

DACOWITS RFI #7 (DECEMBER 2024)

Subj: DACOWITS RFI #7 - Impact on Military Mothers Reintegrating into Family/Home Life After Deployment

RFI #7: In 2019, the Committee identified challenges, impacts, and issues military mothers experience returning from deployment as they reintegrate to family and work life, and subsequently recommended that the Secretary of Defense commission a foundational research study to identify and assess these potentially unique impacts on military mothers and identify measures to help ease their transition back to “normal” family and home life. The Committee seeks information on the progress of research and initiatives to address these reintegration concerns.

The Committee requests a written response from the **Marine Corps** on the following:

7.a. What research or studies have been undertaken or is ongoing to identify the issues unique to returning mothers and reintegration? Provide links to or copies of findings and reports. What actions have been taken to address issues identified by the research or studies, if applicable?

At this time, the Marine Corps is not engaged in research focused solely on the unique challenges female Marines and Marines who are mothers face when reintegrating after deployment. However, the Marine Corps recently completed a study on retention using the exit milestone longitudinal survey and interview data with career planners. Data from the career planner interviews, while limited by low participation, indicates that female Marines who are single parents desire more support. The Marine Corps is also wrapping up the Marine Corps Quality of Life study. We have asked the contractors to note if they have any findings unique to mothers returning home from deployment. Data collection for this study will conclude within the calendar year.

7.b. Section 555 of the FY21 NDAA directed the Secretary of Defense to develop policy that, among other issues, outlined “[r]esponses to the effects specific to covered members who reintegrate into home life after deployment.” What policy, initiatives, or resources have been developed to assist returning military mothers with the challenges they face on return from deployment. Provide copies of relevant policies, training, and other documents.

Combat and Operational Stress Control (COSC) Deployment Cycle Training addresses reintegration and will be discussed in more detail in answering RFI #7.d.

Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB) facilitates post-deployment briefings and events for returning Commands. These events are tailored to the needs of the Command being served through collaboration between MCFTB and the Command. All Marines and families receive the same information unless the Command has specifically requested assistance in a particular topic area. All briefers at post-deployment events are prepared to answer to the individual needs of Marines as those needs are presented during or after the event. These briefings are required by Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1754.6C Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB).

7.c. What are the issues and challenges that have been identified, including the restoration of the parent-child bond, and resumption of prior family roles and responsibilities?

Current studies noted above have not yet yielded findings that differ from existing studies and the expected challenges such as those listed in the question. These challenges are addressed currently in many ways, to include deployment cycle training conducted before deployment, as units are returning, and shortly after return.

7.d. What policies and procedures does each Service have to support reintegration. Are there any programs specific to mothers and being a woman?

As per DoDI 6490.05, Change 2, Military Departments’ Combat and Operational Stress Control (COSC) programs shall consist of curricula, training, and exercise requirements for joint and Military Services-specific operations that focus on using psychological principles that enhance combat effectiveness and prevention and management of combat and operational stress reactions in settings from garrison to the battlefield. Per DoDI 6490.05, in addition to

stress first aid, COSC training shall address leadership, communication, peer support activities, unit morale and cohesion, unit assessment of stress, individual stressors, preventive stress management, referral resources, and stress first aid, before, during, and after deployment. In the Marine Corps, COSC training is operationalized through Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) Team Training and OSCAR Deployment Cycle Training (DCT). OSCAR Team Training and OSCAR DCT is not specific to being a mother or woman, but rather has a broad approach to the impact of stress on all deploying Service Members.

OSCAR DCT is a set of standardized curricula to be used at specific times (Pre-, Re-, and Post-) throughout the deployment training cycle. OSCAR DCT audiences include both Leaders (SNCO and officers) and Warriors (junior Marines to Sergeant) that are deploying as defined in the DoD Dictionary. The DoD Dictionary defines deployment as the relocation of forces and material to desired operational areas. Deployments may be for combat, training, humanitarian efforts, or other operations. Pre-and Post-DCT is delivered through virtual, self-paced modules via MarineNet. Re-DCT is delivered in-person by a member of the OSCAR Team when available. This may include an OSCAR trained Marine, Extender (chaplain or corpsman), or uniformed Mental Health Professional (MHP). In the absence of the availability of an OSCAR Team Member, the command may designate a facilitator. The goal of OSCAR DCT is to enhance psychological fitness, to include strength building strategies and application of stress mitigation principles in mission performance, and to address prevention and management of stress before deployment and stress reactions during and after deployment. The knowledge gained in OSCAR DCT may better enable the implementation of OSCAR principles that enhance combat and operational effectiveness and prevention and management of stress reactions in settings from installation to the battlefield, before, during, and after deployment.

Marine & Family Programs does not have post-deployment program that specifically supports female Marines or mothers. MCFTB facilitates post-deployment briefings and events for returning Commands. All Marines and families receive the same information unless the Command has specifically requested assistance in a particular topic area. All briefers at post-deployment events are prepared to answer to the individual needs of Marines as those needs are presented during or after the event. These briefings are required by MCO 1754.6C.

7.e. Are there any resources or programs geared to military mothers prior to deployment to help them plan for and more successfully reintegrate post-deployment? If so, describe these efforts and provide links to policies, programs, etc.

