


Soldiers are mentally and physically trained to go to war: it is part of their mission and for many, the reason they volunteered to serve in the military. Until that mission is accomplished, the veteran will not come home. Unfortunately, there is no mental training for spouses. The anxiety of separation can be an ever increasing burden for the partner who remains at home.

A search through recent literature does not reveal any specific insights on research conducted on the prevalence of extra marital affairs by members of the military (Karney & Crown, 2007). The number of divorces in the military is higher than in previous years, which can correlate to the increase in deployments to the GWOT, but the divorce rate has yet to surpass the percentages of non-military couples (2007). The most recent and thorough research into military families and divorce is the Rand report (2007), however, there is not much available that specifically addresses infidelity in the military, particularly in the wake of the GWOT.

The information available for those of us around military installations who invest our careers counseling military families is mostly anecdotal. Our appointment books are filled with distressed military couples. Many of them are looking for help resolving extramarital affairs and help with affair recovery. Those who have opted to go straight to a lawyer, or to divorce court, seldom get to our offices. While affairs are the most significant single contributor to divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997), neither the military nor the non-military records are able to determine the relevancy of affairs in the present military environment.

There are three specific contributors to consider. The first is the anxiety of separation during deployment by the spouse left at home, which contributes to infidelity; the second is the fear and anxiety of having a spouse living in harm’s way, which leads to seeking relief through infidelity; and the final contributor is that infidelity can be a form of retaliation against a spouse who is separated from his or her partner during a deployment.

Some partners may take the opposite approach. Rather than experiencing anxiety, they sense nothing at all. No longer feeling like they need sexual attention, some spouses develop an asexual attitude, while others, due to forced suppression of their desires and needs, may have thoughts of cheating (Pavlicin, 2003). The affair is unexpected and the consequences are not

...
Felicia Primrose on duty in Baghdad, Iraq.

References


Jerry Powell, DMin, LMF, LPC, is an AAMFT Clinical Member and Approved Supervisor. He is the director of the Fayetteville Family Life Center, Fayetteville, NC. Powell retired from the Army in 2007 after a 20-year career that included a deployment to Iraq.

Amber Kennedy, MA, is pursuing licensure for LMF and LPC. She is married to a service member who is preparing for his second deployment.

Jerry Powell on duty in Baghdad, Iraq.


The Virginia Division of the AAMFT Annual Conference
APRIL 3, 2009
The Virginia Division of the AAMFT will hold its spring conference at the Crown Plaza Hotel & Convention Center in Williamsburg, VA.

Ethics & Family Treatments with Eric McCollum, Ph.D.
Theme: "Internal Family Systems Therapy: Theory & Practice"
Speaker: Richard Schwartz, Ph.D.
VAMFT at http://www.vamft.org or call Ed Hendrickson at (703) 994-0034.