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# Military Wife Participation in the Family Readiness Group During the Deployment Cycle

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Donetta D. Quinones

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2019

Abstract

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by

Donetta D. Quinones

MS, Walden University, 2009

BA, University of Maryland, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

A comparative review of statistical summary results of the Survey of Army Families demonstrated that there is a gap in the research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in the Family Readiness Group (FRG).  The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to supplement the limited amount of scholarly research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives and their lack of participation in the FRG during the deployment cycle.  The theoretical framework of this study explored the military family syndrome through application of the double ABCX model in examining this phenomenon.  The foundational research question inquired about the deployment-related emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in a FRG.  Phenomenological interviews with 5 civilian military wives narrowed the gap in research as their specific experiences with the FRG of their soldier's unit were analyzed and coded to identify different categories and themes.  Study results suggested that familiarity with the deployment cycle was a crucial determinant in how civilian military wives experience the deployment cycle and perceive the use of the FRG as a source of support.  The perceived detached communication and engagement of the FRG organization and its leaders were also found to be contributing factors to civilian military spouse participation.  The implications of these findings for positive social change are to inform FRG leadership of the importance of addressing the needs of new and seasoned civilian military wives to foster a more favorable perception of the organization and to promote the potential participation of new members.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I wholeheartedly believe and stand on the scriptural promise that his plans are to prosper me and not to harm me, plans to give me hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). There were times I wavered and wanted to give up, yet this promise has fortified my pursuit and accomplishment of this doctoral degree. This scriptural promise along with the knowledge that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13), has built up my determination to let His light shine bright in the midst of darkness (Isaiah 58:5; John 8:12). May I inspire others with words of wisdom that provides healing to their soul (Proverbs 16:24; Luke 9:11).

I also dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Luis and children, Dante, Saraiya, and Delan. Luis, you are a walking example of perseverance and determination. You have been my biggest cheerleader on this journey. You have supported me in every way possible and sacrificed to make sure that this accomplishment was made possible. Quinones kids you are my legacy and this accomplishment is my demonstration that you can do whatever you set your mind towards accomplishing.

I want to thank my parents, Luke and Valerie Bennett, for their encouragement and support during this journey. I am grateful to be a first-generation representative of the family to surpass societal expectations to move forward with this academic achievement. To my Aunt, Nina Villegas Laboard, I appreciate your love, support, and self-sacrifice you've demonstrated so I can achieve this goal. To my relatives, friends, and peers who have lent a kind word of encouragement and support on this journey, "Thank You!"

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

**Introduction**

The need of the civilian wife of a military service member to feel connected to people during times of war is a natural part of the human condition.  An extended period of disconnection between civilian military wives and their soldier causes them to need support.  The Family Readiness Group (FRG) has been an active support network for this population during military-related deployment of soldiers throughout U.S. history (Grace, 2012).  On July 21, 2006, the FRG became official as a Department of the Army (DA) organization with statutory and regulatory guidelines in Army Regulation (AR) 608-1-Appendix J of the Army Family Readiness Group Operations.  These guidelines outline the need to support Army family members during war and deployment (Di Nola, 2008; Grace, 2012).  Civilian military spouses can connect with other military wives within their assigned units and communities as they gather relevant information about unit events and future deployments (Army OneSource, n.d.; Grace, 2012).  According to social support researchers (Coll et al., 2011; De Burgh et al., 2011; Devoe & Ross, 2012), further research is needed to address deployment-related emotional experiences of the civilian wife of military service members who do not participate in the FRG.

The deployment cycle of a civilian military wife is a significant element to learning how the military family adjusts to unpredictable circumstances.  The civilian military wife experiences contextual stressors relevant to the deployment cycle.  One such contextual stressor involves the unit support that comes in the form of the FRG (Devoe & Ross, 2012).  The absence of comfort from this military-mandated social

support organization can further affect their ability to function during the deployment

cycle (Devoe & Ross, 2012).  Nondeployed civilian military wives report experiencing

various emotional and behavioral symptoms of stress that impacts their functioning

during the deployment cycle.  These negative symptoms influence parent and children

mutual attachment (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

The FRG can influence the emotional and behavioral symptoms of stress during the

deployment cycle; however, there is an insufficient amount of research that yields insight

into civilian military wives' perception of their need to participate in the FRG.  The FRG,

as an extension of the military unit, can serve civilian military wives in getting the

emotional support they need from the military command during the deployment cycle

(Grace, 2012).  I examined the Survey of Army Families (SAF) (U.S. Army Community

and Family Support Center & U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social

Sciences (CFSC & ARI), 2006; U.S. Family Morale Welfare Recreation Center

(FMWRC), 2010), an Army-wide survey carried out every four to five years and found

numerous civilian military wives remain in need of help on the home front during the

deployment cycle.  The SAF provided statistical data and background information on

heterosexual civilian wives of active duty soldiers (FMWRC, 2010).  The report provided

statistical support in determining how the FRG, as a military social support organization,

handled the fundamental responsibility of working with the civilian military wife during

the deployment cycle.  The emerging data illustrated the discoveries of several

researchers who claim that civilian military wives lack the skill and knowledge required

to maneuver through the deployment of the soldier (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Eeriness et al.,

2012; Sinclair et al., 2011).  The Department of the Army (DA) commissioned the FRG

to help military families with matters that emerge during deployment (Grace, 2012).

