

# **SOLDIER'S HEART**

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## **SPOUSES AND LOVERS KEY ISSUES**

### **PRE-DEPLOYMENT**

Honeymoon – don't discuss hard stuff – couples' intimacy suffers

Bickering to release fears and anxiety – anger can make it easier to say goodbye

Sudden deployments – no time to adjust/prepare emotionally

Military is not family friendly. Girlfriends/boyfriends are not acknowledged and have no rights.

### **DEPLOYMENT**

New roles- spouse has to do it all - takes on tasks that were done by the other spouse.

Isolation and alienation – especially if not on a base – if on a base, often away from friends and family. (Only 1/3 of families live on a base.) Isolating tends to be less for spouses of officers.

(Average age of officers' wives is 41, enlisted men's wives 25)

Often young service people marry shortly before they are deployed – relationship doesn't have time to develop or get strong before separation.

Lack of local supportive services

Adjustment to new routine – spouse must create a new lifestyle

Never get a breather, especially if there are children

Phone calls – blessing and curse – waiting by the phone – it may be the last time they talk, calls are short and often have interference. If a call doesn't come, fear increases. Bomb blasts, heard in the background, create more fear.

Sexual acting out by either or both partners – looking for soothing, companionship, fun – distraction from feelings. Both fear the other's infidelity.

Substance abuse - young spouse needs to socialize, numb feelings

Often needs substance to sleep at night, so fears and worries don't keep her/him awake.

Idealizing the missing partner, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” – complicates the homecoming when they get back together and reality sets in.

Loss of control to military

Economic hardship – on average, women married to military men earn 1/3 less than other women. Those with post graduate degrees make half as much as those married to civilians

24 hour news can become addictive and increase anxiety. News of other deaths, especially from same unit, increases fears.

Death – grief is complicated by the “needless” circumstances, grief may be delayed until the whole unit returns. Loss of military “family.”

Injury - Can be devastating and drastically change appearance and physical and intellectual functioning. Spouse and family carry the burden of care, which may be life long.

## HOMECOMING

Homecoming delays – disappointment, anger

Fear of the unknown – loss of love, unseen wounds.

1<sup>st</sup> marriages for combat veterans are 62% more likely to end in divorce than for civilian marriages

Renegotiating the marriage contract - Loss of independence. Couple has to become married again, share responsibilities, decisions, which can cause conflicts that were not there before. Each one has matured. Expectations can be too high – “Knight in shining armor” has returned – NOT

Changes – Veteran is not the same and never will be. Who are you now? Do I still love you? Do you still love me?

PTSD – The emotional whirlwind is not expected by either one. Spouse may have to financially support them both – strain, resentment. Spouse acts as caretaker and buffer to outside world.

Spouse can develop secondary PTSD. Spouses “tour of duty” does not end.

Brotherhood – the war experience bonds troops like nothing else because the situation is so urgent and ultimate. Spouses often feel as though they are in competition with this bond, which seems to supercede the marital relationship.