



Research Report

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The Impact of OPTEMPO on Soldiers and Families

Since the end of the Cold War, soldiers have been involved in an increasing number of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. Because of the concurrent force reduction, the same soldiers are often asked to deploy on multiple, consecutive missions. There are many concerns about the toll such operational tempo (OPTEMPO) has on soldiers and their adaptation to the military. Despite these concerns, there is no previous research on the relationship between OPTEMPO and the psychological health of the forward-deployed soldier. In the OPTEMPO survey, we wanted to determine 1) what is a good measure of OPTEMPO, and 2) what impact OPTEMPO has on career intentions and well-being.

BACKGROUND

In 1997, the U.S. Army Medical Research Unit-Europe surveyed soldiers and leaders stationed in Germany while they were deployed to the Bosnia Theater. Of the 2,256 respondents, 88% were male and 13% female. With regard to rank, 50% were junior enlisted soldiers, 36% were senior enlisted soldiers, and 14% were officers. Most of the soldiers were active duty (91%), although 8% were reservists and 1% were from the National Guard. The average number of years of service was 6.7 years. The respondents served in the combat arms (45%), combat support (29%), combat service support (23%), and at division or higher Headquarters (4%). More than half (52%) were married, and 47% had one or more children living at home.

MEASURING OPTEMPO

How should OPTEMPO be measured? We asked soldiers how often they had been deployed. When this number was simply added up, it was not surprising that we found that the longer soldiers had served in the military, the more deployments they had been on (Figure 1). However, when we took the "deployment load" into account, meaning that the total number of deployments was averaged across the number of years of service, the results were quite different

Figure 1: Average Number of Deployments and Years of Service

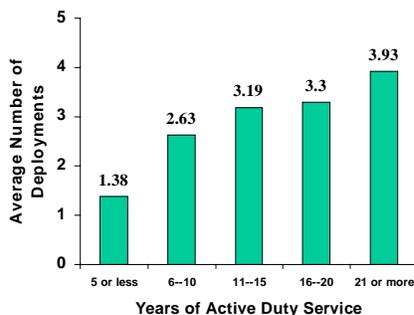
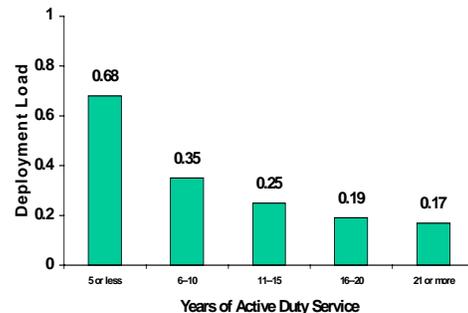


Figure 2: Deployment Load: Average Number of Deployments Per Year by Years of Service



(Figure 2). We found that soldiers with fewer years of service actually had a greater deployment load than those with more service. That is, although soldiers with fewer years of active duty have been on fewer deployments, **their rate per year of service is higher**. It is also important to note that the difference in deployment load was not simply due to rank differences. In summary, deployment load is a more effective way of measuring OPTEMPO because it takes into account the *rate* at which these deployments have been occurring.

PROJECTING DEPLOYMENT RATES

What if we project deployment rates? At the current rate of deployment load, soldiers entering the military today will go on an average of 14 deployments by the time they serve 21 years or more in the service. This projected rate means that a soldier can expect to deploy once every 18 months. Such a projection is in sharp contrast to the rates reported by soldiers with 21 years or more of service. These soldiers report a total of 4 deployments in their 21-year career, or an average of one deployment every 71 months (or about once every 6 years).

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

- ∃Active duty soldiers have a higher deployment load than Reserve and National Guard soldiers.
- ∃Lower enlisted soldiers have a higher deployment load than NCOs and officers.
- ∃Over half of the soldiers (54%) with families agree that the number of deployments has put a big strain on their family, and 28% agree that it has hurt the stability of their marriage.
- ∃33% of soldiers intending to get out of the military after their current obligation report they are doing so because there are too many deployments.
- ∃Deployment load was related to lower levels of motivation and pride in the Army and the unit.
- ∃Deployment load was not related to personal morale and unit cohesion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list of recommendations is provided to leaders as a way to reduce the impact of deployment load, thus easing the strain of OPTEMPO on soldiers and their families:

- ∃Consider burnout as a function of "deployment load"
- ∃Use "deployment load" as the basis for limiting number & length of deployments for soldiers
- ∃Recognize the cost of "deployment load" on retention, and target junior enlisted soldiers
- ∃Eliminate disparities in deployment length across the services
- ∃Tell soldiers up front what to expect on deployments, and keep telling them
- ∃Provide more information to soldiers on the purpose of the mission
- ∃Ensure that leaders explain the importance of all tasks, including the mundane (e.g. guard duty)
- ∃Reward soldiers for deploying on peacekeeping operations
- ∃Guarantee soldiers time-off after redeployment
- ∃Support soldiers and families by providing more time in garrison before deployment
- ∃Provide additional family time to prepare for separation and reunion

Reference: Adler, A. B., Bartone, P. T., & Castro, C. A. (1997). *OPTEMPO/Burnout II Survey: Final Report*, prepared for The Inspector General, 1 ID. U.S. Army Medical Research Unit-Europe. For more information contact MAJ Carl A. Castro, Commander, USAMRU-E, DSN: 371-2626/2007. This research report was prepared by Amy B. Adler, Ph.D. and Evelyn H. Golembe, M.A. The DTIC number for this research report is **ADA 365 393**.