

Literature review on army reserve components' dual identities



As the largest component of the military branch, the United States Army has pulled the bulk of deployment duties since September 11, 2001. The Army reserve components consisting of National Guard and Reserves fought alongside active duty component during the nation's wars (Wenger, O'Connell, & Cottrell, 2018). Despite being advertised as "weekend warriors" who supposedly serve one weekend a month and two weeks during the summer, that title is no longer fitting for the reserve components. According to Wenger, O'Connell, and Cottrell's 2018 study, reserve components deployed over 529,000 Soldiers overseas and of those number, 141,000 reservists had more than one deployment under their belt. The implication of this research is understanding how the varying nature of the Army reserve service can impact the servicemembers and their families. With significant number of reservists playing the role of active duty soldiers, the question comes about their well-being, transition, stressors, and reintegration process.

Studies have looked at active duty soldiers' transitions back to civilian life and their mental health issues, but few studies have researched the impacts on the reserve soldiers. Related to the research question, a qualitative study on Israeli's combat reservist showed that soldiers stressed or had conflicts about family separation, readjustment to the military life, getting ready to fight, panic about the war, and finally transition back to home with a sense of disconnection (Lander, Huss, & Harel-Shalev, 2019). One thing to note is that Israel has a compulsory military service for all citizens and those who have served in combat may be transitioned to serve in the reserves (Lander, Huss, & Harel-Shalev, 2019). Even though American military is voluntary, soldiers

have no choice over when and where they are going to be deployed while serving. In Castaneda, Harrell, Varda, Hall, Beckett, and Stern's 2008 study, American reserve components experienced range of stressors during their pre-deployment status. In this qualitative study, researchers identified that some of the main concerns that reservist and their family have are finance, redistribution of family roles, health care, and mental health issues (Castaneda, Harrell, Varda, Hall, Beckett, & Stern, 2008). When ordered to active duty, reservists have to pause their civilian lives. This means some soldiers have to leave their newborns or pass their recent promotion to another coworker or take a gap year if they were pursuing higher education. Looking at both studies, the same research question emerges regarding how reservists manage their dual identities in between transitions.

In Sripada, Walters, Forman, Levine, Pfeiffer, Bohnert, Emerson, and Valenstein's 2017 study, 78 Army National Guard soldiers went through a semi-structured interview to identify common themes of struggle after deployment. This study revealed that top mental health issues soldiers struggled with were anger and irritability, followed by alcohol abuse, which was utilized as a coping mechanism (Sripada, Walters, Forman, Levine, Pfeiffer, Bohnert, Emerson, & Valenstein, 2017). Other common themes that came out of the research were culture shock, emotional withdrawal, and lack of help-seeking behaviors (Sripada et. al., 2017). Another big concern amongst the soldiers were job security and financial issues, which included not having a stable job after return, living on unemployment support, and/or bias against veterans (Sripada et. al., 2017). Most importantly, Sripada's 2017 research revealed only 27% of the interviewed soldiers reported easy

transition from deployment to civilian life. The identified problems provide good examples of how reservists experience issues that active duty soldiers are experiencing in addition to their own issues regarding multiple transitions. Research even described reservists to be “ transmigrants” for moving back and forth between the two worlds (Lomsky, Gazit, Ben-Ari, 2008)). The constant switch from one culture to another is a legitimate concern that emerges as a transitional issue, especially when soldiers move from a collective, male-dominated society to more individualistic, emotion-based home settings.

Sripada’s 2017 study compares well with Kukla, Rattray, and Salyer’s 2015 study which interviewed 40 veterans with both combat and noncombat experiences throughout multiple wars (e. g. Vietnam, Desert Storm, OIF/OEF). In this mixed method research, researchers identified veterans who all had mental health diagnosis, but they found veterans with combat experience to have significantly more perceived barriers to finding employment (Kukla, Rattray, & Salyers, 2015). From the interview, the common themes that emerged were health-related issue, transition difficulties, relationship issues, workplace adjustments, and self-identity issues (Kukla, Rattray, & Salyers, 2015). Despite varying degrees of military involvement, these veterans pointed to the fact that military to civilian life transition was not an easy task. Observing this literature helped to validate reservists’ identified struggles because both components experienced very similar issues.

Studies have revealed reservists experience similar deployment stressors as the active duties as well as post-military transitional issues. For reservists, <https://assignbuster.com/literature-review-on-army-reserve-components-dual-identities/>

constant reintegration to both worlds was a huge stressor. Family separation was another theme that emerged looking at the reserve component. Previous study comparing active duty and reserves Gulf War veterans revealed that despite having no significant difference in the warzone, reservists had more interpersonal stressors such as family separation (Vogt, Samper, King, D., King, L., & Martin, 2008). Further study on American army reservists needs to be conducted to understand their experiences and stressors in the warzone, family life, and transition from military to civilian life.

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