakes they made. (Respondent Y0087, Army Reserve E-6)

> Definitely emotional support because my normal group of friends, they don't always understand the military and how that whole world works because it is a very different world. So to be able to have a couple of girlfriends—they were in the same boat that I was in. We could sit and talk and understand where we were emotionally. You know, it was good to have them to just lean on and talk to and hang out with and, you know, share a glass of wine with. (Respondent Y0131, Air National Guard E-6's spouse)

Social Networks

Our interviews indicate that social networks (including online social networks) are playing an increasing role in the web of support for reserve component families. Some social networks, such as FRGs, are a traditional source of social support, whereas online social networks offer a newer, emerging form of support. These communities include "grassroots" social networks, started by motivated individuals on Facebook, Meetup, and similar sites, as well as more formally supported efforts, such as the aforementioned social media hub that Military OneSource maintains.

One organizer of a social network told us,

> We want this group to be open to families and spouses so it's an extended family between all different military service members. (Informal Provider 2)

One moderator of an online group said that her group had grown to several hundred members:

> Group members post comments about reintegration, complaints about reintegration, and how to deal with aspects of posttraumatic stress disorder. There isn't a mental health specialist monitoring responses, just a bunch of wives that have issues, to air out and get off issues off their chest, and see if others have similar experiences. (Informal Provider 1)

Another participant told us,

> I don't know how to explain it. But with the Army wives that I had gotten to know, that I consider like some of my closest friends, because they know exactly how I felt during some of the hardest times of my life, you know, they keep me informed, and they make sure that we all know everything. And if one of us has a question, the other one will find out. It's like a family, you know. Like, we don't just not talk to each other. . . . We also have like a Facebook page that we can ask anybody anything or do anything, or whatever. And we can talk to each other. (Respondent Y0109, Army National Guard E-4's spouse)

Social networks tend to be informal, with minimal structure or resources. They aim to provide opportunities for interaction, information exchange, and social support to service members and their families. Our findings from our interviews with service members and spouses indicate that online social networks are used most actively prior to and during deployment. However, these social networks could be leveraged as a vehicle through which more information regarding reintegration support services could be distributed.

The Nature and Extent of Collaboration in the Web of Support

Integration across levels of organizations within the web of support is an important network function, but we do not know much about

how it works yet. Which organizations, if any, facilitate that process, and how do they accomplish it? What are the challenges of integration between national and local levels? More generally, how can national policies affect local networks? What should be the goals of national policy with respect to the web of support?

During our interviews with resource providers, interviewees were asked a series of questions designed to elicit information on the structure of provider networks. Each participant was asked to identify five organizations with which they collaborate and to provide some basic information about those organizations, the frequency of their collaboration, and how they collaborate. The intent of this line of inquiry was not to map provider networks in detail but, rather, to generate insights on the general nature of provider networks. As such, these data suggest interesting patterns that—if supported by future research—would have significant implications for understanding and improving the functioning of the web of support for guard and reserve families.

First, all the resource providers that were interviewed, regardless of the type or scale of their organizations, recognized the importance of collaboration with other organizations. The main reasons they cited for the need to collaborate were avoiding overlap between organizations, reaching out to potential new clients, and learning about other resources in the community to which they could refer clients. Second, we found that organizations tended to view collaborations with other organizations of the same scope as most important to them (i.e., national organizations tended to report collaborations with other national-level organizations as most salient, while relationships with local-level organizations were most salient to local organizations). Table 5.1 shows that, among the national organizations, 80 percent of the collaborators cited by interviewees were also national organizations. Among the local organizations, 69 percent of the collaborators were other local organizations. Because representatives with whom we spoke were not asked to list all collaborators but, rather, only the top five organizations with which they partnered or coordinated, it is possible that national organizations and local ones do engage with each other in some way. This analysis instead focuses on the interactions perceived as most important to the providers we interviewed.

Table 5.1
Collaboration Dynamics Among National and Local Organizations

	Collaborators				
Type of Organization	**National**	**Local**	**Total**	**% National**	**% Local**
National (N = 11)	36	9	45	80	20
Local (N = 16)	21	47	68	31	69

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with resource providers.

This preliminary evidence suggests that there is already a complex network of national and local providers of services in support of reintegration and that this network has some coherent structure. The findings should be interpreted while keeping in mind that the interviewees were not selected in a way that would produce a representative sample of providers. Since interview participants were recruited at YRRP events or contacted through network connections interviewed at YRRP events, it is reasonable to assume that our sample is, on average, better connected to collaborating organizations than other similar organizations that do not attend YRRP events. This initial analysis could inform the development of methods for more thoroughly exploring the network connections among organizations, which could lead to a better understanding of how the web of support is structured and could identify ways to leverage these resources. For example, an organization that serves as a gatekeeper, or, in other words, is a link to organizations not connected with other resource providers, may be a good choice for information sharing or other efforts to facilitate effective coordination across providers.

Cross-Cutting Themes

In looking across our interviews with providers, the following themes arose regarding this broader web of support for guard and reserve families:

- *Providers share a common understanding of the reintegration process.* There is a common understanding across providers working in different domains that deployment can be disruptive for guard and reserve families and that the goals of reintegration are family stability and security, maintaining economic and social relationships, and positive psychological functioning. Providers across domains acknowledge that there will be challenges to reintegration, that many of the challenges are normal life challenges that are simply exacerbated by deployment, that reintegration takes time, and that it will not always be successful. Providers in each domain emphasized the importance of their particular domain but also recognized that functioning across all the domains is interdependent.
- *Myriad small organizations play a vital role in service provision.* Small-scale organizations that provide services locally bring unique value to the web of support:
  - *Access:* These providers often provide services across their states by approaching service members and families directly.
  - *Confidentiality:* These providers often emphasize their role outside the military, which may foster an increased trust among service members and families.
  - *Motivation:* Small-scale organizations provide opportunities for motivated individuals to make a contribution.
- *Knowledge of and appreciation of the distinctive circumstances and needs of guard and reserve families is mixed among providers.* Those that work for military organizations are well aware of guard and reserve issues, and some of the other providers have some sense of the difference, particularly if they have some personal experience in the military. However, many providers do not make distinctions between different types of veterans. Some interpret their mission in a very broad sense to include anyone who has been affected by a deployment or anyone who is involved with the military.
- *Evaluating outcomes can be a challenge for providers.* As we discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven, our interviews with providers indicate it can be a challenge for providers to assess how well they

are meeting their goals. While some national providers track clients through formal reporting mechanisms, we found that, overall, few providers use systematic metrics that would enable them to measure how effectively they are carrying out their goals, and most have very few resources to devote to evaluation or tracking client outcomes over the long term.

Conclusion

Our analysis indicates that the web of support comprises five primary types of organizations: (1) government organizations, including DoD and other federal agencies, state governments, and local governments; (2) private for-profit organizations; (3) private nonprofit organizations; (4) faith-based organizations; and (5) informal resources, including family, friends, and social networks. Our findings also indicate that support resources in the web of support for guard and reserve families largely focus on the following nine areas: education, employment, family relationships, financial issues, medical concerns and health care, legal issues, mental health, social networks, and spiritual support. In addition, we found that providers tend to focus on nine main types of services: referrals, training or instruction, social activities, monetary or material support, informal emotional or social support, child care, professional counseling, professional nontherapeutic services, and health care. Finally, our analysis also sheds light on collaboration within the web of support. For instance, we found that organizations tended to view collaborations with other organizations of the same scope as most important to them (i.e., national organizations tended to report collaborations with other national-level organizations as most salient, while relationships with other local-level organizations were most salient to local organizations).

These findings provide a window into the web of support that is available for guard and reserve families. While that web of support is extensive and complex, our interviews with service members, spouses, and resource providers offer insights into how it is structured and how it operates. Most importantly, our findings indicate the breadth of

organizations that play a role in providing support to reserve component families during the reintegration process. This finding highlights that DoD does not have to "do it all" and that, in fact, a better understanding of the web of support would enable DoD to better leverage the support that other organizations are already providing to guard and reserve families. This would, in turn, allow DoD to avoid redundancy, identify gaps in reintegration support services, and target its resources toward filling those gaps. In the next chapter, we present our findings about the resources that reserve component families find most useful, further deepening our understanding of the web of support.

CHAPTER SIX

What Kinds of Reintegration Support Do Guard and Reserve Families Use and Find Helpful?

This chapter describes which resources our study participants reported using, as well as their perceptions of which resources they found helpful. We begin by examining which resources our survey respondents mentioned using during deployment to prepare for reunion, then turn to our analysis of the resources our interview participants mentioned using during reintegration. Then, we report our analysis of the reunion-oriented resources our survey respondents found helpful during deployment and the resources that our interview participants thought were especially helpful to them postdeployment. We also examine why our survey respondents and interview participants thought these resources were helpful.

It is important to note that our survey respondents were home for an average of about one month, whereas our interview participants were home for longer. Our YRRP interview participants had been home for an average of 21.1 weeks (close to five months), whereas those who participated in a follow-up interview had been home an average of 28.9 weeks, or roughly seven months. In addition, there were differences in the ways we asked our survey and interview questions regarding resource utilization. Our interview participants were asked open-ended questions, whereas our survey respondents were asked to choose options from a list.

Resource Use During Deployment and Postdeployment to Aid Reintegration

Survey Findings: Resource Use During Deployment to Prepare for Reunion

As reported in Chapter Three, our findings indicate that certain factors before and during deployment can have some influence on successful reintegration (e.g., feeling ready for deployment, adequate communication with the family during deployment). Consequently, a better understanding of the resources families use during deployment to prepare for reunion may help DoD target its resources. In addition, the reunion-oriented resources that guard and reserve families use during deployment, in turn, promote those factors that are associated with reintegration success.

Our survey data offer insights into resource usage during deployment. In the survey, we asked respondents whether they had received reunion support from the following sources prior to the service member returning home from deployment: (1) unit-sponsored resources,[1] (2) YRRP, (3) Military OneSource, (4) other military-sponsored programs, (5) faith-based organizations, and (6) civilian resources (e.g., through nonprofits or for-profits). As Table 6.1 shows, our survey respondents most frequently cited reunion-related support from unit-sponsored resources, followed by Military OneSource, YRRP, faith-based resources, civilian resources, and other military-sponsored programs.

The resources that our survey respondents cited most frequently could be powerful means through which DoD can convey reintegration-related information to guard personnel, reservists, and their families while the service member is still deployed. Although we do know which of these sources respondents perceived as helpful, as we discuss later in this chapter, the extent to which families' use of these sources influenced their reintegration success is unclear. As we discuss in Chapter Seven, such questions could be included in larger DoD

[1] Examples of unit-sponsored resources include FRGs and the Army's Strong Bonds program.

Table 6.1
Reunion Preparation Resources Cited by Survey Respondents

	Survey Respondents (N = 192)	
Source	Number Who Cited Resource	% of Respondents
Unit-sponsored program	86	45
Military OneSource	66	34
YRRP	56	29
Faith-based organization	38	20
Civilian services	34	18
Other military-sponsored program	22	11

SOURCE: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families.

surveys to determine any associations between the use of particular resources during deployment and better outcomes during reintegration.

Interview Findings: Postdeployment Resource Use

We also asked our interview participants to describe the resources they accessed during reintegration.[2] These participants were home longer than our survey respondents; therefore, they had more time to perceive a need for support and to locate and use support resources. As Table 6.2 indicates, participants in both of our interview samples most often cited turning to federal resources and to private for-profit resources least frequently. One important finding to note is the degree to which informal resources were mentioned. Nearly half of our interviewees reported using informal resources during reintegration. At the other side of the spectrum, only two participants reported using state or local resources,[3] and none reported using for-profit resources.

[2] Our interviewees indicated which resources they accessed, and we coded their responses according to the type of organization identified in Table 6.2.

[3] This may be a function of the limited participation of guard personnel in our study. Because National Guard units are more closely aligned with their states, guard personnel may be more exposed to state resources.

Table 6.2
Types of Organizations Cited by Interview Participants for Reintegration Support

	Follow-Up Interviews (N = 40)		YRRP Interviews (N = 127)	
Type of Organization	Number Who Cited Resource	% of Respondents	Number Who Cited Resource	% of Respondents
Federal	34	85	106	83
Informal	17	43	59	46
Faith-based	5	13	25	20
Private nonprofit	5	13	14	11
State, local government	0	0	2	< 1
Private for-profit	0	0	0	0

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

We should also note that the low frequency of resource utilization in general could be because, in both of our interview samples (as in our survey sample), the majority of participants reported that reintegration was going well for their families. Therefore, they may not have perceived a need for many resources.

Given that our interview participants used federal resources the most as a group, we also wanted to identify which specific federal resources were cited most frequently. As Table 6.3 shows, unit-based support resources were the federal resource used by the largest number of our interview participants. This mirrors the findings from our survey. It should be noted that our YRRP interview participants were recruited at YRRP events (hence, they all used that resource). This is why 100 percent of them report using the YRRP. We also found that less than 1 percent of our follow-up interview sample mentioned using ESGR, whereas 12 percent of our YRRP interview sample mentioned using this resource.

Table 6.3
Federal Resources Cited by Interview Participants for Reintegration Support

	Follow-Up Interviews (N = 40)		YRRP Interviews (N = 127)	
Federal Resource	Number Who Cited Resource	% of Respondents	Number Who Cited Resource	% of Respondents
Unit-based resource	25	63	89	70
Military OneSource	22	55	55	43
YRRP	16	40	127	100[a]
Service-based resource	10	25	33	26
VA	10	25	25	20
TRICARE	8	20	25	20
ESGR	3	< 1	15	12

SOURCES: 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

[a] YRRP interview participants were recruited at YRRP events.

Type of Support Used Most

We also sought to identify the type of support that guard and reserve families mentioned most frequently. We found that the types of support described by families fell into the following categories:

- referral
- informal emotional or social support
- medical treatment
- professional counseling
- monetary or material support
- professional nontherapeutic support
- social activities
- child care
- training or instruction.

As indicated in Table 6.4, participants from both interview samples mentioned referral services most frequently, followed by informal

Table 6.4
Types of Support Cited by Interview Participants

	Follow-Up Interviews (N = 40)		YRRP Interviews (N = 127)	
Type of Support	Number Who Cited Resource	% of Respondents	Number Who Cited Resource	% of Respondents
Referral	21	53	106	83
Informal emotional or social support	17	43	64	50
Medical treatment	9	23	47	37
Professional counseling	7	18	22	17
Monetary or material support	5	13	9	1
Professional nontherapeutic support	4	10	14	11
Social activities	2	5	28	22
Child care	1	3	13	10
Training or instruction	1	3	36	28

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

emotional and social support and medical treatment. A higher percentage of our follow-up interview sample reported using monetary or material support than our YRRP sample. This could be an indication that families need this type of support later in the reintegration process. On the other hand, our YRRP interview sample reported using training or instruction, as well as social activities, at a higher rate than our follow-up interview sample. This could be an indication that these types of support are especially salient to families earlier in the reintegration process.

Our findings across our survey and interviews indicate that some resources may be used more during the early phase of reintegration, while others may be used more at a later point during reintegration. However, we found that federal resources were cited most frequently by both our survey respondents and interview participants. This is an

important and timely finding, especially as the federal government considers where to cut federal resources. Among federal resources, unit-based resources were most frequently cited across our survey respondents and interview participants. Next, we turn to a discussion of the resources that our survey respondents and interview participants reported as helpful.

Resources That Families Perceive as Helpful

In this section, we identify the resources that families found helpful and discuss why families said they were helpful. As in the previous section, we examine findings from both our survey and our interviews. It is important to note that we relied on our survey respondents' and interview participants' self-reported perceptions of helpfulness rather than the research team's evaluation of the helpfulness of the resources.

Survey Findings: Helpful Reunion-Oriented Resources During Deployment

In our survey, we asked respondents who had used a resource whether the resource was helpful to them. As Table 6.5 shows, the large majority of respondents who had used the resources listed in the table thought that they were helpful. Among the survey respondents who indicated using the resources listed in the table, unit-sponsored resources were most frequently reported as helpful in preparing for the service member's reunion with his or her family, followed closely by YRRP and faith-based organizations. Military OneSource, other military programs, and civilian resources were closely clustered after that.

These findings are important because they indicate that our study participants received support from resources that they deemed helpful early on in their reintegration experiences. However, our survey did not ask respondents why they felt that these resources were helpful. Further information would need to be collected from a broader sample to determine why guard and reserve families perceive certain resources to be helpful. Next, we turn to our analysis of our interview findings and the impressions of our interview participants.

Table 6.5
Sources Cited by Survey Respondents as Helpful for Reunion Preparation

Type of Organization	Number Who Cited Resource	% Who Said Resource Was Helpful
Unit-sponsored program	86	78
YRRP	56	77
Faith-based organization	38	76
Military OneSource	66	67
Other military-sponsored program	22	64
Civilian services	34	62

SOURCE: 2011 RAND survey of reserve component families.

Interview Findings: Helpful Postdeployment Resources

We also asked our interview participants which resources they found to be particularly useful during reintegration. In the following section, we present those perspectives. Like our survey respondents, our interview participants most frequently cited federal resources as being helpful to them. They also cited informal resources, faith-based resources, and nonprofit organizations as being helpful.

Federal Resources

Among federal resources, the YRRP and Military OneSource were cited most frequently as being particularly helpful.

YRRP

Approximately 25 percent of our follow-up interview sample and 35 percent of our YRRP interview sample reported that the YRRP was particularly helpful. This is consistent with findings from the January 2011 Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Service Members, in which 34 percent of respondents reported that the YRRP had a positive impact on family communication, 29 percent reported that it had a positive impact on resiliency and stress management skills,

and 26 percent said that it had a positive impact on personal financial management.[4]

One of the most common themes we heard from our interviewees is that they found the YRRP to be particularly helpful because it was a comprehensive program and they could find a lot of information in one place:

> I would say the Yellow Ribbon was particularly helpful. They put together a really nice program with all of the resources, the educational opportunities that were now available, the financial resources that were available. . . . They were just top-notch. (Respondent F049, Air National Guard E-6)

> Yellow Ribbon [was] very helpful. I mean, Yellow Ribbon gave me a lot of connections to those organizations, and gave me the phone numbers and . . . the websites that I can go to, to find these other organizations that help make sense of it all. (Respondent Y0088, Army Reserve E-5)

> Since all the information that we needed was all in one place, it was really helpful because, that way, everything was taken care of all at once. (Respondent Y0027, Air Force Reserve, E-5's spouse)

> Those two Yellow Ribbon briefings, they were pretty informative. We got a lot of information out about that. And I guess that's really all we needed. (Respondent F007, Air National Guard E-7)

In addition to providing information to families, we also heard that YRRP events play a more therapeutic role as well. As one interview participant told us, "It did a lot more than just give us information. It was an opportunity for us to just be a family again" (Respondent Y0039, Air Force Reserve E-6). Others mentioned that YRRP events provided a forum in which participants could share their common experiences:

[4] January 2011 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Service Members.

