

Public Abstract

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Title:Battle on the home front: A contingency approach to analyzing how an Army unit communicates with families during a deployment

The past five years represent a period of unprecedented deployments for Army soldiers and their families.

This study explores how Army unit leaders and volunteers communicate with families of soldiers during a deployment of six months or longer to a Department of Defense-classified combat zone. A case study with an Army aviation unit was conducted to determine what factors contribute to how Army rear-detachment commanders and family readiness group leaders communicate with families in their unit during a deployment, as well as how the families perceive and respond to the communication they receive.

The findings suggest that unit leadership tends to advocate to family members more than accommodate them in terms of communication. However, various factors were found to trigger a shift in the communication. Overall, family members were satisfied with the communication they received from unit leadership.

Unit leaders at least partially operated as communication practitioners during a deployment, and they should understand the implications of their communication with family members. Additionally, this research suggests that in a hierarchical organization, such as the Army, advocacy and one-way communication work. Unit leadership's basic strategy of constant communication left family members satisfied.