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A PSYCHOTHERAPY PROGRAM FOR SOLDIERS DEPENDENTS: THE EFFECT ON RECALL RATES. "THEY ARE NOT GOING FOR THREE WEEKS AND THE FIGHTING HAS ALREADY BEGUN!"

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Introduction: Deployment to conflict areas poses problems for service families. These stressors pose a high cost from increased rates of marital / family break-up and the impact on operational effectiveness, through early recall from combat zones. Soldiers look forward to a mission whilst partners are more ambivalent. The time before deployment is hard on those who stay behind, who experience high levels of anxiety. Those about to be deployed feel guilty, and have to manage their own anxieties about what the mission will bring - hard work, excitement and danger. Most do not talk about this to their partners, who in turn have to manage their own inner turmoil and worst case 'fantasies'.

Aims: The project grew from concerns about the welfare of families of deployed army personnel.

Objectives: The project aimed to help them develop a greater capacity to manage, contain and function with these worries. The program provided psychodynamic psychoanalytic practices to a previously neglected group that was not wholly army, but is essential to its well-being.

Methods: The program gave the families a greater understanding of the emotional difficulties faced by their partners before, during and after deployment and lessened the stress in their relationships; strengthening their own and their partners' sense of self, resilience, and the marital bond.

Results: Usually 3-5% of a unit would be recalled from combat operations, over the duration of a tour, this was reduced to 1%.

Conclusion: A psychotherapy programme for the families of soldiers reduces attrition rates.