> [Yellow Ribbon], I think that was huge because it just kind of brought everything full circle. It didn't feel like we were kind of like left out in the dark and knowing that some of the things we were feeling were natural. (Respondent F045, Navy Reserve O-3)

> I thought it was very helpful if for no other reason than to see the perspective of more than just my husband and to hear other stories, the personal stories of other soldiers and their families and how they handled it, how they've adjusted, how they haven't adjusted; just being able to connect with other people who have just been through that, and to feel like I was listened to. (Respondent Y0152, Navy Reserve O-4's spouse)

One interview participant even mentioned that he noticed a substantive difference in his children's behavior after attending a YRRP event:

> I found the Yellow Ribbon very helpful. I've noticed a big difference in my children just by their attitude, their confidence level, so I haven't had nearly as many arguments or acting out since we've been to the [Yellow Ribbon event]. (Respondent Y0019, Army Reserve E-4)

Military OneSource

Some of our interview participants told us that they also found Military OneSource to be helpful. In the January 2011 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Service Members, 85 percent of respondents who had used Military OneSource reported that its in-person counseling referrals were helpful, 77 percent reported that its website was useful, and 73 percent indicated that email communication with a Military OneSource consultant was helpful.[5] In our study, 22 percent of our follow-up interview sample and 12 percent of our YRRP sample called out Military OneSource as a particularly useful resource. However, our interview questions were open-ended, so it is

[5] January 2011 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Service Members.

possible that other participants did not mention Military OneSource for various reasons (e.g., they did not remember using Military OneSource). One of the reasons participants viewed Military OneSource as a particularly helpful resource is that, like the YRRP, it offers comprehensive support resources:

> OneSource is definitely really, really important. I mean, that's all-inclusive and that one has helped the most because I can do so much on one website, so, I mean, that was very helpful for me. (Respondent Y0111, Air National Guard O-5's spouse)

> There's just so much content there that's accessible for almost any need that you have. (Respondent Y0058, Army National Guard E-6)

Other than its website, the Military OneSource resource that was most frequently cited was its tax preparation assistance:

> Any time I have any questions, I go on that site. Actually, I had some issues with . . . some tax questions and I called them and they have a free specialist there who talks to you and works [with you]. [And when] they didn't know the answer to my question, they'd look it up and get back to you. Military OneSource is really a great website. (Respondent F017, Army Reserve E-5)

> Well, Military OneSource with the tax thing, that was invaluable. It's huge not having to pay for those returns and having online help and all that kind of thing. It's huge. And then we had a problem because I was out for tax year 2010 and 2011 on this deployment. So I actually had to call somebody and that was all free, so it just made it really super easy to get 2010 and 2011 tax returns filed. (Respondent F045, Navy Reserve O-3)

Several parents also told us that Military OneSource had creative and helpful resources for children:

> [Military OneSource is helpful] with the online library where you can look up the different books and whatnot. And they have different resources there for children, which has been good to

> look at for our son. And then they have—which we didn't know about before, but—and I mean he's little—but they have that DVD from Sesame Street that you can get to help kids with [deployment], so that was nice to know . . . for the future if we go through another deployment. (Respondent Y0041, Navy Reserve E-7's spouse)

Our interviewees also reported that some unit- and Service-based resources were particularly helpful. The Army's Strong Bonds program was cited as an especially helpful unit-based resource. Interview participants indicated that the Strong Bonds program allowed them to reconnect with their spouse:

> I definitely believe the Strong Bonds program my husband and I attended by ourselves without our daughter in January was wonderful. It was very beneficial. They helped us learn more about communication and what the other person needs from a relationship and things like that. So it was great to go to those classes and focus on our relationship and ourselves. (Respondent Y0015, Army Reserve O-2's spouse)

> I like the Strong Bonds the most because, one, they make it where you talk one-on-one with your spouse. And then they . . . just have you sit together separated from the group and just talk to each other, and they'll give you different tasks to address. And that was kind of neat because we never really sat down and talked a lot about it. And then they give you a lot of free time to go have a date night, which is nice. And if we have to bring the kids, they have child care. Sometimes you can do it where it can just be the two of you. But then, if that's the case, you have to have child care. (Respondent Y0056, Army Reserve O-2)

In addition to the military resources described here, some of our respondents also found the VA to be helpful, not only for health care needs but also for educational benefits:

> I think the [VA] website is a good resource for really any questions. I went on there to check out the student loan informa-

> tion and student loan repayment stuff, and especially the GI Bill. (Respondent F017, Army Reserve E-5)

> The VA, when I went through them, they have been excellent as far as women's health care and postdeployment and . . . making sure I knew my appointments, sending me information. It's been very thorough. (Respondent F047, Navy Reserve 0-5)

Informal Resources

Our interview participants cited friends and family as helpful resources. As mentioned in Chapter Five, families often turn to these resources first. In particular, we heard that extended families are especially valuable in providing support:

> My family has been one of our best resources . . . taking the kids and giving my husband and I a little bit of time to ourselves just to reconnect as a couple. (Respondent Y0039, Air Force Reserve E-6's spouse)

> My extended family helps me out tremendously. I've been on multiple TDYs [temporary duty assignments] and my sister, while I'm gone, helps in my finances. She manages my money situation, and she's done that multiple times. So my family is a real big help in that. And, like I said, I've been deployed multiple times, so she is actually on my checkbook and she can write checks and I trust her with everything. (Respondent F040, Air National Guard E-7)

Friends and neighbors were also cited as particularly helpful because they sometimes assisted with household chores or child care so that service members and their spouses could have some time to themselves:

> [Friends and neighbors] helped [when] me and my wife needed to get some alone time, or they helped when we needed somebody to take care of our house or stuff like that. Or when my wife needed anything, my family was there for her while I was deployed, and even when I came home, they helped with every-

> thing. I mean, they tried to make things easier and more pleasant for us as a family, and they just helped us a tremendous amount. (Respondent Y0146, Air National Guard E-6)

Some interview participants also indicated that online social network resources were a particularly helpful way to connect with others going through the same life experiences:

> The spouse support online and Facebook social network has been a good place to talk with other people who are going through the same things, during and after deployment. (Respondent Y0206, Air Force Reserve O-3)

Faith-Based Resources

Some interview participants told us that they found faith-based resources to be particularly helpful. Faith-based resources provided some of the same kinds of support that friends and family provided, such as helping to fix things around the house, providing child care, and offering spiritual support.

> Our church, they were helpful through the whole deployment and, after the fact, they've been supportive. (Respondent Y0015, Army Reserve O-2's spouse)

> Now, with our church, if I were to call and say, "We need help," they would be there in a heartbeat. During my husband's deployment, I never, ever heard from anybody in his unit asking if I needed anything or any support whatsoever. But my church would call me up and say, "Do you need any help with anything? Can we send someone over to mow your yard or wash your car or anything?" (Respondent Y0159, Navy Reserve E-4's spouse)

Nonprofit Resources

Finally, our interview participants cited some nonprofit organizations as being particularly helpful:

> Actually, the Knights of Columbus, I'm involved with. They are really, really helpful and not just for me, just for any of the guys, I would have to say. They've been extremely active and helpful in our community. (Respondent Y0019, Army Reserve E-4)

> I'd say the [Disabled American Veterans, a nonprofit organization]. They've been really helpful with everything, in dealing with my injury. (Respondent Y0077, Army National Guard E-5)

> Marine Corps League, for me, because it's got everything I need. (Respondent Y0179, Marine Corps Reserve E-8)

> We went to the Volunteers of America . . . and they helped us get an apartment. They helped get our car fixed. They [made] sure we had to set goals and really achieved one by getting a job, because they helped me get a job. Like I said, right now I'm going to go talk to my case manager about getting help because I'm not going to get paid until the 30th of this month and my car insurance runs out Friday, so I'm going to go talk to her about assistance in trying to pay for my car insurance. And they've helped get food in the house and stuff like that. (Respondent Y0085, Army National Guard E-4's spouse)

Conclusion

Both our survey respondents and interview participants most frequently cited using federal resources to aid with reintegration. Federal resources were also most frequently regarded as helpful. This is an important and timely finding, especially as the federal government considers where to cut federal spending. Our findings suggest that some of these federal resources are heavily used by guard and reserve families and that some federal entities provide resources that guard and reserve families find helpful. In particular, our survey and interview participants most frequently cited using unit-based resources, and these resources were most frequently perceived as helpful. Given these findings, DoD could leverage these unit-based resources to improve support to guard and reserve families. However, we need to know more about how effective federal

resources are in terms of influencing reintegration success, especially vis-à-vis other types of reintegration resources, to better inform such funding decisions.

We also found that almost half of guard and reserve families represented in our interview samples used informal resources. As mentioned in Chapter Five, our interviews suggest that some families use informal resources in lieu of formal resources if they are not able to access them. In addition, while other types of resources were used at lower rates, our study participants indicated that many of these resources are helpful. If federal budgets become constrained in the future, these other resources could take on even more importance to families if they expand to fill the gap between needs and shrinking federal resources.

CHAPTER SEVEN

What Are the Challenges to Supporting Guard and Reserve Families?

To formulate strategies for improving support resources for guard and reserve families, it is critical to identify the barriers to supporting these families. Our study findings point to the following three overarching barriers:

- The needs of guard and reserve families are not fully understood.
- Guard and reserve families do not utilize support resources for various reasons.
- Providers face challenges in supporting these families.

The Needs of Guard and Reserve Families Are Not Fully Understood

As part of the study, we sought to explore how the needs of guard and reserve families are identified and whether that process could be improved. We began by assessing DoD survey instruments to identify potential topics and questions that could be added to DoD's data collection efforts to improve support for guard and reserve families. We also asked providers to give us their perspectives on families' most pressing needs. This section presents the key findings from our analyses.

Data Collection Efforts Could Be Augmented to Address Needs and Factors Associated with Reintegration Success

We reviewed 17 DoD surveys administered between 2007 and 2012. The bulk of the surveys either focused on or included the Reserve Com-

ponent. Our goal was to determine the extent to which DoD's large-scale data collection efforts could provide insights regarding the reintegration phase of the deployment cycle. Details about our approach, including a full list of the instruments reviewed and the topics covered, are provided in Appendix A.

Our analysis indicated that when asking about problems during reintegration, most of the DoD surveys focus primarily on employment problems, emotional problems, and relationship problems. Given the results of our family survey and interviews, DoD should consider including more questions about other potential problems (e.g., financial issues, child well-being, health care or medical concerns). In addition, we found that none of the surveys asked specifically about needs during reintegration.

We also found that the surveys consistently asked about resource use and resource helpfulness during both deployment and postdeployment; however, questions were largely focused on the use and helpfulness of DoD resources—specifically, the YRRP, Military OneSource, TRICARE, and unit-sponsored programs. While some of the surveys did ask whether respondents had used non-DoD resources, including civilian and faith-based resources, they did not ask more in-depth questions about how these resources were used or the type of support that was provided.

We found that DoD consistently asks questions about how well readjustment is going. This is an extremely valuable question because it allows DoD to use statistical methods to associate reintegration success with other variables (e.g., family finances, particular problems, particular resource use). We found that DoD surveys sporadically touched on some of the factors that are associated with reintegration success. For instance, the June 2007, June 2009, and January 2011 Status of Forces Surveys of Reserve Component Service Members all asked questions regarding financial health. The DoD surveys did not consistently ask about other factors associated with reintegration success, including whether the family engaged in adequate communication and whether the unit provided adequate communication.

The surveys also did not consistently ask about factors that may contribute to a more challenging reintegration experience. For instance,

our study findings indicate that deployments that last more than one year are associated with difficulties during reintegration. Although many of the surveys consistently asked about the total number of days that the service member had been deployed since September 11, 2001, they did not consistently ask for the duration of the most recent deployment. In addition, a few of the surveys asked whether the service member returned home with a wound, but this question was not asked consistently. Although these data are likely available from administrative data files, including them on confidential survey instruments (i.e., instruments that cannot be linked to other data files) would enable DoD policymakers and other analysts to investigate how these characteristics are related to reintegration problems, needs, and success.

We found several deployment-related questions that could be adapted to obtain postdeployment perspectives. For instance, the 2008 Survey of Reserve Component Spouses asked, "How could the military have provided better support for you and/or your family during deployments?" This same question should be routinely included in future surveys that address reintegration in some way. In addition, almost all of the surveys asked a question about how prepared families felt for deployment. This same question should be asked consistently with regard to preparation for reintegration.

We found several questions that were posed only to reserve component members that should pertain to reserve component family members as well. For instance, the 2011 Military Family Life Project (MFLP) survey asked,

> When did you use [respondents choose options from a variety of support resources]: prior to my spouse's most recent deployment, during my spouse's most recent deployment, or after my spouse's most recent deployment.

This question should be posed consistently to both service members and spouses in both the Active Component and the Reserve Component because the answers could help DoD identify which resources service members and their spouses use at different points during the deployment cycle. In a similar vein, while we found that DoD rou-

tinely asks survey respondents to provide feedback on how well reintegration has proceeded, the question often pertains only to the respondents themselves. This is another example of a topic that would be very worthwhile to expand so that spouses and children are considered as well, either by posing a question to both service members and spouses or by phrasing items so they cover the experiences not only of the respondent but also his or her spouse and any other dependents.

Finally, we recognize that in many of its large-scale survey efforts, such as the Status of Forces surveys, DoD must make hard decisions about which important topics to cover and to what degree, because covering all of them in great depth would make an instrument too onerous for most would-be respondents. Accordingly, DoD should also consider using the Quick Compass survey approach (a web-based survey designed to provide DoD leadership with immediate information on a few key topics) as a way to learn from reserve component service members and spouses about a variety of targeted issues that are unique to the Guard and Reserve. DoD also may wish to use a Quick Compass survey to focus on the reintegration phase of the deployment cycle and include both the Active Component and the Reserve Component in such an effort. This would enable DoD to understand better how the two elements differ in terms of their reintegration experiences and may also shed light on potential disparities in the support available to them.

Providers' Perspectives on the Needs of Guard and Reserve Families

To try to gain a better understanding of the needs of guard and reserve families, we asked resource providers to give us their impressions of those needs, particularly those that have not been fully met. They identified the following needs:

- more support for finding resources
- earlier preparation for deployment and reintegration
- greater financial literacy
- more support for medical problems
- more emphasis on the needs of children.

Several of these topics were also raised by service members and spouses (e.g., difficulty finding resources, difficulty navigating support for medical problems). Some were also factors that we found to be related to successful reintegration (e.g., feeling ready for deployment, comfortable family finances). We discuss each of the needs in turn.

Helping Families Find Resources

Providers reiterated a theme that we also heard from service members and their spouses: Families have trouble finding resources. Several providers mentioned that families have difficulty finding resources because there are so many of them, and a clearinghouse of some kind would be helpful to families:

> The problem is that there are now approximately 900 free services available, but there is no single source to access all of it. (Federal Provider 14)

> There needs to be a credible clearinghouse by municipality to reach all areas. Giving vets local resources is essential for helping them and increasing utilization of these services. (Private Nonprofit Provider 24)

In addition, some providers emphasized the need to extend information to hard-to-reach populations:

> Getting information to veterans and family is the number 1 thing. It may be difficult to make it a requirement that attendees at events like Yellow Ribbon talk to at least a certain number of resource or service providers. Resource or service providers can only make themselves available and offer help, but they can't force someone to take that help. And reserve component members and families are so spread out, which makes it all the more difficult to reach out to them. (Private Nonprofit Provider 22)

Preparing Families Early for Deployment and Reintegration

Some providers with whom we spoke mentioned the need to prepare families earlier for the reintegration phase. For instance, one provider

suggested the following to help service members reintegrate into the civilian job force faster:

> There needs to be more done before demobilization, while still in the field. They probably can't get a career counselor out to Afghanistan. But maybe service members can even start preparing their resume before they leave. They do that with awards so they can be awarded right when they step off the plane. Why not also do that with resumes? (Private Nonprofit Provider 7)

This echoes our finding from Chapter Three that preparation for reintegration is associated with a smoother reintegration experience.

Increasing Financial Literacy

We also heard from providers that there is a need to increase financial literacy among guard and reserve families:

> A financial piece should be included in [support programs]. Finances really affect relationships, especially financial changes surrounding deployment. (Federal Provider 3)

> I think it's financial literacy in general. These aren't military-specific things. These problems represent a need that needs to be met in high school, with financial literacy courses. (Federal Provider 13)

Again, this corroborates our finding from Chapter Three—specifically, that comfortable family finances are associated with a smoother reintegration experience.

Improving Support for Medical Problems

Several providers also mentioned that there is a need to improve support for service members returning from deployment with medical problems. In particular, they mentioned that access to care needs to be improved, especially for geographically dispersed populations, and some suggested improving the coordination of medical services:

> We have it right now where military medical can't meet the needs of the active-duty population. . . . When you're in the Guard or

> Reserve, that is amplified. . . . There's no VA hospital near you. You may have to drive hundreds of miles. You may lose your benefits. And then the whole aspect heard in media where guard and reserve members are coming back and not admitting to PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] issues for fear that it would keep them from reuniting with their families. (Faith-Based Provider 3)

> There are still huge mental health issues and difficulties coordinating services for the wounded when they are out of military hospitals and back in their communities. We need a more coordinated grid [of services]. (Private Nonprofit Provider 9)

These issues were also raised during interviews with service members and spouses who were dealing with medical issues.

Emphasizing the Needs of Children

Finally, we heard from providers that the needs of children must be better addressed. Providers told us that children need better support both during deployment and after:

> The needs of kids are just beginning to be addressed. Magnitude of effect on kids needs to be addressed. Even if the parents are not deployed. Kids are very resilient, but they still need attention. We need to demonstrate that youth development is a worthy investment so that interest is maintained. (Private Nonprofit Provider 12)

This mirrors many of the comments we heard from service members and spouses. For instance, we heard about problems that children were experiencing both during deployment and after, and that parents were seeking out support to help their children through the entire deployment cycle. We also heard that many parents rely on friends and family because they have difficulty finding reliable child care.