Marine & Family Programs does not have a pre-deployment program that specifically supports female Marines or mothers plan for a more successful post-deployment reintegration. MCFTB facilitates pre-deployment briefings and events for deploying Commands. These events are tailored to the needs of the Command being served through the Pre-Deployment Agreement. All Marines and families receive the same information unless the Command has specifically requested assistance in a particular topic area. All briefers at pre-deployment events are prepared to answer to the individual needs of Marines as those needs are presented during or after the event. These briefings are required by MCO 1754.6C.

7.f. DACOWITS' 2019 focus group participants expressed that post-deployment reintegration/assistance efforts were male-centric and lacked resources to assist the unique challenges returning military mothers faced. What efforts have been made to address this important subset of re-integration assistance?

Headquarters Marine Corps COSC team aims to ensure OSCAR DCT is not male-centric, and we will continue this attention as the curriculum is periodically updated.

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7.g. What kind of mentorship and support are specifically provided to deploying mothers?

HQMC Family Advocacy, OSCAR, Behavioral Programs does not have specific mentorship for deploying mothers. That said, OSCAR programs have the ability to tailor their approach locally based on COSC doctrine and local

needs. As we continue to update OSCAR team training, we can encourage OSCAR teams to enhance support and mentoring for deploying mothers.

As of March 2024, Manpower Plans and Policy Division initiated a contract to conduct a professional mentoring pilot; Mentors for Marines. The execution phase of the pilot will be conducted from February to April 2025 with the evaluation phase going from April to June 2025. This pilot will test a virtual enhancement to the organic, in-person mentoring connections that happen every day. The virtual format provides an additional avenue to mentoring, enabling individuals to forge meaningful connections and share knowledge and experience regardless of their location or duty station. By taking part in the Mentors for Marines Pilot, participants will directly impact and contribute to the evaluation of a virtual mentorship platform that aims to transcend geographic barriers and connect mentors and mentees serving across the globe by using specific criteria that best meets their needs.

7.h. What efforts have the Women's Initiatives Teams (WITs) initiated, if any, and how are the Services supporting those recommendations?

While the Marine Corps does not have a formal Service WIT, the Marine Corps supports and participates in advisory committees, boards, and working groups that focus on recommendations for our women who serve. DACOWITS, Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), and the Female Force Readiness Advisory Board with the Female Force Readiness Navy Medicine Operational Clinical Community are some of the groups supported by our M&RA personnel.

Moreover, the Marine Corps Outreach Program provides the diverse population of Marines, Sailors, and Civilian Marines the opportunity to participate in a number of in-person events hosted by different affinity groups across the country. Some of these events include Officer Women's Leadership Symposium hosted by Academy Women; Joint Women's Leadership Symposium hosted by Sea Service Leadership Association, Women in Aviation International and Women in Defense. Participation in these events strengthen individuals and the Marine Corps through education, mentorship, and professional development while addressing the top issues and challenges faced by the Marine Corps today.

7.i. What type of mental health screening/care is provided?

As per DODI 6490.03, all Marines receive the same periodic health assessments as the Army, Navy, and Airforce. In addition, deployment readiness coordinators and embedded preventive behavioral health specialists who coordinate resources, such as bringing in the Community Counseling Center and Marine Corps Family Team Building to conduct reintegration workshops and group-based interventions. The decision to engage with these resources can be command directed or based on data gathered by the integrated primary prevention coordinators and data analysts. See DODI 6400.11 for more information on the role of integrated primary prevention coordinators and data analysts.

All Marines and families with children ages birth through age five also have access to New Parent Support Program and all Marines and families can access parenting education through the Family Advocacy Program. In New Parent Support, there is initial screening conducted and referrals are made to health care providers as needed. In Family Advocacy parenting education classes, if parents indicate additional needs, appropriate referrals and warm handoffs are conducted.

7.j. What kind of follow up is provided and at what intervals?

For mental health care follow up, HQMC Health Services would be the appropriate office to respond. From the command perspective, Commanders are required to establish a force preservation council comprised of command leadership, behavioral health providers, and prevention staff. According to MCO 1500.60, force preservation councils meet bi-monthly to identify and monitor at risk Marines. Any Marine identified in the force preservation program as at risk must have a risk reduction plan which can include peer-to-peer interventions, referrals to behavioral health resources, financial counseling, and more.

7.k. Is leadership training provided to military leaders about the challenges and difficulties of reintegration that military mothers may encounter, the range of impacts of those challenges, in order to increase knowledge and understanding? Provide links to or copies of such training.

OSCAR DCT for leaders speaks broadly to supporting Marines who are parents during reintegration, recognizing their risks and challenges. This content is not specific to mothers or fathers.

7.l. What second and third order effects of reintegration difficulties have been identified (e.g., on military readiness, work productivity, psychological and physical health, attrition rates)?

While we do not have results yet, the Marine Corps is currently engaged in a DoD wide study examining how access to child-care and parental leave alleviate or exacerbate health outcomes and job performance by gender. Though not specifically related to post-deployment reintegration, this study should provide information on how the Marine Corps can better support mothers across the lifespan of their career.

7.m. Do exit surveys have questions related to whether reintegration/post-deployment challenges are a reason for separation?

No, exit surveys do not have questions which specify whether separation is related to reintegration or post-deployment challenges.