Researchers have established that these civilian military wives are not receiving the

guidance and services needed during the deployment cycle (CFSC & ARI, 2006;

FMWRC, 2010).  Researchers have demonstrated a need for further investigation on how

the FRG can address the deployment-related emotional experiences of civilian military

wives (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010).

   In this chapter I introduce vital factors connected to the dilemma under

investigation in this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study.  I impart an

awareness of the background of the problem to provide the reader with a foundational

basis for understanding the formation of the FRG, the influence of the deployment cycle

on the civilian military wife, and the problem with previous research by the DA on the

topic.  I give a statement of the problem to describe how previous research on the civilian

military wife and the FRG unsuccessfully explained the small measure of the presence of

civilian military wives in the FRG.  I present the introduction of the research question to

give attention to the response I endeavored to bring out through the study.  An

examination of the purpose of the study adds further understanding as to what inspired

me to examine this phenomenon within the military community.

   I include other sections in the chapter that facilitate further understanding of the

problem.  I endeavor to provide the reader with an appreciation of those fundamental

arguments for civilian military wife participation in the FRG in the conceptual framework

of the study.  The key-terms section describes those phrases that remain essential in

helping the reader to comprehend the matter dealt with in the study. I examine important assumptions and limitations to inform the reader of circumstances as they relate to the study. I provide a review of the scope and delimitations of the study within this chapter to help readers to recognize the key factors undertaken in subsequent chapters. I discuss the significance of the study to provide the reader with an understanding as to how the problem is addressed through the study. Closing the chapter, a summary of essential elements of the study addresses vital research topics reviewed in the following chapter.

## Background of the Problem

Through a summary of the research literature, I offer readers a general scope of the topic. I describe the current gap in knowledge existing in the mental health community for this population. I also demonstrate how this study addressed this gap in knowledge by describing the need for this study.

Although soldier deployments have occurred since the Revolutionary War (Grace, 2012), discussions concerning the military-family dynamic gained prominence in the last few decades as researchers reviewed the impact of deployment on the military family (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Eeriness et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2011). The military family can expect to experience a reduced amount of parental support upon the soldier's absence from the family environment due to these military separations (Lagrone, 1978, McFarlane, 2009). Military deployment is a nonstandard military separation that can present some level of loss (financial, support, life, etc.) and uncertainty to the civilian military wife within the military environment (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass & Grass, 2007).

Conflict-induced separations cause several specific issues that render deployments to be abnormal to the military family during a period of war (McFarlane, 2009). According to MacFarlane (2009), these issues include stressors experienced by the civilian military wife and child, child separation from the military parent, emotional detachment experienced by family members, changes in roles and responsibilities, and the reintegration and reestablishment of the family upon return of the military parent. Further review of the abnormal nature of these issues would demonstrate how the deployment cycle impacts the civilian military wife to the point of influencing the parenting deployment cycle (Devoe & Ross, 2012).

The mental health and stress of the civilian military wife is a critical component in evaluating child maltreatment during deployment (Gibbs, Martin, Kupper, & Johnson, 2007; McFarlane, 2009). De Burgh, White, Fear, and Iversen (2011) explored the prevalence of mental health disorders and help-seeking behaviors of military wives. This population is reported to have increased rates of "depression, anxiety disorders, sleep disorders, acute stress reaction, and adjustment disorders" (De Burgh et al., 2011, p. 193). The problematic behavior among children in military families intensifies the stress and mental health of civilian military wives (Gibbs et al., 2007; Kelley, 1994, Lagrone, 1978). One study of the mental health and help-seeking behaviors of civilian military wives informed that 88.5% of Army wives from one FRG reported a willingness to seek help for mental health issues (Warner, Appenzeller, Warner, & Grieger, 2009).