The list of needs that providers mentioned maps tightly to the issues we heard about from service members and spouses, as well as our statistical analysis of the factors that are associated with successful reintegration. This is significant because it indicates that if these needs are addressed, they should have an impact on successful reinte-

gration. Therefore, providers—both DoD and others—should target more resources to address these issues. The remainder of this chapter presents our findings regarding why reserve component families do not use resources and the barriers that resource providers face in providing effective support to reserve component families, as well as the strategies that providers use to overcome those barriers.

Guard and Reserve Families Do Not Utilize Support Resources for Various Reasons

As shown in Table 7.1, the service members and spouses with whom we spoke gave the following reasons for why their families did not utilize resources:

- a lack of awareness of resources
- no one reached out to them to use the resources
- difficulty accessing resources
- concerns about the quality of the resources
- cost of resources
- difficulty finding resources.

Next, we discuss what guard and reserve families told us about each of these barriers to support.

Table 7.1
Reasons Interview Participants Did Not Use Resources

	Follow-Up Interviews (N = 40)		YRRP Interviews (N = 127)	
Reason for Lack of Use	Number Who Cited Reason	% of Respondents	Number Who Cited Reason	% of Respondents
Accessibility	14	35	28	22
Lack of awareness	14	35	23	18
Resource quality	9	22	22	17
No one reached out	3	1	9	1

SOURCE: 2012 RAND interviews with reserve component families.

Lack of Awareness of Resources

One of the most prevalent reasons interviewees gave for not using support resources was that they were not aware of them. For instance, our interviewees shared observations such as

> We didn't know about [ESGR] when I was laid off at the time. I would have [contacted ESGR], but I didn't know that that resource was available because I wasn't notified. (Respondent F050, Navy Reserve O-4)

> I don't know who the FRG person is. I don't know any of it, and the FRG from the unit I deployed with hasn't contacted me or my wife. (Respondent Y0065, Army Reserve E-4)

> Well, it's twofold. First of all, I didn't know that there were any services available to us. And, secondly, because I didn't need any, I didn't go looking. (Respondent F031, Navy Reserve 0-6's spouse)

As discussed in Chapter Six, we asked interviewees whether they had utilized specific resources, such as the YRRP, Military OneSource, ESGR, the VA, or Service-specific resources (e.g., key volunteer, an ombudsman, an FRG). We found that a large number of our interviewees used some DoD resources, especially the YRRP, Military OneSource, and Service-specific resources.

Lack of awareness of resources continues to be a challenge for both DoD and service providers. In the January 2011 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members, 60 percent of respondents reported that they were aware of the DoD/VA benefits, programs, and services available to service members. Twenty percent reported that they were neither aware nor unaware, and 20 percent reported that they were unaware of these benefits, programs, and services.[1]

[1] January 2011 DMDC Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Service Members.

No One Reached Out to Them

Some of the service members and spouses we interviewed indicated that they did not use support resources because no one had reached out to them. The most common complaint we heard in this area was that service members and spouses had very little communication with the service member's unit during both the deployment and reintegration. Twenty-three percent of our follow-up interviewees and 27 percent of our YRRP interviewees said that they did not hear from their unit after the service member demobilized. In other cases, interviewees told us that they grew frustrated because they reached out to a provider who then did not respond to their inquiries or requests. For instance, one spouse told us,

> I sent them [the provider] an email asking if they could give me the resources, and she said she would look into it. She said she was going to get back with me, and she never got back with me. And it was just kind of like pulling teeth with them. (Respondent F006, Navy Reserve E-6's spouse)

Such experiences can leave a bitter taste with families and could prevent them from reaching out to providers in the future, as we saw from examples in the previous category.

Difficulty Accessing Resources

Another prevalent reason interview participants offered for not using support resources was trouble accessing them, primarily because they live far away from a military installation or their drill unit. Unlike active component families, who usually live on or close to an installation and can therefore more readily take advantage of the resources and support networks at these locations, guard and reserve families sometimes live far from installations—hundreds of miles, in some cases.[2]

[2] For instance, 7 percent of our web survey respondents indicated that they live at least 100 miles from the nearest installation. Eleven percent of our follow-up interview participants and 9 percent of our YRRP interview participants also indicated that they live at least 100 miles from the nearest installation.

Some interview participants said that they thought they would have access to more resources if they lived on or near an installation:

> And I will tell you, I called Military OneSource and I called everybody I can think of. I went to the police stations, I went to Social Services, I went to the Sheriff's. . . . I tried to call Navy Legal and . . . they really were no help, whatsoever. I'm not near a base so . . . had I been near a base, I'd have got a lot of help but I'm not—it's like three hours away. (Respondent F010, Navy Reserve E-6)

> TRICARE is useless unless you're close to a base. The people that have given us medical care are usually former military doctors, so we've got a former Air Force doctor that kind of took the family under the wing the first time I went over and she's our regular doctor anyway, so she will accept whatever TRICARE is willing to pay. (Respondent Y0179, Marine Corps Reserve E-8)

> My wife tried to access them while I was gone and she kept getting the runaround, and it was because we're in Arizona. My unit is out in California, so all the resources that they had were for Southern California. It didn't pertain to Arizona. (Respondent Y0160, Navy Reserve E-5)

Others expressed frustration that resource providers were not sensitive to the needs of geographically dispersed families:

> My wife would get calls from the FRG leader who—well, let's just say I don't have kind words about her—[would say,] "Why aren't you coming to the meetings?" and this and that. And my wife had to keep reminding her, "Hey, I've requested if we could phone conference into these meetings and reminded you that I live almost 400 miles away and I have three kids. And one's a baby and I can't come to these things once a month. (Respondent Y0050, Army Reserve E-4)

A dominant theme that emerged from our interviews was that participants felt that the lack of access to support resources can lead to a sense of isolation:

> So all of them up there have a built-in resource in their community to help each other while their spouses are deployed and to help those deployed soldiers when they return home to kind of recuperate, rehabilitate, and get used to being a civilian again. Well, being almost 400 miles away from that and not really knowing who else is in the area who might be in a similar situation, my wife felt alone. (Respondent Y0050, Army Reserve E-4)

> Had we been on post probably with a network of other officers and other officers' families . . . there would have been a more natural support network for those deployed families, I think—at least how I envision it, perhaps. Here, as a reservist kind of off by ourselves, you're being just kind of plucked out of civilian life and sent overseas. And not really being part of a military support network that is rightly available to you or you're readily part of. (Respondent F011, Navy Reserve O-4)

> We're four and a half hours from the base, so I think what affects it the most is the fact that, the people who live around the base, they have the support at work and they have everything there. And we're kind of left spinning off into no man's land. (Respondent Y0027, Air Force Reserve E-5's spouse)

In general, there was a sense among our interviewees that they did not have access to the same types of resources that they would have had they been living on or near an installation. However, we also found that, in the absence of official support resources, some guard and reserve families have instead relied on friends and family for support:

> Honestly, I think it's just that we're so far away from the base. And I know that it would just be a phone call for them, but I didn't get any phone calls or anything, and I just really don't know what I can get from them. So they're not the first person that I think of when I need help. I think of my family because they're right there. (Respondent Y0039, Air Force Reserve E-6's spouse)

Given the dispersed nature of guard and reserve personnel, these issues associated with geographic dispersion will endure. Our findings

indicate that some guard and reserve families want access to the types of support resources that are available on installations.

Concerns About Resource Quality

Another reason our interviewees gave for not using support resources was that they did not anticipate that the resource would provide them with the support they were seeking. Some service members and spouses indicated that they did not use resources because they had a previous bad experience with a provider and they did not want to repeat that experience. For instance, when one interviewee was asked whether she sought help from a particular provider after her husband returned home, she pointedly told us,

> No, because they were useless as a pile of goose poop on a pump handle during the deployment. (Respondent F043, Navy Reserve E-6's spouse)

Others expressed disappointment that some resources did not help them in the way that they had hoped. For instance, one reservist explained,

> When I called them when I first got back here, I needed a place to stay because my stuff was in storage, and what they did for me was they sent me a list of hotels. I mean, I could've Googled that; I know what hotels are in my area. It wasn't any special price or anything worth using . . . so the [resource] didn't do what I needed it to do. (Respondent F010, Navy Reserve E-6)

Another theme that arose from our interviews was the need for more customized support. Several of our interviewees mentioned that some of the resources that they tried to use did not provide the support they were seeking. For example, providers told us,

> I do believe that one size doesn't fit all. It's critical that we coordinate efforts when the service member comes home. (Private Nonprofit Provider 9)

> [I see] a lot of disappointment in support provided to them [veterans] because the veterans structure does not provide personal, customized help. (Private Nonprofit Provider 10)

Along these lines, one of the spouses we interviewed said,

> I would have liked something that was specifically tailored for military wives, spouses. (Respondent F033, Navy Reserve O-2's spouse)

Other Reasons for Lack of Resource Usage

Other reasons why service members and spouses did not use support resources include not having the time to find or use the resources and the perception that the resources were expensive:

> It would have been nice to have gone to one of those Yellow Ribbon programs just to see what the conferences offered and stuff like that. I really wanted to do that, but I was already back to my civilian job. I then went to normal, one-weekend-a-month drill. So everything's competing for your time. (Respondent F038, Air Force Reserve O-5)

> I mean, it was nice to take the kids to a nice hotel and all that, but I mean it definitely financially wasn't very helpful. Like I said, it hurt me more than it helped. (Respondent Y0120, Air National Guard E-4)

> [The event was not] in close proximity to the base, which was very inconvenient. It was also in rather expensive places . . . so, I mean, it could've been done on a [drill] weekend, and made a lot easier to go to, so that the information could be dispersed quickly, but that's not how they do it. (Respondent Y0145, Air National Guard, E-5)

In addition, some service members and spouses told us that they were overwhelmed because there are so many resources and that it was sometimes difficult to find the resource they needed:

> Sometimes there's so many resources for the same thing, and I can't name a lot of them off the top of my head, because I didn't really pay a lot of attention to them. But so many different people do the same thing that it's overwhelming to see who you need to go to for something in particular. (Respondent Y0087, Army Reserve E-6)

These findings suggest that guard and reserve families are busy, especially during the reintegration phase, and that their time and patience are often limited. Therefore, they are looking for resources that are easy to find, easy to negotiate, and do not cost a lot of money. It is important to note that reserve component families also noted that while the web of support is expansive, it can be overwhelming as well. Next, we turn to the challenges that providers cited in our interviews.

Providers Face Challenges in Supporting Families

Providers reported the following primary challenges to providing support to guard and reserve families:

- Some populations can be hard to reach.
- Service members and families are concerned about stigma, which can inhibit them from seeking help.
- There is a lack of coordination across the web of support.
- Many providers do not measure outcomes systematically.

We discuss each of these barriers to support in turn, as well as the strategies that providers told us they are using to overcome these barriers.

Some Populations Can Be Hard to Reach

Providers told us that one reason why they have difficulty reaching some members of the Reserve Component is that most units do not have any contact with their personnel for several weeks after demobilization:

> Since guardsmen don't go back to drills right away postdeployment, they can be hard to reach. . . . Strong Bonds events also usually don't happen for at least four months after returning home. (Federal Provider 3)

There is always the challenge of trying to stay in touch with reserve component personnel beyond the monthly weekend drill and annual training when they are back home. The situation may be worse for reservists than for guard personnel because reservists are even less well connected and harder to reach in peacetime (Federal Provider 31). During our interviews with providers, they echoed the concerns expressed by families regarding geographic dispersion. As the comments that follow demonstrate, they reinforced the challenges associated with trying to reach out to such a dispersed population:

> As to barriers to delivering service, number 1 is finding the families and getting information to them. (Private Nonprofit Provider 3)

> Veterans are so scattered, especially reserve component members. Getting information to them about what [we] can do for them is difficult. (Private For-Profit Provider 2)

> Guard and reserve families are especially hard to reach if they live in remote, rural areas. (Federal Provider 18)

> Guardsmen and reservists can be at a disadvantage, geographically and in terms of support, so they may struggle with knowing how to ask for help, or even what help they need. A consistent method for reaching out to these individuals, outside of the Yellow Ribbon events (which not everyone is able to attend), would be invaluable. In some cases they are left to interpret what they are able to Google. (Federal Provider 7)

Some providers also told us that young service members are particularly difficult to reach because they do not want to admit that they need help.

Strategies Used to Overcome This Challenge

During our interviews, we also asked providers to tell us about the strategies they use to reach out to guard and reserve families. Other than relying on word of mouth to inform families about their resources, we found that many providers attend official DoD-sanctioned events (such as YRRP events and veterans job fairs). Some providers disseminate information via Craigslist and are developing online resources, including Facebook and Twitter accounts, webinars, training courses, self-help guides, and discussion forums.

> We reach out through networks on base, through Facebook, blogs, local and national media. (Private Nonprofit Provider 9)

Other providers market their resources through churches and community organizations, such as the American Legion and the VFW:

> We market through churches and community organizations. We train them to help them identify what their needs are and help them. . . . From our perspective, we're dealing with the community as opposed to the military establishment. For us [that means] being able to mobilize churches to understand, so they can recognize when their service members come for help. We can only do so much, so we want to be the multiplier through other organizations . . . try to get our resources out. (Faith-Based Provider 3)

> Each office worker does four hours per week of outreach in the community—to get our name out there, let people know we are here. (Federal Provider 21)

One federal provider told us that the program has two mobile vehicles that staff use to travel around the state offering services on-site:

> We make sure to target local and state fairs, such as the current "Hillbilly Days," to get its message out as efficiently as possible. (Federal Provider 22)

When asked about which marketing strategies are *most* successful in reaching guard and reserve families, providers told us,

> We use multiple approaches. We make use of opportunities at reintegration events and employment fairs. We talk to service members and their families, and find out what they need. We reach out through networks on base, through Facebook, blogs, local and national media. It's a constant drumbeat of effort. We have to find [service members] where they are. They often don't know that they should reach out [to providers]. We need to continue to reach them so they understand what they're experiencing is normative. (Private Nonprofit Provider 9)

> Briefings at the units, referrals for NCOs [noncommissioned officers], and also briefings for families and soldiers before they deploy. The briefings held during deployment are family check-up meetings. We inform families of what they should be aware of when their solider returns. These are probably the most effective briefings. (State Provider 11)

Providers also shared that one of the most effective strategies they use is to work through units and military leadership to disseminate information about their resources.

> We push information through the units. . . . Information about our events is handed out at Yellow Ribbon events, and our pamphlets go out like hot cakes! We need way more [pamphlets]. (Federal Provider 4)

> Army Reserve has a requirement for leaders to attend pre-command courses. . . . We attend these and let the leadership know what we offer so that they can turn around and engage their troops. Many of our [staff] attend Yellow Ribbons or battle assembly during weekend drills if a group is not deployed. (Private Nonprofit Provider 7)

> We go to the armories and try to participate whenever they allow for us on drill weekend. We keep our info out there and stay in

> contact. We try to help as much as we can. We try to let the FRGs know. (Federal Provider 26)

> The lesson is to go to the high-level leadership and get their support. When big generals say something and give you help, it makes a big difference. (Private Nonprofit Provider 4)

Given that we found that a sizeable proportion of interviewees (about one-fourth) did not hear from their unit following deployment, it is unclear whether this strategy is actually the most effective means to reach guard and reserve families. More research would be needed to evaluate the relative effectiveness of the various outreach strategies mentioned by our interview participants.

Families Are Concerned About Stigma

Providers also mentioned that some service members and families may not seek out help because they are concerned that they will be regarded as weak or that it will affect the service member's guard or reserve career. For instance, one interviewee who tried to organize an online discussion group focused on PTSD told us that few people have joined the group because of the stigma associated with PTSD:

> Most service members will get discharged if there is an issue, so there's not a lot of people in the group. So it's a hush-hush group because of stigma, especially if the spouse is active-duty. When people interact, it's more sensitive. They want to know what they're going through is normal. (Informal Provider 1)

Another provider told us that perceived stigma makes it very difficult for service members and their families to choose reintegration resources:

> First, the stigma associated with reaching out for help. If you're a family member, you worry "How will it affect my service member?" If you're a service member, "How will this affect my job?" (Private Nonprofit Provider 25)

It was also regarded as a main barrier to providers' efforts to support service members. These sentiments are illustrated below:

> Stigma is number 1. Military men and women have the self-image of being tough, are typically Type A, who are naturally—and reinforced by their military experience—to be self-sufficient. So they are very hesitant to ask for help, especially if they fear that it would harm their image and careers. (State Provider 10)

> Military men and women are Type A people. They don't want to be seen as weak. They think they can solve problems on their own. They don't like to ask for help. But they don't know what they want or how to get what they want. The young veterans are not coming forward even when so much is available to them, more than ever before when you compare it to the older generations of veterans. (Federal Provider 17)

> Veterans want to maintain deployment eligibility, so they don't want to be seen looking for help by their supervisors, peers, or subordinates at Yellow Ribbon and other venues. It's beyond a stigma issue, though stigma remains strong, especially with veterans like young Marine [reservists]. . . . So, sometimes it is the spouses on their own or at the urging of the military member who approach the table at events like this to get information. (Federal Provider 20)

Some providers also mentioned that, at times, they must work hard to gain the trust of service members:

> Then there's the trust issue. You have got to know someone to trust them. It's not just the name of the organization. In his case [referring to a staff member responsible for interfacing with personnel and their families], he has a certain level of credibility with his clients because he is a member of the Reserve. He also has certain credibility with his professional peers because he works with military clients. But you still need to get to know the person and have time to share information. (Private For-Profit Provider 4)

> The problem is that they [service members] have to trust you. You have to be there a lot with them, especially with the younger generations, Millennials and Generation Y. (Federal Provider 4)

Strategies Used to Overcome This Challenge

One of the main strategies used by providers to fight this stigma is to reach out to all service members (rather than targeting those who may have a problem) and then meet with all of them in private rather than singling some out in public. According to one provider,

> [We] should get them a list and do a "mass passing out of information" and don't make them feel like they're being singled out. Then, check in with them, and talk with them regularly. The Navy calls this "deck plate ministry"; the Army calls it "ministry of presence." This should be done for all service members when they come home. (Federal Provider 4)

In addition, many providers said that they hire retired members of the military because retirees understand military culture, more readily garner the trust of service members, and can assuage concerns about stigma.

There Is a Lack of Coordination Across the Web of Support

Providers also reinforced what we heard from families regarding the complexities of the web of support that is available to them. In particular, most of the providers we spoke with expressed concern that coordination is lacking among organizations providing support to reserve component families—this includes both vertical coordination within organizations and horizontal coordination across organizations and across the various domains in the web of support. For instance, one provider told us,

> [There are] so many contractors doing the same thing, and much for free. The government is realizing this redundancy and trying to take control now and prevent overlapping. (Private For-Profit Provider 4)

This is consistent with findings from a 2012 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study of federal programs intended to help people with disabilities (including service members) overcome barriers to employment. Specifically, it found that there were 45 federal programs of this nature and noted both a great deal of overlap and a lack of coordination. The greatest overlap occurred in the 19 programs serving veterans and service members. GAO concluded that such overlap and fragmentation of services increased the likelihood of duplication of effort and noted that, even when the potential for duplication is minimal, operating multiple programs that provide similar services to similar populations has inherent inefficiencies.[3]

Some providers expressed concern that the web of support is sometimes difficult for providers themselves to navigate:

> Trying to find the right person who wants to help makes all the difference, but it is not easy. When people know how to work on the system, it helps. But if they don't, it goes nowhere. (Private Nonprofit Provider 15)

Most of the providers we spoke with recognized the importance of collaboration with other providers for several reasons: (1) outreach to potential clients, (2) learning about other services available locally to which service members can be referred, (3) minimizing redundancy across providers, and (4) ensuring that clients can be passed seamlessly between providers when needed.

> [Coordination] is important. We need to make sure we don't have conflicting schedules and coordinate so that we don't overburden the service members. We also need to share information about the family trends that we observe." (Federal Provider 4)

> [Coordination] is extremely important. It's not [our organization's] response; it's a community response, like how we approach disasters. We need to make certain that what is needed is being

[3] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Employment for People with Disabilities: Little Is Known About the Effectiveness of Fragmented and Overlapping Programs*, Washington, D.C., GAO-12-677, June 2012.

> coordinated and provided, if not by [our organization] then by another agency so there isn't that redundancy. (Private Nonprofit Provider 18)

Providers reiterated that reserve component members are sometimes overwhelmed by the number of resources available to them and that this can lead to what one provider called "decision paralysis."

> In general, veterans don't know where to go to get help. Resources like Military OneSource can be helpful but it, too, has so much information and things barely scratch the surface—as they should in a way. There is so much information that it is simply overwhelming for anyone. (Private Non-Profit Provider 22)

Another expressed concern was that with so many organizations providing support to military families, it is difficult to monitor the credentials of providers and the quality of their services. Therefore, there is a need to build trust with community members and other providers:

> There are providers across the nation, but if someone is outside your jurisdiction, how do you know who can provide services? [It's difficult to track] the plethora of how many agencies are out there, what their qualifications are, and things like that. (Private Nonprofit Provider 18)

Providers did acknowledge that collaboration can be difficult and that it can be a burden, particularly for small-scale organizations, that takes time away from providing services.

Strategies Used to Overcome This Challenge

We found that the provider community is already using various strategies to better coordinate with other providers. For instance, some providers mentioned that compiling resource guides is a good way for service members, families, and providers to find out what resources are available. Other interviewees indicated that they attend career fairs and YRRP events as a way to network with other providers. Several providers mentioned that they attend regularly scheduled quarterly meetings for providers. In some cases, we found that these meetings are

organized by state agencies in an effort to better understand the web of nongovernmental resources. The main goal of these meetings is to facilitate information sharing across providers so that they have a better sense of what kinds of resources are available.

Some of our interviewees discussed "speed-sharing" events as an emerging strategy at these various meetings. During speed sharing, providers are given a few minutes to quickly discuss the resources that their organization offers. Our interviewees indicated that this strategy has been a useful way to quickly get to know providers and the resources they provide. We heard that this strategy has been used at events where providers are less likely to know one another—for example, at statewide events and YRRP events.

Other providers told us that they proactively reach out to other providers, including federal, state, and local organizations. For instance, one provider said,

> [I] made a point of visiting the chief of police, the prosecutor's office. Not going in and saying this is what we have, rather listening to issues they're dealing with and then offering if any assistance we can offer, hope you'll take advantage. (Faith-Based Provider 4)

Given the various strategies described here, it is not surprising that some of the providers we spoke with said that coordination is difficult and time-consuming. One provider wondered whether it was even possible to effectively coordinate across the vast web of support:

> I'm not sure. Can there ever be successful coordination? There're always people jumping in to help. There's some group trying to coordinate efforts targeting vets now, but don't really know it. (Private Nonprofit Provider 21)

But while some of the providers we spoke with felt a bit overwhelmed about *how* to coordinate across the web of support, there was strong agreement across providers that better coordination could help to improve resource provision. As one interviewee told us,

> If the community is better organized, then there can be ongoing outreach—it's not just about one issue or another. Integration requires a comprehensive system. Providers need to know about each other so they can refer to one another. (Private Nonprofit Provider 9)

Many Providers Do Not Measure Outcomes Systematically

During our interviews with providers, we asked, "How do you know how well your organization is doing to address your clients' needs?" As mentioned in Chapter Five, we found that larger providers and national providers often track clients through regular formal reporting:

> Data go into an online reporting system for reporting back to DoD [which pays for the provider's services]. DoD monitors [our] outreach to soldiers and families to improve their quality of life. We track the number of people we met with, the purpose of the visit, what programs were used to help them. (Private For-Profit Provider 4)

> Through our website, we try to track applications. We can get feedback for some service members: whether the resume was submitted, considered, and job offered. We can also track whether the service member logged on to site. But not all employers allow access to their servers and firewalls. (Private Nonprofit Provider 7)

We found that few other providers use systematic metrics that would enable them to measure how effectively they are carrying out their goals, and most have very few resources to devote to evaluation or tracking client outcomes over the long term. One of the interesting patterns we found was that none of the faith-based providers in our sample evaluated their spiritual outreach in a formal way. In fact, they told us that implementing such metrics is challenging for multiple reasons:

> We thought about that long and hard. First, it's a touchy issue on collecting that data. Second, we don't have a controlled environment and [data in] spiritual, much like emotional and relational,

> soft areas are hard to collect. Third, there's more on active duty than [in the] Guard and Reserve, but there's this whole squeamishness with spiritual issues and separation of church and state. We find more openness to do spiritual ministries on the guard side and not active duty. (Faith-Based Provider 3)

> There's no formalized process [to measure how we're doing], but we do have consistent requests from military families. It's hard to say how we're succeeding spiritually, but we do seem to be meeting practical needs. (Faith-Based Provider 2)

These comments highlight that it may be more difficult for certain types of providers to create meaningful metrics to evaluate their support to guard and reserve families, simply because the type of support they offer seems less amenable to such measurement and evaluation.

In a similar vein, we also heard mixed views about whether or not surveys are an effective mechanism for collecting feedback:

> You can do surveys all day long, but I don't care for that. It's about how many people are hired, how many employers are coming to us, how many businesses are talking to my staff about what we do. . . . It's about being results-oriented. (State Provider 6)

> We send out Survey Monkeys [a type of web-based survey] and email traffic where we ask for input. I ask in person at events, "How can we do better? What are your needs?" All our sites have customer response forms and people do fill them out, positively or negatively. (Private Nonprofit Provider 13)

> [We] really can't think about doing surveys because the issues are often complex, [and it's] not just about solving any single money problem. So how do you survey that? (Private For-Profit Provider 6)

Strategies Used to Overcome This Challenge

Many of these providers indicated that they use informal strategies to help them gauge how well they are achieving their goals. For instance, some use the number of referrals or repeat requests for support as a

means to assess whether their services are effective. In addition, many providers told us they use informal feedback and their reputation in the community as evaluation methods and that they view being in demand or appreciated by clients as indications that their services are valuable. For instance, one provider told us, "When people just even pop in to say hi, it's an honor to see that" (Private Nonprofit Provider 15). Some providers did indicate that they are beginning to track some simple measures, including the number of visits to their websites and the number of referrals by their clients.

Conclusion

This chapter examined three primary barriers to supporting guard and reserve families: whether their needs are being systematically identified, why they currently do not utilize support resources, and the challenges that providers face in supporting these families, as well as the strategies they use to overcome those challenges. Our review of recent surveys of service members and spouses indicate that DoD should add additional questions to its current survey efforts and consider using its topic-focused Quick Compass surveys both to learn more about issues unique to guard and reserve families and to compare the reintegration experiences in the Active Component and the Reserve Component. This includes additional questions on the needs of reserve component families and the problems they experience. In addition, DoD should ask more questions about the factors that are associated with successful reintegration (e.g., feeling ready for deployment and reintegration, comfortable family finances, adequate communication with family and the service member's unit during deployment). Finally, DoD should consider collecting information about different family members, either by surveying both service members and spouses or by wording questions to ask about the experiences not only of the respondent but also his or her spouse and any dependents. A better understanding of the foundational needs of these families could enable more targeted and efficient provision of resources.

In our interviews with families, they indicated six main reasons why they do not use support resources: difficulty accessing resources, a lack of awareness of resources, concerns about the quality of the resources, no one reached out to them to use the resources, the cost of the resources, and difficulty finding the resources. These findings suggest that in its efforts to improve the uptake of support resources for those who need them, DoD should address these barriers to resource utilization.

Our interviews with providers indicate that they face four main challenges to supporting guard and reserve families:

- Some populations can be hard to reach.
- Service members and their families are concerned about stigma, often inhibiting them from seeking help.
- There is a lack of coordination across the web of support.
- Many providers cannot tell how well they are doing because they do not systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the support they provide.

We found that providers are employing creative strategies to address these challenges. For instance, they are using online means to reach geographically dispersed families, they are hiring retired members of the military to build trust with service members, they are continuing to find new ways to coordinate with other providers, and they use inexpensive, informal mechanisms to gauge how well they are achieving their goals. By understanding the challenges confronting resource providers, DoD can better support the provider community. For instance, DoD could facilitate improved coordination among providers by serving as a clearinghouse for information.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What Advice Do Families and Providers Offer to Ensure That Reintegration Goes Smoothly?

In our interviews, spouses and service members shared ideas about how DoD might better support guard and reserve families following deployment and offered advice for families that are about to experience the reintegration phase of deployment. Resource providers were asked to identify ways to improve coordination with other providers and ensure that reintegration proceeded smoothly for families. This chapter summarizes their answers. The responses fall into three broad categories, which we used to guide the organization of this chapter: advice for families, advice for DoD and other resource providers, and advice for DoD in its capacity as the "employer" of guard and reserve personnel.

Advice for families

- Start planning for reintegration during deployment.
- Engage in financial planning.
- Anticipate what readjustment entails.
- Practice good communication during and after deployment.
- Be patient.
- Manage expectations.
- Seek out and use the resources you are offered.

Advice for DoD and other resource providers

- Extend the window of support.
- Target individuals with the greatest need.
- Improve YRRP events.
- Improve coordination of services.

- Provide more guidance in choosing the appropriate services.
- Include spouses and the community in providing support.

Additional advice for DoD

- Improve the demobilization process.
- Improve communication from the military following deployment.
- Dispel the perception that seeking help is a barrier to career advancement.

Advice for Families

Start Planning for Reintegration During Deployment

We reported in Chapter Three that families emphasized the importance of preparing for deployment as one reason why reintegration was going well for them. When asked what would help other families with reintegration, they also emphasized the importance of early preparation. Some spouses, service members, and providers we spoke with focused on how families would benefit from being proactive *during* deployment to prepare for life *after* deployment. For example, one reservist told us,

> I think one thing that's important, a few months out, a few months before you return, start making a plan—especially with jobs or school. Make a plan of what you're going to do so you can transition right into it. I think the biggest issue when you get back is money. I think it's definitely money. Because you come back and, if you don't have a job already, then what are you going to do for money, and then I think that leads to a lot of problems. So if you have a plan, I think it's important to start that a few months before you get home, not right when you get home. . . . I started applying for jobs five months before I returned. And then when companies called me back or emailed me back, I'd explain to them, "I'm deployed. I'll be returning on this date. I'd like to interview then." And a lot of companies were very good about setting up interviews when I got back. (Respondent F017, Army Reserve E-5)

This is consistent with observations made by providers. As discussed in Chapter Seven, one provider felt that if awards could be prepared while service members were still deployed and promptly awarded upon their return, it should be possible to provide employment-related support as well.

Engage in Financial Planning

Making sure the family has good financial planning practices in place was regarded as especially important because some personnel made more money while mobilized than they did at their civilian jobs, and others returned from deployment to find that their civilian job was gone, often as a result of the economic downturn. As one Navy reservist explained,

> I think that would be nice to have for them [service members] . . . . Show them how to handle their finances because now they're making quite a bit of money tax-free all, all these bonuses, and for them not to just blow it and go buy [things] and go crazy. Show them how to save it or invest it for the family and not just blow it on cars and clothes and video games—because I see that a lot, too. (Respondent F021, Navy Reserve E-7)

Providers mentioned financial planning as well, offering suggestions such as "make sure that soldiers save money" and "financial readiness should be a regular part of military training." The veracity of this advice has empirical support: As already discussed, comfortable family finances are related to readjustment success (Chapter Three). The reverse is also true: Families suffering from financial shortfalls reported having greater difficulty making the transition to civilian life (Chapter Four).

Anticipate What Readjustment Entails

Another type of advance planning that families recommended was educating both the service member and family members who remained behind about what to expect following deployment. The remarks that follow illustrate the suggestions for reunion-related preparation:

> I think that preplanning is essential. . . . [It includes] trying to discuss with your significant other where you would like to see the family headed while you were gone and then have that significant person contacting you to let you know if there had to have any kind of adjustments. So that way you don't come home to surprises. No one likes to be bombarded by four or five different surprises when you step off the plane. (Respondent F035, Air National Guard O-3)

> They [family members who stay behind] could be educated on what to expect, and what's expected of them, and what they need to be prepared to feel, and how they can best help the person [service member] when they get back. (Respondent F033, Navy Reserve O-2's spouse)

> Well, I think that if you've never had someone deploy or anything before, I think you should really speak to someone about what happens to them when they come back home. If you're prepared that way, then I think it would make things a lot easier because I know some people that, you know, this is their first deployment and they came home and they're fighting all the time . . . and they think there's something wrong with them when it really isn't anything wrong with them. (Respondent Y0113, Air National Guard E-6's spouse)

Practice Good Communication During and After Deployment

The point about anticipating what readjustment entails is clearly related to the importance of communication among family members and with families who have already undergone the postdeployment experience. Good communication surfaced as a key theme when interviewees were asked what advice they would offer to families and providers to ease readjustment to civilian life. This is not surprising, since they identified good communication during and after deployment as a key factor in their own successful reintegration (Chapter Three).

Interviewees also recommended that families interact with other families that have gone through—or are currently going through—the reintegration phase of deployment. Both providers and families

extolled the benefits of connecting all family members to others in similar circumstances, as illustrated in these remarks:

> Service members need to have contact with people with similar experiences as them so they can avoid feeling like people don't understand them. (Federal Provider 3)

> You got to create a community of soldiers or service members so service members have a place to go and talk constructively as opposed to going to a bar at a VFW and drinking their asses off. (Respondent Y0050, Army Reserve E-4)

> It would be great to have ongoing get-togethers where military children could discuss with other military children what is working or not working. Meetings where they don't feel alone. It is important to be among other military children. It is important to hear from other kids who have actually gone through the same thing. That is priceless. (Private Nonprofit Provider 12)

> More things to get the kids together. The hardest part for [my daughter] was her daddy was gone, and she didn't know that, you know, there were other kids that had daddies until he came home, and all of a sudden there's all these kids getting their daddies back, and that's when it clicked to her that she wasn't the only one. (Respondent Y0100, Army National Guard O-3's spouse)

> If there was some sort of list or support group or something for civilians [spouses]—and maybe there is, I don't know—but just having access to that would be awesome. There was one lady who called me, but if I knew beforehand of another spouse who was going through the same thing, at least we could meet up on a monthly basis [or] every other week, something like that. (Respondent Y0227, Air Force Reserve O-4's spouse)

Be Patient

Some suggestions for successful reintegration drew more on internal qualities than on external resources. For instance, our interviewees advised guard and reserve families to be patient, to allow the service

member to return slowly to civilian life, and to recognize that readjustment is a process that will take some time. As the comments that follow demonstrate, both providers and families noted that adjusting to a "new normal" and learning about how both the service member and family members changed during deployment is an important process that cannot be rushed:

> The family doesn't have an understanding or awareness of that, to come back to a new normal when a military member comes back and now is a civilian again. The normal they expect will never be regained. It will have to be new normal. The family has also experienced new things. When all are back together again there has to be new normal. . . . Spouses and extended family have to understand. (Faith-based Provider 2)

> Just time, that's the biggest factor, just take it one day at a time. It's not going to be easy. It's not going to be the first day everything's fixed. You have to realize how much time you've been away and how much people change over that long period of time. You change, the people around you will also change. So just give it time. That's the best advice I can do. Every day, I learn something new about the people in my life. (Respondent Y0053, Army Reserve E-6)

> Just patience; be firm but gentle. And remember, no matter what, they've been through something that we will never be able to understand. Whether they were facing down the rifle of an enemy or whether they were sweeping up the mess hall, they were in a war zone and it has an effect on them. And so we have to just be patient and listen and help them in every way we can and understand that the person you have now is not the person that you had then. They're going to change. (Respondent Y0159, Navy Reserve E-4's spouse)

In particular, families recommended that the service member reconnect with family members and resume household responsibilities at a measured pace:

> One of my biggest pieces of advice would be just—maybe easier said than done—but, like, take it slow. It's important for the service member, I guess, to—and I'm speaking for myself—to feel supported. But to be swamped with questions and things like that all at once or swamped with family obligations all at once, that's not really what I was looking for when I first came home. I wanted to see people, but I didn't necessarily want to. You have all your big, large-number-of-people gatherings and things like that, so just to kind of take it slow. And I think it's important that the family members know what warning signs to look out for because, obviously, they know if things might be going wrong but, I guess, not to push too hard for things to return to normal—just to understand that that will take time. (Respondent Y0077, Marine Corps Reserve E-5)

> I would say just take it very slow. My husband and I are both from big families, and the inclination is everybody wants to come and everybody wants to visit and everybody wants to get a piece of them. And we didn't do that and it was—he was home for a month before he saw anybody. We went to church. We went out to lunch. But in terms of family, we just kept it real quiet. And I think that that was very helpful for him because it allowed him to get very settled back in our house. (Respondent F031, Navy Reserve O-6's spouse)

One reservist also advised delaying important decisions:

> Just sort of take a deep breath, just ease into things, and don't make any major life decisions for the first six months of being home. Because during that first six months, you're still transitioning back to and reconnecting and trying to figure out how this new routine is going. (Respondent F011, Navy Reserve O-4)

We also heard examples of service members slowly resuming their responsibilities at their place of civilian employment. Overall, taking things slowly on all fronts was perceived as a key facilitator of reintegration success.

Manage Expectations

Another point emphasized in our interviews that also draws more on internal qualities was to manage expectations about how reintegration should proceed. This relates to the advice to be patient, but it focuses more on developing the appropriate attitude toward the evolution to a new normal following deployment:

> I would say the biggest thing would be to manage expectations and to communicate about what everybody expects and, especially, for family members not to have expectations of returning members that are too high because the overwhelming feelings associated with "I'm being pulled ten different directions" can really be tough. (Respondent F052, Navy Reserve O-5)

> Keep an open mind and understand that every family is different. Don't let someone try to paint you into a corner or put you in a narrow box and say, "Oh, well, you're not supposed to be feeling like that. You're supposed to be doing this because, oh, my wife's girlfriend's brother's ex-cousin—whatever—came back and they're all fine and wonderful and everything." No, every family is different. Everybody's experiences are different coming back. There are a lot of similarities, but it's completely different whether you have kids or you don't have kids, how old the kids are. So don't let anyone try to paint you into a corner to say, "Oh, well, this is what you're supposed to be feeling. This is how you're supposed to act." (Respondent Y0027, Air Force Reserve E-5's spouse)

> Don't have any expectations of everything floating back the way it was. I just had visions that I would come back and everything would be exactly as it was before we both left, that the pieces would fit back into the puzzle the way that we took them out. (Respondent Y0061, Army Reserve E-5)

Seek Out and Use the Resources You Are Offered

Families and providers shared a number of ideas relating to the resources available to guard and reserve families following deployment. First,

and perhaps most simply, spouses and service members advised their peers to make use of those resources. As one reservist stated concisely, "Use your resources that you're offered" (Respondent Y0176, Marine Corps Reserve, E-5). Other interviewees also urged families to do so, especially if they were encountering problems:

> If you are having problems, don't hesitate to make that phone call. Don't wait until it gets so bad that, you know, it's too hard to fix the problem, I guess, maybe would be the way to put it. And use all the resources that you need to. I mean, if I would've called the resources that I had the very first deployment our reintegration process would've been so much easier, but they didn't have that kind of stuff. (Respondent Y0104, Army National Guard E-6's spouse)

> I'd say, take advantage of those events and then if you need to seek the help for individual help, then definitely seek it out because there's plenty of opportunities out there, whether it's with the military or a private practice out there. (Respondent Y0208, Air National Guard E-4)

Advice for DoD and Other Resource Providers

Extend the Window of Support

One repeated suggestion was that the time frame for providing services should be extended, especially to make services available earlier. One provider stated, "Waiting 30 days for the first reintegration briefing was too long. After a week or two, the soldiers are alone again, while everyone is back to life" (State Provider 11). Similarly, a guard member told us,

> I think if they [DoD] were just a little bit better about the initial homecoming—maybe a program in place for both spouses and the military member together to go to into the initial homecoming period, in the first week of arrival. Some kind of program to help with the reintegration at that point, I think, would greatly

> assist [if] both people [are] sitting there. (Respondent F035, Air National Guard O-3)

Providers also recommended extending support through a longer portion of the reintegration period, such as for six months following demobilization.

Target Individuals with the Greatest Need

Two overall suggestions—from both families and resource providers—concerned ways in which providers could improve on current services. This advice also applies to DoD in its role as a resource provider. First, interviewees mentioned the need for more individualized attention for families: specifically, targeting the people perceived as more likely to need support and tailoring support to meet individual families' needs. With respect to the former, we heard comments like the following:

> Keep a closer eye on the individuals that seem to be more [stressed out] and continue to have more follow-ups on them. (Respondent Y0047, Marine Corps Reserve E-3)

> [Take] a more active, proactive role in pursuing those people that are not being proactive for themselves in seeking out the resources and the help that they can get. And they're just kind of falling through the cracks because either they're not mature enough to recognize that they need to get the help or they're just not willing to step into the light and say, "Yeah, I've got issues." (Respondent F045, Navy Reserve O-3)

> We're involved with it [combat], like, we're mechanics, electricians and everything, and avionics and we're maintenance people, but we're not the ones directly fighting in the battlefield, you know, like the Army troops, all right? We had guns this last time but it's not like we're constantly in combat or anything like that. The guys that I would be concerned about are the guys that are actually in the battlefield, you know, like maybe your security police or maybe an Army guy that's out in the field quite a bit or a marine or somebody that's more directly involved with combat. . . . I would say that if there's any emphasis put on some-

> body that may need this type of help, I would look at the people directly involved with combat situations. (Respondent Y0132, Air National Guard E-7)

Remarks about customization emphasized the need to recognize that different family situations call for different forms of support:

> I think that a lot of those programs aren't adequately targeted to the people they're trying to help. I think that probably an 18-year-old enlisted guy needs something really different than a 48-year-old captain in the Navy. (Respondent F031, Navy Reserve O-6's spouse)

> Different families have different needs and will get value from different types of programs. (Private Nonprofit Provider 12)

> There is recurring theme: a lot of disappointment in support provided to them [veterans]. The veterans' structure does not provide personal, customized help. For example, the military teaches the soldiers to write a resume by giving them a template and then [having] them send applications to apply for jobs. But that may not work because customized help is needed or extra help is needed to link them to the right jobs and employers. There is just no customization. (Private Nonprofit Provider 4)

Improve Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program Events

Not surprisingly, given that we recruited spouses and service members from YRRP events and conducted interviews with providers on-site at the 14 YRRP events we attended, many of the suggestions we heard pertained to the YRRP. Many of the people who discussed the events were complimentary. For example, one provider encouraged DoD to continue funding the program, and some service members used words like "great," "a life-saver," or "fantastic" when discussing it. Yet, interviewees still felt that there were several opportunities to improve the postdeployment portion of YRRP events.

First, interviewees suggested that the logistics and administrative tasks related to attending an event, such as making arrangements via

the Defense Travel System, could be made easier. Providers reiterated that logistics could be a problem on their end too because, at times, venues are secured at the last minute, making scheduling and travel difficult.

Both families and providers recommended changes to the timing and frequency of the postdeployment events. A major concern was ensuring that the family could attend a YRRP event soon after the service member returned home. Spouses and service members told us about delays that resulted in their not attending their first postdeployment event until several months after the service member returned home. Providers recommended that there also be an event about six months later—a more open-ended event focused on resources available to support guard and reserve families.

Several interviewees also questioned whether three postdeployment events were necessary for all families, noting that some of the information was repeated across events. Particularly for components with short, frequent deployments, some interviewees regarded having three events after each deployment as burdensome. As evidence of this, one reservist shared a story of a person who attended his 60-day postdeployment YRRP event the weekend before another YRRP event for an upcoming deployment. Combining YRRP activities with a drill weekend was cited as another way to ease the burden posed by attending multiple events. One last suggestion to reduce the potential burden was to require only the first postdeployment event and make the other events optional, or to require only first-time deployers to attend the full postdeployment series.

Other ideas for enhancing the YRRP pertained to the actual event—namely the involvement of children during the event and the structure and content of sessions. Service members and spouses encouraged YRRP organizers to allow families to truly interact during a YRRP event, instead of separating the family members and placing the children in a day care setting. The following remarks illustrate the types of observations we heard about this issue:

> They say it's a family retreat, but you can't spend time with your kids in that because they have family care, and you're with your-

> self or your wife's with your kids, or whatever. So they say it's a weekend away, but you're sitting in classes by yourself again with a bunch of military people. So how is that a family reintegration? (Respondent Y0129, Air National Guard E-7)

> So we go to these [Yellow Ribbon events] and then they have all these great amenities, everything, but they want to separate us from our kids. They want to have the kids go to a day care while we stay in eight- to nine-hour classes. And it's kind of like, well, we'd really like to see our kids, not listen to a class. But that was just us thinking. I mean the class is well meant, but, when you get home, you don't want to sit in class. You want to hang out with the family. (Respondent Y0012, Army Reserve E-4)

> It's supposed to be a reintegration, and we thought it was meaning integration with your family and stuff, maybe actually make it a reintegration with your family program. Less briefings and more time with the family. (Respondent Y0146, Air National Guard E-6)

The last comment also refers to a structure-related idea: reducing the number of briefings presented during a YRRP event. As discussed in Chapter Six, a number of spouses and service members expressed the view that large, lecture-style sessions were less effective for sharing information and experiences than were smaller breakout sessions and discussion forums. As one reservist suggested,

> During the actual event . . . have more involvement rather than hours of sitting in a chair listening to someone talk. More of the involvement of smaller groups and interaction, things like that. I think that would be more effective. (Respondent Y0177, Marine Corps Reserve E-5)

Another concern about YRRP events was that the content of various sessions was sometimes redundant. One guard member discussed this situation in depth:

> The only problem I have with Yellow Ribbon is—and all the people that I hear always [have] the same opinion about this—is that we were presented the same material four times. They made us go to two Yellow Ribbons before we left and two Yellow Ribbons when we got back. Well I guess one Yellow Ribbon before we left and two when we got back. And we were presented the same material . . . in a different form, so we got the same information four times and by the fourth time it's just like, you're kidding me. I'm spending a whole other weekend getting the exact same information that I got twice before deploying and already once upon getting home. And I'd much rather be at home with my family than at another Yellow Ribbon event getting the same information. (Respondent Y0144, Air National Guard E-6)

One potential solution—to reduce the required number of events for some personnel—was discussed earlier, but spouses and service members also suggested letting people decide which sessions to attend instead of having everyone follow the same sequence. This also would potentially enable family members to focus on the topics that were relevant to their situation and avoid those that either were covered during an earlier YRRP event or were not pertinent, which was another shortcoming some noted about YRRP events that should be addressed.

In several ways, interviewees called for more customization of the YRRP experience. Among the ideas noted were to make the full series optional for families with prior deployment experience and to allow family members to choose different information sessions to attend during the YRRP event based on their individual needs. Taking this idea a bit further, some families suggested allowing other events, like the Army Strong Bonds program or another marriage retreat, to be substituted for a YRRP event. In a related vein, providers noted that YRRP events should not be standardized. Instead, they should vary based on such criteria as the needs of the returning unit, characteristics of the region in which the families live, or differences between the reserve components (e.g., deployment length).

Improve Coordination of Services

Families and providers also identified better coordination of resources as a way to facilitate effective reintegration. As we discussed in Chapter Five, many interviewees mentioned the wide variety of resources available to guard and reserve families and said that it was somewhat difficult or daunting for families to navigate through this web of support. As one reservist explained,

> It's so confusing, all the information that you get when you're coming back, from DoD, from the VA, from Fleet and Family Support. There needs to be a coordination of outreach if they can do it, at least between VA and DoD. There's so many different programs. I know there's, like, job programs and this and that, and not everybody would be interested, but there needs to be coordination of outreach. That's the biggest thing. . . . It's fantastic that they have all these programs. Fabulous. But how is anybody going to know about them unless there's a coordination of actual outreach? (Respondent F047, Navy Reserve O-5)

While this officer's comment focused on support provided by the VA and DoD, the idea was discussed more broadly by other interviewees. Although they admitted that improved coordination across providers was a challenge, interviewees offered a variety of ideas in the hope of achieving it. Their suggestions included interorganizational meetings at the local level and beyond, information sharing via databases and resource clearinghouses, and establishing a procedure for credentialing resource providers. This last idea was offered as a way to develop a common understanding or language for the type of support provided, thereby facilitating collaboration among similar or complementary providers. In a related vein, one provider emphasized the need to screen organizations so that inclusion in coordination-oriented activities was contingent on having a clearly defined set of services with documented outcomes:

> I think that maybe an organization like the DoD needs to put parameters around the services that can be included on resource lists, even though that might be politically difficult. But some-

> times you can't be Mr. Nice Guy and have everyone sing Kumbaya. If you really want to effect change, you need to have some discipline. You need a tangible, viable product and you have to have criteria. It was very, very time-consuming to go to all these meetings for resources that did not have tangible benefits. (State Provider 3)

Provide More Guidance in Choosing the Appropriate Services

Providers and families also cited the need for better guidance for guard personnel, reservists, and their families in choosing the appropriate provider option as another way to facilitate reintegration success. One provider described a YRRP scenario in which such guidance was provided in an interactive way:

> Last Yellow Ribbon, we did a resource roundup which I think was helpful. We gave people scenarios and asked which resources they should use in that case. All vendors gave quick five-minute presentations on their services. Then, we gave service members a scenario and asked which resource they would use and why. I think that helped. (Private Nonprofit Provider 18)

Providers also encouraged relying on unit-level personnel, such as the chaplain or family support group leadership, for this purpose. In related remarks, families requested more help from the service member's unit to better understand what resources were available and when to use them. They recommended that DoD not just rely on the YRRP for this purpose. Yet, at the same time, providers cautioned that unit-level personnel need to know what resources are available in order to make the best choices, and families suggested there be some sort of oversight or assessment to ensure that family support–focused groups are functioning as intended.

Involve Spouses and the Community in Providing Support

Interviewees recommended getting both the spouse and the community involved in resource provision. As one provider explained,

> Spouses can be allies in getting service members to get back to work. The spouse can be a conduit of information or motivator. Even when the service member wants to sit around or not think about it, the spouse would. So trying now to talk to spouses too before units return [would be helpful]. (State Provider 5)

Comments about the role of the community, both citizens and community-based organizations, included the following ones made by providers:

> I think there's been statistically fewer people serving in the military for longer periods of time. The disconnect between employers, school, medical facilities, all the service organizations in a community and the vet [is a problem]. In other warrior cultures, when there is a threat to the village, war summoned [people] to surround the village and protect it. When it passed, the village people knew [that they had an] unwritten contract that they now had to protect their warriors. Bring them back into the community slowly. I think to help the reintegration of our veterans back into society. Part of that is to educate the community itself. You have a moral obligation to be open and receptive, doesn't mean having a parade; those are good things, but to educate them as to how to listen, and don't slap people on the back and say, "Thank you. You're my hero." That's the last thing they want to hear. (Faith-Based Provider 4)

> We need to help service members realize what community services are available. Postdeployment they should know: "When I get home, how do I get what I need when I need it?" We need to keep working at the community level. (Private Nonprofit Provider 9)

Additional Advice for DoD

Improve the Demobilization Process

Some service members felt that reintegration began at the demobilization site. Accordingly, they suggested changes to the demobilization process as a means to improve reintegration outcomes. A few requested that demobilization take place in a comfortable location, far from a combat zone, where service members can truly start to unwind and readjust. One reservist described her demobilization experience as follows:

> We were taken from our comfort zone, brought over to another base for our decompression, and it was more stressful that week than it was the whole year I was gone. . . . Our living conditions were worse; they put us in a tent with disgusting beds. They had a schedule to do stuff. They gave us white space, but we were in the same area that we were when we were deployed. It wasn't anything better, it wasn't any better food, it wasn't any better things to do. It was stress. (Respondent F010, Navy Reserve E-6)

Service members also mentioned the length of the demobilization process but varied in their views regarding whether it should be shorter or longer. Those recommending a shorter time tended to focus on the desire to be reunited with their families without further delay, whereas those who argued for a longer demobilization period felt that it would give service members more time to process the information provided and to plan their next steps. Some reservists acknowledged this tension:

> The big thing that would, I think, help because you're in such sensory overload is, even though it's painful to have to put a few more days into de-mobing and outprocessing, I think the people should go ahead and spend the extra day or two to be very clear about what all will take place when you de-mob and what tasks—maybe a calendar of when tasks need to take place as you're transitioning back to a reserve status. That would have helped me more. I still felt like it was all a jumble of information thrown at me and then I was punted out the door and de-mobed. . . . There's a lot of guys that I de-mobed with that were wondering why it was taking

> so long, why don't they just kick us free? I, on the other hand, felt like I needed to get all this information because it would be of value later on. And it did become that way, that I needed it later on and I just—it wasn't clarified or it wasn't clear to me when we were de-mobing. (Respondent F048, Navy Reserve E-6)

> I think they could spend more time, especially after deployment. I think they need to ask each individual soldier as to what their plans are, okay, and force a window where they have to remain stateside for a while so that they can go through this transition. A lot of people just rush through it. They say, "Ah, I just want to go home. I just want to go home." But I think they should actually make it mandatory so that they can see where their career is going, what they have planned for the future, and let them know—educate them as to what their options are as far as like the VA, as far as job opportunities, as far as talking to somebody to see what kind of experiences they have, and see if they can actually set them up for a job fair in their area or whatnot. (Respondent F013, Army Reserve E-7)

Other service members focused their remarks on a potential solution:

> I think one major thing is let soldiers see their family the day they get back before they go through the de-mob process. (Respondent Y0058, Army National Guard E-6)

> Streamline their [guard and reserve] processes for leaving and coming home. Once I got off of an 18-hour flight, I had to stay on the base for another four to six hours to in-process. . . . Allow people just to go home and get a good night's rest and then come back instead of sitting on an airplane for 18 hours and then having to wait here to get blood drawn and do orders and do travel vouchers and explain stuff that actually nobody was probably even listening to because it was like, you know, I got family members waiting over at the chow hall and you've got me sitting here for what? Something that could be done the next day. . . . Don't prolong the inevitable of reuniting with your families. (Respondent Y0136, Air National Guard E-7)

On the whole, it appears that some service members recognized the demobilization experience as an important step in the reintegration process and felt that it could set the stage for a smooth transition to civilian life.

Improve Communication from the Military Following Deployment

Service members and spouses also recommended improvements to how the service member's unit communicated with personnel and family members following deployment. As noted in Chapter Seven, a sizeable minority of interviewees felt that postdeployment communication from the unit was inadequate or very inadequate. One spouse observed,

> I understand that we're talking about one guy out of thousands and thousands, but I would say that if somebody from his local unit had called to check up on him, had made it personal—give me a call, let me know they know you're out there for questions or to help with finding resources, or just that you give a damn—that'd be great. (Respondent Y0159, Navy Reserve E-4's spouse)

Interviewees emphasized that this contact needed to be personal, and not an automated telephone call or something the family would perceive as a "check-the-box" activity by the unit. This was perceived as critical because people might be less inclined to report trouble to someone they did not know or may have never had contact with before. As one Navy reservist explained,

> I mean, of course, big Navy has lots of support, but it's different when big Navy calls my wife and says, "How are you feeling today?" Somebody she's never met or known. You know, she's not going to tell them she's having a terrible day or, you know, things are tough. (Respondent Y0156, Navy Reserve O-4)

Dispel the Perception That Seeking Help Is a Barrier to Career Advancement

Finally, providers emphasized that DoD and other resource providers needed to do more to dispel the perception that if a service member

seeks help it will reduce his or her chances of advancement in his or her military career. As we noted in Chapter Seven, the stigma associated with seeking help, especially for mental health issues, was one of the reasons interviewees mentioned for not using the resources available to them. In the comments that follow, providers acknowledge this problem and call for addressing it as a means to facilitate a smooth readjustment:

> Many returning now are still in denial that they need help. They don't want the stigma of being considered weak. So, present it to them that you're not being weak by asking for help. (Private Nonprofit Provider 15)

> Overcoming stigma in reaching out for help is the first step. First concern for the service member is whether asking for help will impact his job negatively, worried about chain of command finding out about money issues. (Private For-Profit Provider 4)

> Make sure their families know them also and know how to get to them, and I would definitely say if they have families make sure they spend the time needed to reintegrate with their families and make sure that that gets done. Because if that doesn't get done, it will affect their career in some way, form, or fashion. (Respondent Y0146, Air National Guard E-6)

Conclusion

Service members, spouses, and resource providers shared a large number of ideas for ways to ensure that the reintegration process proceeds smoothly for reserve component families. The onus of turning their ideas into action varies depending on the nature of the advice. Acting on advice to be patient, to manage expectations, and to make use of available resources is primarily, if not solely, the responsibility of the families themselves. Changes to the provision of resources, such as targeting individuals perceived to have the greatest need or revising the timing or content of support provided, are the charge of resource

providers, including DoD when it serves in this direct role. In addition, as the employer of guard personnel and reservists, DoD has the authority—and the responsibility—to implement advice related to military operations, such as changes to the demobilization process and facilitating communication between service members and their families or between unit personnel, unit members, and their families. It should also take the lead in implementing suggestions related to the YRRP. However, even when advice is not directed primarily or exclusively at DoD, the department can play a role in promoting its implementation. For example, DoD could emphasize resources geared toward family financial planning or create a media campaign that highlights advice for families, such as planning for reintegration before the service member returns home and being patient. With respect to resource provision, DoD could facilitate efforts to improve coordination across providers and collaborate with them to reduce any source of stigma related to self-care. After determining whether the benefits of implementing these suggestions for smooth reintegration outweigh their costs, DoD can directly take action to make some of them a reality or, for others, play a supporting but important role in their implementation.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of our study offer insights into (1) the problems that guard and reserve families experience after deployment, (2) what factors relate to successful reintegration, (3) the web of support available to guard and reserve families during reintegration, (4) the resources that guard and reserve families use most and find helpful during reintegration, (5) the barriers to providing support to guard and reserve families during reintegration, and (6) advice that both resource providers and families would give to other guard and reserve families, resource providers, and DoD to help reintegration go more smoothly. This chapter brings together the report's primary conclusions.

Conclusions

Reintegration Can Be a Time of Diverse Problems for Families, Especially Soon After Homecoming

Evidence from our web survey and family interviews indicates that the most prevalent problems experienced by study participants included service member mental or emotional health concerns, service member civilian employment challenges, medical concerns and health care frustrations, and relationship problems with one's spouse or partner. Additional problems that were cited by fewer participants included those pertaining to spouse mental or emotional health concerns, child well-being, financial or legal issues, and education. Our interviews also provided insights on how problems may evolve over the course of reintegration. For instance, we heard that problems related to service

member civilian employment, service member emotional or mental health, spouse emotional and mental health, child well-being, and financial issues related to military pay were most compelling early in the reintegration phase. While none of the families in our study experienced all these problems following deployment, the intersection of multiple problems meant that the period after the service member's homecoming was an especially challenging time. This suggests that either proactively preparing families during deployment for the initial reintegration period or reaching out to families soon after the service member returns home may be especially effective forms of support.

Families' Initiative Is Key to Successful Reintegration

We found that several of the factors associated with successful reintegration (i.e., the perception that readjustment was going well for all family members) involved proactive efforts on the part of the families themselves. Family readiness for deployment was related to reintegration success for survey respondents, for example, while evidence from both the survey and family interviews demonstrated the importance of good communication between the service member and the rest of the family. Other strategies that families offered in explanation for their reintegration success included deliberately creating opportunities for the whole family to spend time together and taking advantage of the resources available to them. In a related vein, interviewees encouraged other guard and reserve families to be proactive and plan ahead for reintegration, recommending, in particular, that the service member reach out to employers while still deployed. Consequently, DoD could influence the reintegration success of guard and reserve families by promoting family readiness for deployment, facilitating good communication among family members throughout the deployment cycle, and sharing families' "best practices" for a smooth postdeployment readjustment. Through such efforts, DoD can empower families to be active, effective architects of their own reintegration success.

Reintegration Success Is Related to Military Career Preferences

Most service members we spoke with had favorable views toward reserve component service. Just over three-fourths of participants from

the web survey and family interviews reported that the service member planned to stay in the Reserve Component until he or she was eligible for retirement or was already qualified for retirement. Spouse opinion was somewhat more mixed toward continued service in the Reserve Component, although the majority of participants indicated that they or their spouse favored the service member remaining in the Guard or Reserve. As a whole, service members and spouses also expressed less support for staying in the Reserve Component as a result of the most recent deployment.

We found that families that felt reintegration was going well also (1) planned a longer military career for the service member, (2) reported that the spouse favored the service member staying in the Guard or Reserve, and (3) felt that the most recent deployment had a favorable influence on continued military service. While these findings suggest that families' reintegration experiences have important implications for military readiness and effectiveness, additional research is required to determine whether these findings are true for the overall Reserve Component, not just our study sample.

Some Populations May Need Targeted Support

To identify other ways to improve reintegration support, we also looked at the types of families in our study that tended to report post-deployment problems. We found that families were more inclined to report different kinds of problems under one or more of the following conditions:

- The family was not ready for deployment.
- The service member deployed independent of his or her drill unit.
- The service member deployed for one year or longer.
- The service member returned home from deployment with a physical injury.
- The service member experienced psychological issues stemming from deployment.
- The family lived far away from the service member's drill unit or the closest military installation.

- There was inadequate communication between the service member and the family during deployment.
- The family's financial situation was more dire.
- There was insufficient communication from the service member's unit following deployment.

These findings suggest that efforts to bolster family readiness at the outset of the deployment cycle may have long-term benefits. In addition, they imply that certain populations may benefit from increased attention or more tailored support (e.g., families experiencing a deployment longer than one year, families whose service member experienced a physical or psychological injury, geographically dispersed families). Finally, our findings highlight critical areas of support that DoD and other resource providers should not overlook. For example, facilitating good communication throughout the deployment cycle, and providing families with the tools to manage their finances effectively or to weather an unexpected financial hardship postdeployment may all contribute to reintegration success.

The Web of Support Offers Opportunities to Target DoD Resources Where They Are Needed

We found that many organizations play a role in supporting guard and reserve families during the reintegration process, including

- government organizations (DoD and other federal organizations, state governments, and local governments)
- private for-profit organizations
- private nonprofit organizations
- faith-based organizations
- informal resources (such as family, friends, and social networks).

The guard and reserve families in our study most frequently cited using federal and informal resources during reintegration, and they indicated that these resources were helpful. However, families also emphasized that private organizations, faith-based organizations, and state and local organizations were helpful in providing support as

well. Our findings indicate that guard and reserve families rely heavily on informal resources (such as friends and family); therefore, these resources could serve as important conduits through which information and support could be provided. These findings highlight that DoD does not have to "do it all" and that, in fact, an improved understanding of the web of support would enable DoD to better leverage the support that other organizations are already providing to guard and reserve families. This, in turn, would allow DoD to support guard and reserve families more efficiently by avoiding redundancy, identifying gaps in reintegration support services, and targeting its resources toward filling those gaps.

Guard and Reserve Families Face Barriers to Resource Utilization

In our interviews, families offered six main reasons for not using support resources:

- a lack of awareness of resources
- no one reached out to them
- difficulty accessing resources
- concerns about the quality of the resources
- cost of resources
- difficulty finding resources.

These findings suggest that in its efforts to improve the uptake of support resources, DoD should address these barriers to resource utilization.

Resource Providers Face Barriers in Providing Support to Families

Our interviews with providers indicate that they face four main challenges in supporting guard and reserve families:

- Some populations can be hard to reach.
- Service members and families are concerned about stigma, which can inhibit them from seeking help.
- There is a lack of coordination across the web of support.
- Many providers do not truly know how well they are doing.

We found that providers are employing creative strategies to address these challenges. For instance, they are using online means to reach geographically dispersed families, hiring retired members of the military to build trust with service members, continuing to find new ways to coordinate with other providers, and using inexpensive, informal mechanisms to gauge how well they are achieving their goals. By understanding the challenges confronting resource providers, DoD can better support the provider community. For instance, DoD could facilitate improved coordination among providers by serving as a clearinghouse for information and support efforts to develop and apply pertinent metrics for effective reintegration support across contexts and types of providers.

Other Families, Resource Providers, and DoD Can Learn from the Reintegration Experiences of Families

During our interviews, spouses and service members shared ideas about how DoD might better support guard and reserve families following deployment and offered advice for families that are about to experience the reintegration phase of deployment. Resource providers were asked to identify ways to improve coordination with other providers and to ensure that reintegration proceeds smoothly for families. The responses fell into three broad categories: advice for families, advice for DoD and other resource providers, and advice for DoD in its capacity as the "employer" of guard and reserve personnel. That advice can be summarized as follows:[1]

Advice for families

- Start planning for reintegration during deployment.
- Engage in financial planning.
- Anticipate what readjustment entails.
- Practice good communication during and after deployment.
- Be patient.
- Manage expectations.
- Seek out and use the resources you are offered.

[1] See Chapter Eight for a more detailed discussion of these points.

Advice for DoD and other resource providers

- Extend the window of support.
- Target individuals with the greatest need.
- Improve YRRP events.
- Improve coordination of services.
- Provide more guidance in choosing the appropriate services.
- Include spouses and the community in providing support.

Additional advice for DoD

- Improve the demobilization process.
- Improve communication from the military following deployment.
- Dispel the perception that seeking help is a barrier to career advancement.

Much of this advice mirrors the factors that relate to successful reintegration (e.g., start planning for reintegration during deployment, engage in financial planning, improve communication). Acting on this advice could improve reintegration support for guard and reserve families, which could lead to increased retention and improved military readiness.

Study Limitations

Although this study represents one of the most comprehensive examinations to date of reintegration for reserve component personnel and their families, its limitations mean that its findings do not necessarily apply to the experiences of the entire Reserve Component. First, because neither our survey respondents nor our interviewees were selected randomly (i.e., we relied exclusively on volunteers), response bias is a concern. We used multiple strategies to recruit study participants over a long time frame, but we did not achieve the desired numbers or variation. As a consequence, our study participants differ in

notable ways from the overall DoD Selected Reserve.[2] Perhaps of greatest concern is the underrepresentation of the Army Reserve and Army National Guard in the study. Although we obtained the perspective of ground forces from Marine Corps reservists, additional research would be required to understand how applicable those experiences are to Army Reserve and Army National Guard personnel. Another distinction worth noting is that the gender composition of our samples differed from that of the overall Reserve Component: female reserve personnel and male spouses were underrepresented in our study.

In addition, our decision to use two methods of data collection—a web survey roughly one month after the service member returned home from deployment and telephone interviews several months later—had both advantages and disadvantages. The survey enabled us to obtain a larger amount of information from individual respondents in a shorter amount of time than an interview would require, and the interviews provided rich, descriptive data that likely would not have been captured in write-in responses on a survey. However, the change in methods renders a comparison of findings across them more difficult. For example, we do not know whether our web survey respondents cited problems less frequently than interview participants because problems do not emerge until later in the reintegration phase or because people were more inclined to talk about problems in a telephone interview than to select problems from a list on a survey. Given this limitation, we used qualitative data (the comments made by interviewees) as much as possible to determine how problems and other phenomena, such as resource usage, evolve during reintegration. Next, we discuss the recommendations derived from our findings.

Recommendations for Improving DoD Support to Guard and Reserve Families

Our findings point to recommendations in two areas: actions that DoD could take to improve DoD support resources for families and

[2] Recall that Chapter Two includes a more detailed discussion of how our study participants differed from the DoD Selected Reserve overall. See Tables 2.1 and 2.2, in particular.

actions that DoD could take to improve the broader web of support consisting of non-DoD resources. First, we focus on recommendations concerning how to improve DoD support resources. We offer specific recommendations in six broad areas:

- Emphasize early preparation for reintegration.
- Ensure that family members are involved in the reintegration process.
- Shape perceptions about reintegration.
- Make additional refinements to the YRRP.
- Ensure that units have the resources they need to support families.
- Refine ways to learn about the experiences of guard and reserve families.

In the next section, we discuss each of the recommendations in these six broad areas. Then, we turn our attention to recommendations for how DoD can improve the broader web of support.

Emphasize Early Preparation for Reintegration

Our findings suggest that promoting reintegration preparation earlier in the deployment cycle is critical. Accordingly, DoD should encourage families to use the time before and during deployment to prepare for reintegration, reach out to families earlier after reunion, and promote financial planning for families.

Encourage Families to Use the Time Before and During Deployment to Prepare for Reintegration

DoD should encourage families to use the time before and during deployment to prepare for reintegration. For instance, during YRRP predeployment events, more emphasis could be placed on reintegration preparation alongside preparation for deployment. During the deployment itself, DoD could emphasize proactive measures that families can take during deployment to set the stage for a smooth reintegration transition (e.g., service members can reach out to employers before returning home, couples can begin discussing role expectations and what the new normal will be in the household).

Reach Out to Families Sooner

DoD should also explore opportunities to reach families even before the first YRRP postdeployment event. After the service member is demobilized, there is a window during which guard and reserve units often have little contact with those who have just returned from deployment. Our survey findings indicate that some reintegration problems begin to emerge during this period. Therefore, the first YRRP postdeployment event may be too late to prevent problems from developing. Ways to address this concern include providing support remotely, such as through interactive content delivered online or mailed to families, when demobilization is imminent, as well as reaching out to families from the demobilization site or, if feasible, even bringing family members to the demobilization site so that they can better prepare for the service member's return home. During the first few weeks after the reunion, offering a voluntary program that both service members and spouses could attend may be another way to reach families that may need additional support before the first YRRP postdeployment event.

Promote Financial Planning for Families

We found that family finances are associated with a number of problems that families face during reintegration, as well with their reintegration success. While some providers offer financial planning assistance to service members and their families, efforts to increase awareness of these efforts should be expanded. Efforts to assist with financial planning before a service member deploys may help families manage their finances better during the entire deployment cycle. Some of the families we spoke with indicated that they spent frivolously during and after deployment because they had more income than usual, and then it was difficult for them to adjust to having lower or no pay following deployment. Assistance with financial planning may better prepare families for these financial adjustments.

Ensure That Family Members Are Involved in the Reintegration Process

To increase the likelihood of a smooth readjustment after deployment, DoD should also ensure that family members are involved in

the reintegration process. In particular, DoD should engage spouses in the reintegration process and facilitate family communication during deployment.

Engage Spouses More in the Reintegration Process

It is critical to engage spouses more in the reintegration process because they are often the primary means of support for service members. Therefore, spouses can be key allies for resource providers in their efforts to support service members. To maximize the support that spouses can provide, DoD should consider doing more to engage spouses before service members return home. This might include allowing spouses to have more interaction with their service members while they are at the demobilization site.

Currently, spouses are invited to attend several YRRP events throughout the deployment cycle, but some of the spouses we interviewed felt that the contact they had with their service member's unit or Service following deployment was insufficient. We found that some spouses value sharing their experiences and otherwise connecting with other spouses and that they rely on informal resources (such as friends and other social connections) for support both during and after deployment. These informal resources could provide an important resource through which DoD could get information to spouses about reintegration and support resources. In other words, if friends, family, and the public know more about support services, they could be better equipped to help military spouses and direct them to the resources they need.

Facilitate Constructive Family Communication During Deployment

Given that spouses and service members felt that good communication during deployment helped with reintegration, DoD should continue and even expand efforts to facilitate family communication during deployment. This entails ensuring that families have the technology to communicate with one another during the deployment to the extent that the operational security environment allows. It is also important to note that, for some families, too much communication can be counterproductive. For instance, we heard from some service members that they did not need to hear about every household crisis because there

was nothing they could do to resolve them. Some spouses also told us that using Skype too much was difficult on them. The optimal nature and extent of communication will differ across families, but if the communication infrastructure is put in place to allow family members to communicate with one another during deployment, it may make the reintegration process easier for families. To address concerns about the right type of communication, DoD may also wish to develop and refine guidance to help families make the best use of the various communication means at their disposal.

Shape Perceptions About Reintegration

DoD should shape perceptions about reintegration. In particular, DoD should strive to remove any perceived stigma associated with self-care and recognize and praise reintegration successes.

Remove Perceived Stigma Associated with Self-Care

DoD should continue to emphasize to service members that self-care and seeking out support resources are not barriers to career advancement. By removing any perceived stigma, DoD could encourage service members to seek the help they need. In addition, DoD should emphasize to service members and their families that there is no "right" way to reintegrate. Instead, families should be encouraged to make reintegration decisions that will maximize reintegration success for their particular family situation.

Recognize and Praise Reintegration Successes

In addition, DoD should recognize and praise reintegration successes. For instance, DoD should disseminate successful reintegration strategies used by families. We found that families are eager to learn from one another about how to successfully navigate the deployment cycle. In addition, DoD should highlight resources that other families have found to be exemplary or uniquely helpful in their reintegration.

Make Additional Refinements to the YRRP

Given the feedback we heard from families, DoD has opportunities to refine the YRRP further. There are several steps that DoD can take to optimize families' experiences at YRRP events: make it easier for fami-

lies to participate in these events, allow for greater customization of the YRRP experience, and learn from these events' successes and failures.

Make It Easier for Families to Participate

While we heard that some families enjoy traveling to a distant location to participate in a YRRP event because it feels like a vacation, other families told us that it would be easier for them to participate if the events were held were closer to home. DoD might consider experimenting with conducting more YRRP events during units' drill weekends to see whether participation increases. We also heard from some families that they needed to wait to attend a YRRP event until one was held within the allowable reimbursement radius from their home. In some cases, families waited more than a year to attend a postdeployment YRRP event. This was a particular problem among Navy reservists because so many of them deploy as Individual Augmentees and therefore attend YRRP events as individuals rather than with their unit.

DoD should also increase opportunities for family members to interact with one another during YRRP events. We heard from families that they wanted to spend more time with their children during these events but could not because they had to put their children into day care. In addition, some families told us that one of their strategies for successful reintegration was to create situations for the family to be together, be it a weekday dinner or a special vacation. Allowing families more choices in how they involve their children and how they interact with family members more generally at these events could foster the reestablishment of family bonds following deployment.

Allow Families to Customize Their Experience

DoD should also consider allowing families to customize their YRRP experience to a greater degree. One of the most common criticisms we heard from families about YRRP events is that they can be repetitive and families therefore lose interest in attending. There are several steps that DoD could take to keep YRRP events fresh, interesting, and useful for families. For instance, DoD should consider altering the YRRP schedule to fit the tempo of each service member's deployment cycle. When service members are deployed more frequently for

shorter periods, perhaps fewer YRRP events should be mandatory for those who have previous deployment experience. We heard from some service members that there were times when they attended a predeployment YRRP just weeks after attending the last postdeployment YRRP from their previous deployment. As a result, they felt like they were continuously attending YRRP events and that these events' usefulness was diminishing.

In addition, DoD should explore permitting service members to opt out of certain YRRP events and instead attend other support programs. The Army Strong Bonds program was cited repeatedly during family interviews as one possible substitute. Allowing families to customize the type of information and support that they receive during reintegration could make them feel more invested in the types of programs they choose.

Finally, DoD should allow more opportunities for "elective" sessions during YRRP events so that families can choose the type of support they would like to receive. Although this is already the case at some larger YRRP events, there are opportunities to expand this practice. This would increase the range of choices families have at these events and would allow them to target the type of support they receive.

Learn from Events' Successes and Failures

Families are typically asked to fill out a survey at the end of each YRRP event, but DoD should seek their feedback in other ways as well. For instance, at the end of each event, time could be set aside to discuss what aspects of the event were most helpful and how the event could be improved. In addition, DoD should elicit feedback from others onsite, such as facilitators, session leaders, and providers. This could range in format from something as informal as a brainstorming session at the end of a YRRP event to something resembling an after-action report. Obtaining feedback from a wider range of stakeholders could help improve these events for family participants and resource providers.

Institute Standard Criteria for Provider Participation in YRRP Events

DoD could develop standard criteria for organizations that are invited to participate in YRRP events. This may be especially useful for events that many providers are interested in attending, and it can help DoD

ensure that different aspects of the web of support are adequately represented at YRRP events. These criteria could be related to organizational capacity, areas of support, reputation, or measures of effectiveness. They could also be tied to the credentialing system that is discussed in the next section.

Ensure That Units Have the Resources They Need to Support Families

DoD should provide units with the resources they need to support families. In particular, DoD should ensure that there is adequate communication with families, and assign a point person to serve as a clearinghouse for information on resources.

Ensure Adequate Communication with Families

Given our findings indicating that adequate communication is a factor that contributes to successful reintegration, DoD should ensure that units have the resources they need to reach out to families. Our evidence suggests that families expect this from units not only during deployment but after deployment as well. Furthermore, they would also like the communication to be routine and personal—not something they perceive as simply "checking the box." DoD's *Generating a Local Commander's Family Support Plan and Communications Tool Kit* presents a foundation on which unit commanders base their communication with families.[3] DoD should work with units to identify the resources they need to carry out such communication with families.

Assign a Point Person to Serve as a Clearinghouse for Resource Information

Units should also equip someone to serve as a point person to whom families can go for information on resources. This could be someone in the unit with family support responsibilities, but, ideally, it would be someone who would not rotate out of the position quickly. This would alleviate confusion among families about where they can find information about resources, and it would consolidate communication

[3] See U.S. Department of Defense, *Generating a Local Commander's Family Support Plan and Communications Tool Kit (A Commander's Guide)*, Washington, D.C., undated.

between the unit and resource providers, many of whom opt to reach out to a unit point of contact in addition to or instead of individual families. Such a position would also allow units to get a better sense of the types of resources families are looking for and the type of support families need, which could ultimately help them identify gaps in resource provision.

Refine Ways to Learn About the Experiences of Guard and Reserve Families

DoD should continue to refine the way it collects information about the reintegration experiences of guard and reserve families. In particular, DoD should minimize the survey burden, add additional questions or areas of focus to surveys, and supplement surveys with other sources of feedback.

Minimize Survey Burden

When surveying guard and reserve families, DoD should try to minimize the burden associated with completing multiple surveys fielded by different entities about related topics. This could be accomplished with a more targeted sampling of members of the guard and reserve community so that the same individuals are not asked to complete multiple surveys in the same time frame and by keeping survey instruments as short as possible. Although DoD currently reviews survey instruments for redundancy as part of its formal data collection approval process, the survey fatigue we encountered during our study suggests that additional actions to coordinate research efforts are warranted. If steps are taken to ensure that a survey sample is representative of the overall guard and reserve community, it may be more productive to administer short surveys on a small number of related topics to different service members and spouses. Another action that DoD could take to ensure that sufficient numbers of service members and spouses are amenable to participating is to convey to families how concrete changes in policy or services have been made in response to their participation in data collection efforts. Demonstrating to survey respondents the impact of their contribution could convince families that their participation in these data collection efforts is worthwhile.

Add Additional Areas of Focus and Items to Surveys

DoD should consider the following additions to existing survey efforts:

- Include more questions about other potential problems (e.g., financial issues, child well-being, health care or medical concerns).
- Ask more specific questions about how service members and their families use both DoD and non-DoD resources, what kind of support they receive from these resources, and the extent to which those resources are helpful.
- Include questions related to other potential factors associated with reintegration challenges, including whether or not the service member deployed with his or her unit, whether the service member returned home with a psychological issue, and whether the service member lives far from an installation.
- Add or adapt relevant deployment-related questions to DoD post-deployment questions.
- Collect information about the reintegration experiences of different family members, either by surveying both service members and spouses or by phrasing questions to address the experiences not only of the respondent but also his or her spouse and any dependents.
- Pose reintegration-focused questions to both active component and reserve component survey respondents.

For specific examples of questions that should be revised or adapted to implement these suggestions, see Appendix A.

The addition of these questions could help DoD identify what kind of support service members and their spouses feel they need during reintegration. In addition, by asking about both problems that were experienced and support needs, DoD could identify the needs that are associated with particular problems. These questions could also help DoD understand where service members and their families turn for support resources (both DoD and non-DoD) and whether they think those resources are helpful. This information could provide valuable input into decisions regarding resource allocation for DoD support programs. Finally, although information such as Individual

Augmentee status, service member injury, and the distance a family resides from the nearest military installation can likely be derived from DoD administrative data files; their inclusion on confidential survey instruments (i.e., instruments that cannot be linked to other data files) would permit DoD and other analysts to verify their relationship not only with readjustment success but also with specific problems and needs. This, is turn, would indicate which guard and reserve families are especially in need of support during reintegration and why.

Although we have been exhaustive in our list of opportunities for data collection improvement, we appreciate that DoD must make hard decisions about which important topics to include and measure in detail in its large-scale survey efforts because, otherwise, its surveys would be too onerous for most would-be respondents. In addition to considering which of the aforementioned reintegration-related topics and items to cover in future Status of Forces surveys, there are several other survey-related avenues that DoD should explore:

- Conduct Quick Compass surveys both to learn more about issues that are unique to guard and reserve families and to compare the reintegration experiences of the Active Component and the Reserve Component. Keep up with nongovernmental surveys of service members and spouses and include any relevant questions in future DoD surveys.
- Examine surveys of foreign militaries and include any relevant reintegration-related questions or measures. For example, Defence Research and Development Canada, part of Canada's Department of National Defence, has developed and used a postdeployment reintegration scale to examine the postdeployment experiences of Canadian Forces personnel.[4]

[4] These studies can be accessed via Defence Research and Development Canada, "Welcome to Defence Research Reports," web page, last updated March 15, 2013, using the keyword "reintegration."

Supplement Surveys with Other Sources of Information

DoD should consider ways to supplement surveys with other data. This could include conducting interviews or focus groups with service members and their families, as well as collecting information from those who interact with guard and reserve families on a daily basis. DoD should collect information from DoD and non-DoD resource providers about the patterns they see regarding problems that guard and reserve families experience during reintegration, their support needs, and the kinds of resources they use. Finally, there may be additional sources of data that DoD could learn from without directly interacting with service members, their families, or the providers that seek to ease reintegration. For example, Military OneSource maintains records of the number and nature of contacts it receives monthly. Focusing on the records pertaining only to Guard- and Reserve-affiliated individuals or reviewing records to identify when during the deployment cycle a contact with Military OneSource was initiated could provide additional reintegration-related insights.

Recommendations for Improving the Broader Web of Support for Families

In addition to the steps suggested earlier in this chapter, DoD can help improve the broader web of support for families. We offer specific recommendations in five broad areas: target a broader audience to support families, identify gaps and overlaps in the web of support, facilitate coordination across resource providers, work with providers to address reasons for a lack of resource use, and encourage resource providers to develop and learn from measures of effectiveness.

Target a Broader Audience to Support Families

Both DoD and non-DoD providers should target a broader audience to reach more family and friends and disseminate information on how they can better support guard and reserve families. In particular, DoD should recognize and leverage nongovernmental support resources; promote community capacity, awareness, and involvement in support-

ing guard and reserve families; and continue to honor employers who support guard and reserve families.

Recognize and Leverage Nongovernmental Support Resources

Given our findings about the degree to which guard and reserve families rely on nongovernmental resources, DoD should recognize their role in supporting these families and should leverage these resources. Our findings indicate that guard and reserve families rely on nongovernmental resource providers, especially friends, family members, and nonprofit organizations. These nongovernmental resources can facilitate the dissemination of information—especially to hard-to-reach populations. The more aware friends and family members are of support resources, the better equipped they will be to pass along that valuable information to guard and reserve families. Given their geographic dispersion, social media should also play an increasingly important role in DoD's efforts to disseminate information to guard and reserve families.

Promote Community Capacity, Awareness, and Involvement

DoD should also promote community capacity, which in turn could lead to heightened awareness of and involvement in reintegration. Members of a high-capacity community share responsibility for the welfare of its members and are adept in both proactively attending to community needs and responding to challenges that affect community well-being. With this perspective, community members are viewed as an asset that can work with military and civilian leadership to support guard and reserve families.[5] One way for DoD to build such capacity and promote awareness is to disseminate more information to the public about how local guard personnel, reservists, and their families are serving the country and how community members can thank them for their service by helping guard and reserve families throughout the deployment cycle. In addition, DoD should inform the public about events that offer an opportunity to show support for guard and reserve

[5] Gary L. Bowen, Dennis K. Orthner, James A. Martin, and Jay A. Mancini, *Building Community Capacity: A Manual for U.S. Air Force Family Support Centers*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: A Better Image Printing, 2001.

families (e.g., welcoming service members at airports when they return home). Increasing public awareness could ultimately lead to strong support for guard and reserve families at the local level, which would be especially helpful for families that live far away from their drill unit or a military installation.

Continue to Honor Employers Who Support Guard and Reserve Families

Although we heard from some families about problems that service members experienced with civilian employment after demobilization, other interview participants described ways in which employers were helpful and accommodating. DoD should also continue its efforts to honor employers who support guard personnel, reservists, and their families, such as ESGR's various employer-recognition rewards. Such actions may encourage other employers to maintain a high level of support for citizen warriors and their families. These efforts could also increase public awareness of some of the challenges that guard and reserve families face during reintegration.

Identify Gaps and Overlaps in the Web of Support

The web of support could be a powerful force multiplier in providing support to guard and reserve families. Rather than trying to "do it all"—which could lead to a duplication of effort—DoD should instead leverage the efforts being undertaken by other organizations. To target its support resources most efficiently, DoD should begin by identifying gaps and overlaps in the web of support. Network analysis techniques may be useful in this pursuit. The development of an inventory of resources (building on the National Resource Directory and other resource directories) could help DoD determine which organizations are providing support and what kind of support they are providing. Network analysis could then help to identify the areas in which these organizations are focusing their support, where there are overlaps with DoD support resources, and where there are gaps in the web of support that DoD should focus on filling.

Facilitate Coordination Across Resource Providers

DoD can also help facilitate coordination between providers across the web of support. In particular, we recommend that DoD identify areas to be targeted for improved coordination, promote efforts to organize local resource providers, host or promote networking events, and encourage providers to share best practices. We discuss each of these recommendations in turn. One way that DoD could facilitate the implementation of all of the recommendations is by establishing a forum similar to the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD). VOAD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization in which member organizations share knowledge and resources to help disaster survivors and their communities.[6]

Identify Areas to Be Targeted for Improved Coordination

We learned from our interviews with providers that coordination does occur to some extent, but there are opportunities both to initiate interactions between different types of resource providers and to encourage resource providers that already interact with one another to build on that exchange. One way to inform DoD efforts to facilitate such coordination would be to use simple network analysis, in which information is systemically collected about the interactions that providers have with one another. Network analysis could be used to understand the nature and extent of interactions between resource providers (e.g., communication, referrals, collaboration). In addition, an examination of the full network of providers could show gaps in the web of support (i.e., places where one might expect to see coordination but does not), as well as organizations that are central to the network (i.e., connected to many other organizations). Identifying gaps and well-connected organizations could help DoD pinpoint its efforts to promote coordination.

Promote Efforts to Organize Local Resource Providers

In an earlier recommendation, we discussed how building community capacity could lead to greater support from the public for guard and reserve families. Community capacity can also be improved by har-

[6] For more information, see National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, "Who We Are," web page, undated.

nessing the collective resources of local community providers, suggesting that such efforts as Joining Community Forces (an expansion of Michelle Obama's and Jill Biden's Joining Forces initiative) are well founded. Joining Community Forces aims to promote viable local support networks, foster collaboration among different types of resource providers, and leverage training and best practices for resource providers.[7] DoD should capitalize on initiatives that are already in place, such as Joining Community Forces, and could build upon them by facilitating the creation of Community Action Teams, groups of leaders from different segments of the local community (e.g., business, nonprofits, government, benevolent organizations).[8] By virtue of their local presence, they are well situated—and perhaps better-positioned, in some ways, than a federal agency like DoD—to organize and mobilize the local "sea of goodwill" to meet the unique needs of guard and reserve families in a particular community.

Host or Promote Networking Events for Resource Providers

In addition, DoD should consider hosting or promoting networking opportunities among resource providers. This would allow providers to learn about one another, including their resources and the services they provide, and to exchange contact information. This could also increase DoD's awareness of the resources available to service members and their families. DoD could use these types of events to reach out proactively to the provider community and to disseminate information to providers. During our interviews with providers, we heard that a few states organize these sorts of networking events, and providers have found them to be very helpful.

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[7] See Joining Community Forces, "About Us," web page, undated.

[8] John W. Copeland and David W. Sutherland, *Sea of Goodwill: Matching the Donor to the Need*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Warrior and Family Support, 2010. Examples of community action teams are available through the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of Warrior and Family Support, "Innovative Example Descriptions: Serving Our Nation's Service Members, Veterans, Families, and Families of the Fallen," July 23, 2012.

Encourage Providers to Share Best Practices

DoD could use forums like the networking events or VOAD, mentioned earlier, to encourage providers to share best practices. This would be consistent with one of the objectives of the Joining Community Forces initiative. By learning from each other's experiences, providers could avoid repeating each other's mistakes, and they could replicate or improve upon the practices that other providers have found to be successful. Ultimately, this sharing could improve support to guard and reserve families.

Work with Providers to Address Reasons for a Lack of Resource Use

DoD should also work with providers to address the reasons why service members and their families do not use resources. We found that families do not use resources for the following reasons:

- They have difficulty accessing resources.
- They are not aware of resources.
- They are concerned about the quality of the resources.
- No one reached out to them.
- The resources are expensive.
- The resources are difficult to find.

DoD could work with providers to address these barriers to resource utilization. To overcome these barriers, DoD should work with providers to reach target populations and increase awareness of resources, explore the development of a system for credentialing resource providers, and continue to develop the National Resource Directory.

Work with Providers to Reach Target Populations

To ensure that all families have access to the support resources they need, DoD should work with providers to target specific populations that may not be able to access resources (e.g., families that do not live on or near a military installation, families that are economically disadvantaged, families that may not have access to online resources). By increasing the frequency and method (e.g., mail, email, telephone) of outreach out to these populations, DoD and other providers could improve the accessibility of their resources. Using multiple approaches

and reaching out to families at different points during the deployment cycle, and even at different points in the reintegration phase, can also improve support to guard and reserve families. For example, this could include disseminating information at the first YRRP postdeployment event, then later in the reintegration phase through individual unit commands, social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), and on an ongoing basis via word of mouth. Although care must be taken to avoid the perception of information redundancy—a criticism some families had about YRRP postdeployment events—varying both the means of information dissemination and the timing should help in this regard.

Work with Providers to Increase Awareness of Resources

Several of the recommendations in this chapter touch on how DoD could improve awareness about resources. For instance, we have suggested that DoD leverage informal resources, such as friends, family, and social networks, to increase awareness about the resources that are available to guard and reserve families. DoD should also work with providers to facilitate increased awareness of the resources and services that they provide. One way to do this is to invite more providers to participate in YRRP events. Another possibility would be to track the number and type of organizations that participate in YRRP events. This activity would not only reveal patterns in the types of organizations that maintain a YRRP presence, but it also could show missing segments in the web of support that perhaps should be "recruited" to attend in the future. Another way might be to include more nongovernmental resources in DoD resource directories, such as Military OneSource and the National Resource Directory (as discussed later).

Explore the Development of a System for Credentialing Resource Providers

In our interviews with guard and reserve families, we heard that, at times, families are confused and overwhelmed by the number of resources available to them. There is also concern that predatory providers could take advantage of guard and reserve families.[9] To miti-

[9] See, for example, Executive Order 13607, "Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Mem-

gate these concerns, DoD should explore the possibility of developing a system for credentialing resource providers. For instance, it could establish minimum criteria that providers need to meet to be credentialed by DoD. While there would be some costs associated with exploring the feasibility of a credentialing system (e.g., examining the potential legal limitations), developing it, and maintaining it, such a system could ultimately save DoD resources because families may use more non-DoD resources if they feel they can trust them. The development of such a credentialing system could be informed by the Department of Homeland Security's *National Incident Management System (NIMS) Guideline for the Credentialing of Personnel*, which describes national credentialing standards and provides written guidance on the use of those standards.[10] While the NIMS credentialing system applies to individuals, a similar system could be developed for organizations.

Continue to Develop the National Resource Directory

To help families find resources, DoD, the Department of Labor, and the VA should also continue to develop the National Resource Directory. Specifically, the directory could be further enhanced by including more nongovernmental resources, adding more areas of focus (e.g., financial resources), and ensuring that it is easy to navigate. Our interviews with families indicated that some find comprehensive resources that are "one-stop shopping" to be helpful. DoD should also disseminate information on the National Resource Directory more widely so that more service members and families are aware of it and more resource providers seek inclusion.

Encourage Resource Providers to Develop and Learn from Measures of Effectiveness

Our findings indicate that many resource providers do not use formal measures of effectiveness. However, it is in DoD's interest to help pro-

bers," April 27, 2012. In addition, the Office of Servicemember Affairs within the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was established to help protect service members from predatory lending.

[10] See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *National Incident Management System (NIMS) Guideline for the Credentialing of Personnel*, Washington, D.C., July 2011.

viders develop these measures because they could improve the support that is available to guard and reserve families. Therefore, DoD should encourage resource providers to begin developing these measures and to share information with one another on how to develop and implement them. An important first step is to convey to resource providers the value of assessing how well they are supporting guard and reserve families. Specifically, measures of effectiveness can indicate to the providers themselves, as well as to other stakeholders (e.g., prospective clients, potential funding sources), how well they meet the reintegration-related needs of the guard and reserve families that turn to them. These measures could, as we suggested earlier, also serve as one criterion for participation at YRRP events. They also can help identify both areas of support in need of improvement and those that may be shared with other resource providers as best practices. One way to foster the development of such measures is through the networking opportunities mentioned previously in this section. Another option is to convene workshops that focus on developing these measures.

At these events and through other means, DoD should emphasize that the most useful effectiveness measures are outcome-focused and resource-specific. While the number of clients served or the number of website hits provides evidence of the extent or volume of support, ultimately, what is more important is how well resource providers help guard personnel, reservists, and their families solve problems, avoid problems, or otherwise meet their needs. Moreover, the type of outcome may vary; faith-based organizations providing spiritual support would likely develop and measure effective support differently from organizations focused on mental health issues. In both cases, though, thoughtfully developed metrics can help ensure that the organization fulfills its specific mission.

Final Thoughts

This report sheds light on the reintegration experiences of the guard and reserve families that participated in our study. However, there is much that we still do not know. The reintegration needs of guard and

reserve families are continually evolving and thus warrant ongoing monitoring and research. Similarly, changes to the web of support, the gaps and overlaps in resource provision, and how that network of organizations interacts merit observation. Although military operations in Afghanistan may be winding down at the time of this report's publication, it will remain vitally important to investigate these and other questions because the 21st-century Reserve Component will likely be tasked again to support emergency and wartime missions. In addition, the families of guard and reserve service members who have deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other international contingency operations may confront challenges that have not emerged yet. Most importantly, their sacrifices over the first decade of the 21st century warrant the nation's support over the long term.

APPENDIX A

Details on the Assessment of Survey Instruments and Recommendations

This appendix provides additional details on our assessment of survey instruments. Status of Forces Surveys are among the primary means by which DoD solicits feedback from reserve component service members and spouses. These surveys cover a wide range of topics, including some that vary depending on the year, and are regularly administered to representative samples of individuals affiliated with the Active Component and the Reserve Component of the U.S. military. To identify ways in which DoD could improve data collection efforts regarding reintegration, we reviewed the questions that were included in 14 Status of Forces Survey instruments fielded over the five years preceding our study. We included survey instruments for both service members and spouses in both the Active Component and the Reserve Component. The following 14 surveys were included in our review:

- Reserve Component Status of Forces Surveys:
  - 2008: spouses
  - 2009: spouses
  - 2012: spouses
  - June 2007: service members
  - December 2007: service members
  - June 2008: service members
  - November 2008: service members
  - June 2009: service members
  - December 2009: service members

  - January 2011: service members
  - January 2012: service members
- Active Component Status of Forces Surveys:
  - 2008: spouses
  - June 2010: service members
  - January 2011: service members
- Additional DoD surveys reviewed:
  - 2010 Quick Compass surveys
  - 2010 MFLP survey
  - 2011 MFLP survey.

Quick Compass surveys are web-based surveys of just a few key questions designed to provide DoD leadership with immediate information on specific personnel policies and concerns. The MFLP survey is a large-scale, longitudinal survey that was administered in 2010 and 2011.

Areas of Focus

As we reviewed the questions included in the survey instruments, we looked for the following characteristics:

- extent to which survey questions asked about reintegration needs and problems
- extent to which survey questions asked about the use and helpfulness of support resources
- extent to which survey questions addressed factors that contribute to reintegration success, including
  - family readiness for deployment
  - adequacy of communication with family during deployment
  - adequacy of communication from unit or Service postdeployment
  - family finances
  - distance of residence from drill unit
  - distance of residence from nearest installation

  - whether the service member deployed with own unit
  - whether the service member had a psychological issue
  - whether the service member had a physical injury
  - deployment length of one year or longer
- deployment-related questions that could be adapted to obtain information about the postdeployment phase (e.g., problems experienced, resources used)
- reintegration-related questions posed to active component but not reserve component personnel or spouses
- questions posed to one family member (e.g., service members) that could be posed to other family members (e.g., spouses).

Ways to Increase What DoD Learns About Reintegration from Its Surveys

We acknowledge that in many of its large-scale survey efforts, such as the Status of Forces Surveys, DoD must make hard decisions about which important topics to cover and to what degree, because covering all of them in great depth would make an instrument too onerous for most would-be respondents. However, we considered and report on all the gaps related to the reintegration experiences of guard and reserve families. DoD should consider including more questions about other potential problems (e.g., financial issues, child well-being, health care or medical concerns). The addition of questions related to needs would help DoD identify what kind of support service members and their spouses feel they need during reintegration. In addition, by asking about problems that were experienced *and* support needs, DoD could identify the needs that are associated with particular problems.

DoD should also consider asking more specific questions about how service members and their families use both DoD and non-DoD resources, what kind of support they receive from these resources, and the extent to which these resources are helpful. This could help DoD begin to understand where service members and their families turn for support resources and whether they think those resources are helpful. It will also help DoD identify the extent to which its resources are

being utilized and whether families think they are helpful. This could provide valuable input into decisions regarding resource allocation for DoD support programs.

We recommend that DoD also routinely include questions related to other factors potentially associated with reintegration challenges, including whether or not the service member deployed with his or her unit, whether the service member returned home with psychological issues, and whether the service member lives far from an installation. Although these data are likely available from personnel records and other administrative data files, their inclusion on confidential survey instruments (i.e., instruments that cannot be linked to other data files) would permit DoD and other analysts to investigate how these characteristics are related to reintegration problems, needs, and success.

We found several deployment-related questions that could be adapted or to learn about the postdeployment phase. For instance, the 2008 Survey of Reserve Component Spouses asked, "How could the military have provided better support for you and/or your family during deployments?" This same question should be routinely included in future surveys that cover reintegration. In addition, almost all of the surveys asked a question about how prepared families felt for deployment. This same question should be asked about preparation for reintegration and it, too, should be asked regularly.

The 2012 Survey of Reserve Component Spouses asked the following question:

> How helpful were the following during your spouse's most recent deployment cycle: Military OneSource; Family Readiness/ Support Group; unit commander; other unit leadership; my spouse, military spouse/family; my or my spouse's parents; my or my spouse's family; friends/co-workers; social groups/clubs; civilian organizations; deployment support programs; Military Family Life Consultants (MFLCs); military chaplain; local church/ congregation; other unit member(s) and/or their family; other.

This is a very valuable question because it covers a breadth of resources. DoD should ask this question routinely in surveys that

address reintegration, along with the following question from the same survey:

> If the military had provided the following, would you and/or your family have been better supported during your spouse's deployment: more phone contact with my spouse; more phone contact with my spouse's unit; more details about my spouses deployment; child care; videoconferencing with my spouse; help with household repairs, yardwork, or care maintenance; more activities/programs to prepare children for deployments; increased pay; help with understanding TRICARE health and dental benefits; counseling services; other.

This question was posed only to spouses, but it should be posed to both service members and spouses. The 2009 Survey of Reserve Component Spouses featured the following question, a variation of which appeared in the January 2011 Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Members and should be included among the reintegration questions on future surveys:

> During your spouse's most recent deployment, to what extent were each of the following a problem for you: my job or education demands; managing expenses and bills; home/car repairs/maintenance or yard work; loss of income from my spouse's civilian job; safety of my family in our community; feelings of anxiety or depression; serious health problems in the family; serious emotional problems in the family; technical difficulties in communications with spouse; difficulty maintaining emotional connection with spouse; falling behind in paying rent or mortgage; major financial hardship or bankruptcy; birth or adoption of a child; marital problems; loneliness; managing child care/child schedules; increase in your stress level; unintended weight gain or loss; difficulty sleeping; other.

The June 2009 Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members asked, "How often did your family have contact with [respondents chose options from a variety of support resources] during your most recent deployment?" It would be valuable to include this

question among reintegrated-related questions and to pose this question to spouses as well. This same survey also asked the following question about financial health:

> In the past 12 months, did any of the following happen to you (and your spouse): bounced two checks or more; had to pay overdraft fees to your bank or credit union two or more times; failed to make a monthly/minimum payment on your credit card, AAFES [Army and Air Force Exchange Service], NEXCOM [Navy Exchange Service Command] account, or Military Star Card account; feel behind on paying your rent or mortgage; was pressured to pay bills by stores, creditors, or bill collectors; had your telephone, cable, or Internet shut off; had your water, heat, or electricity shut off; had a car, household appliance, or furniture repossessed; failed to make a care payment; obtained a payday loan; filed for personal bankruptcy.

DoD should also consider posing to reserve component personnel and spouses relevant questions that are currently asked only on surveys of the Active Component. For instance, the 2011 MFLP survey asked a series of questions about resource use:

> When did you use [respondents choose options from a variety of support resources]: prior to my spouse's most recent deployment; during my spouse's most recent deployment; after my spouse's most recent deployment.

This question should be posed consistently to both service members and spouses in both the Active Component and the Reserve Component. These questions could help DoD identify which resources service members and their spouses use at different points during the deployment cycle and could also serve as a basis for comparing the support provided to the different components.

APPENDIX B

Details on the Web Survey and Interviews

This appendix provides additional details on the analysis of the three primary data sources for this study: the web survey completed by the spouses and service members, interviews conducted with spouses and service members, and interviews conducted with resource providers. The methods for the web survey and interviews with spouses and service members were reviewed and approved by RAND's Institutional Review Board, and the interviews with providers were deemed exempt from human-subject protection review. The protocols and procedures for both the survey and interviews with spouses and service members were also reviewed by DoD, licensed as an official data collection effort by Washington Headquarters Service, and ultimately issued Report Control Symbol DD-RA (AR) 2410.

Topics

Full survey and interview protocols are available by request from the study's principal investigators. The web survey included questions about family demographics and situational characteristics, such as length of time in the current neighborhood and family financial situation. A series of questions pertained to aspects of the most recent deployment, including its length, the extent of communication with the service member and with his or her unit during deployment, and problems experienced during that time frame. Participants were also asked about their preparation for the service member–family reunion, what postdeployment problems they had experienced to date, and their

perceptions of resources used. The survey closed with questions about the service member's satisfaction with service in the Guard or Reserve and several items pertaining to military career intentions.

The family interview focused on life following deployment. Using a combination of closed- and open-ended questions, interview participants were asked to describe the service member's (and, when applicable, the spouse's) employment and education plans, the types of challenges the family faced after the service member returned home, and the positive aspects of their reintegration experience. Interview participants in a relationship were asked to assess how happy they were in their relationship and how the problems they experienced and their severity compared with those encountered prior to the deployment. In addition, interview participants were guided through a series of questions that covered how well they thought reintegration was going for each family member and were asked to explain why they felt that way. We also covered resource usage, the perceived adequacy of different resources, and reasons for a lack of resource use. As with the survey, as the interview came to a close, participants were presented with several questions about military career intentions. The final questions invited participants to offer suggestions for DoD to improve reintegration support and advice for other guard and reserve families about to go through this part of the deployment cycle.

Topics covered during the resource provider interviews included those pertaining to the types of resources they offer to guard and reserve families, the forms of outreach they use to make families aware of the services, what a successful reintegration experience looks like, and how the provider organization gauges its effectiveness. Additional questions asked the interviewee to discuss perceptions of unmet needs and underserved populations, and a large part of the interview was dedicated to exploring the nature and extent of coordination across resource providers. The interview closed with questions about ways to improve coordination among providers and to ensure that reintegration goes as smoothly as possible for guard and reserve families. The "mini-interviews" covered a shorter set of topics, focusing primarily on the services offered by the resource provider, outreach strategies, per-

ceived barriers to supporting guard and reserve families, and suggestions for improvement.

Analysis

Family Web Survey

First, we calculated descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies. Then, we explored relationships between measures using simple logistic regression, chi-square tests of significance, and Fisher's exact test, as appropriate. We focused primarily on relationships between "outcome" measures, such as perceived reintegration success and military career intentions, and potential explanatory factors, such as the deployment length, family finances, and the amount of communication during deployment. Findings discussed in this report are significant at $p < 0.05$.

Family Interviews

All interviews were conducted by RAND researchers, audio-recorded, and fully transcribed. Interview transcripts were first analyzed using QSR NVivo 9®. NVivo 9 is a software package that enables its users to review, categorize, and analyze qualitative data, such as text, visual images, and audio recordings. NVivo 9 permits analysts to assign codes to passages of text and later retrieve passages of similarly coded text within and across documents. NVivo 9 is also capable of simple word-based searches and more sophisticated text searches, such as Boolean searches involving combinations of codes.

The project team worked together to develop a coding "tree" to facilitate the tagging of relevant interview excerpts. A coding tree is a set of codes, or the "labels for assigning units of meaning to information compiled during a study."[1] Codes are used in the data reduction process, to retrieve and organize qualitative data by topic and other characteristics. For this effort, codes were largely based on the inter-

[1] Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994, p. 56.

view protocol (e.g., reintegration problems and challenges, reasons for lack of resource use, advice for other guard and reserve families),[2] and six members of the project team worked to review and code transcripts from all 167 service member and spouse interviews. An iterative process of coding a series of interview transcripts independently, sharing examples of coding, and making refinements as needed was used to ensure that the original set of codes was applied to text in a consistent manner. A good example of this approach is illustrated by how we coded passages related to employment challenges: We first coded passages related to employment challenges, and then, after reviewing and discussing them, we developed and applied more nuanced codes pertaining to unemployment, underemployment, interaction with ESGR, and employment satisfaction.

After all the interviews were coded, the resultant data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. For the qualitative portion of our analysis, we generated coding reports to identify the frequency with which each code was applied. Additional reports ensured that all the passages tagged with a specific code could be reviewed together. For the quantitative portion of our analysis, we converted coding results to binary measures (i.e., 1 = tagged with a specific code, 0 = not tagged with a specific code) and analyzed them along with closed-ended measures (e.g., demographic data, family finances, perceived readjustment success) using statistical software. As with the family survey, findings based on statistical analyses of family interview data are significant at $p < 0.05$.

Provider Interviews

We also used NVivo 9 to analyze the provider interviews. Given the smaller number of interviews and the fact that data were captured as notes, not full transcripts, NVivo 9 was used only to organize responses by interview question. We explored additional themes without using the software. For instance, as noted in Chapter Five, we organized the providers into nine domains: education, employment, family relationships, financial issues, medical concerns and health care, legal issues,

[2] The full coding tree is available by request from the study's principal investigators.

mental health, social networks, and spiritual support. Then, members of the RAND project team independently reviewed notes by topic domain and analyzed the data in two ways. First, they described services, outreach strategies, measures of effectiveness, perceived unmet needs, barriers to support, and recommendations in each of the domains. Then, they compared and contrasted these themes across all domains. We conducted additional analyses to determine the types of organizations with which providers tended to coordinate, identify examples of coordination facilitators, and document additional ideas for improving coordination across resource providers.

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Many studies have examined the impact of deployment on military families, but few have assessed either the challenges that guard and reserve families face following deployment or how they manage the reintegration phase of the deployment cycle. This report aims to facilitate the successful reintegration of guard and reserve personnel as they return to civilian life after deployment. Using surveys and interviews with guard and reserve families, along with interviews with resource providers, this report examines how these families fare after deployment, the challenges they confront during that time frame, and the strategies and resources they use to navigate the reintegration phase. Factors associated with reintegration success include the adequacy of communication between families and the service member's unit or Service and between service members and their families, initial readiness for deployment, family finances, and whether the service member returns with a psychological issue or physical injury. Successful reintegration from the families' perspective was related to measures of military readiness, such as the service members' plans to continue guard or reserve service. In addition, there is a wide-ranging and complex "web of support" available to assist families with reintegration, including U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) programs, state and local government agencies, private nonprofit and for-profit resource providers, faith-based organizations, and informal resources (such as family, friends, and social networks). Opportunities for collaboration among providers abound. DoD does not have to "do it all," but the report suggests steps it can take to ensure that reintegration proceeds as smoothly as possible.

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