The FRG may be a possible resource for obtaining data on the emotional needs of the civilian military wife during the deployment cycle. One argument against the use of

the FRG as a resource for military family data is that the FRG is one of the most under-utilized resources of those wives who may be the most psychologically at-risk of experiencing mental health issues (De Burgh, 2011).  Mental health and stress levels of civilian military wives are essential factors in measuring the crisis state of the military family during deployment.  According to De Burgh (2011), reduced participation in the FRG by civilian military wives who may be at-risk of developing or experiencing psychopathology during the deployment cycle has significant ramifications.  The lack of their participation in the FRG has important implications because the FRG is an Army-sponsored program assigned to support military families during the deployment cycle (Grace, 2012).

The Survey of Army Families (SAF) is an Army-wide study conducted every four or five years by agencies within the Department of Defense.  The U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC) worked with the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) to deliver the 2004/2005 version of the SAF, the SAF 5th edition (SAFV).  The U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command (FMWRC) organized the most recent SAF survey, the SAF sixth edition (SAFVI), in 2010.  The 2004/2005 data source for the SAFV looked at 24,793 wives of Army soldiers for a 43% response rate from this population.  The agencies evaluated survey results based on the overall Army wife population (218,536).  The 2010 study had a decreased representation of respondents with 16,805 Army wives at a 28% response rate from this population.  They evaluated survey results based on an increased number in

the total Army wife population (269,745).  Demographics from both surveys disclose that

an estimated 96-97% of the civilian wives of soldiers are female.

The overall key findings from these two official surveys established that despite

the availability of military support services, 38% of civilian military wife respondents of

the 2004/2005 survey (CFSC & ARI, 2006) reported viewing FRGs as a helpful program

during deployment.  This percentage decreased to 36% in the 2010 survey (FMWRC,

2010).  Further review of the results of both surveys does not provide an understanding of

civilian military wife perception of the FRG or how the FRG is used by military wives

(CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010).

Research on the deployment cycle and civilian military wives provided insight

into the statistical findings on deployment-related issues impacting the military family.

The SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) provided statistical information on civilian military wife

use of military social support organizations such as the FRG.  An examination of the

FRG as a social organization can inform others how the organization (CFSC & ARI,

2006; FMWRC, 2010) can be helpful during the deployment cycle.

A comparative review of statistical summary results of both surveys demonstrated

that there is a gap in the research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives

who do not participate in the FRG.  The SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) reviewed important

variables that may influence military wife participation.  A summary of the results

provided a generalized review of the top reasons civilian military wives did not

participate in FRG activities (CFSC & ARI, 2006).  The SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010)

provided information as to the existence or nonexistence of an active FRG; however, it

did not review spousal participation, which is defined as attending meetings or the provision of service as leaders. There was no apparent attempt to capture the research from the SAFV to help further understand changes in the spousal use and participation in support services within the summary of the SAFVI.

Despite the possible advantages of the FRG, the SAFVI reported that civilian wives of currently deployed soldiers who mentioned having an active FRG were less likely to participate in FRG meetings than civilian wives of recently deployed and non-deployed soldiers (FMWRC, 2010). Di Nola (2008) reported that civilian military wives did not use programs because of the possibility of being labeled as being unable to manage obstacles. The SAFVI results illustrated that nonuse of programs was the fall out of the decrease of communication from leaders, the slow dissemination of information from leaders, cliques, gossip, drama, and limited group activities within the FRG. The survey conducted by Di Nola corroborated with this research on the minimal participation of civilian military wives in the FRG. Studies on the topic are limited with no research available on Di Nola's suggestion for the addition of mental health professionals in meetings to provide support during deployment. This alternative should be explored as a plan for supporting civilian military wives during the deployment cycle.

One may consider how civilian military wives can change their perception of the FRG to receive the support needed to avoid the effects of stress, trauma, or danger to the military family unit (Devoe & Ross, 2012). The influences of social engagement between civilian military wives during deployment have not been given a large amount of attention in research because of civilian military wives experiencing difficulty socializing

during this period (Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010; Vormbrock, 1993). This phenomenological study was required to move beyond the statistical report of the variables in the SAF and to explore the emotional experiences of those civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle. Findings can be used to assist in learning the civilian military wife's opinion of their participation in the FRG and whether their perception of their involvement could facilitate or limit their emotional experience during the deployment cycle.

## Problem Statement

Challenges associated with civilian military wives during the deployment cycle have a culture-specific influence on their participation in the FRG (Coll et al., 2011; De Burgh et al., 2011; Devoe & Ross, 2012; Gibbs et al., 2007; Huebner et al., 2007; Lagrone, 1978; McFarlane, 2009). A breakdown in interaction between the FRG and the civilian military wife was hypothesized to be a source of complications in their ability to obtain military unit support during the deployment cycle (Figley, 1993; Kelley, 1994; Gabany & Shellebager, 2010; Marnocha, 2012). These complications and demands on civilian military wives led many investigators to endeavor to gain more understanding about the risk and resiliency of this population during military deployment (Berlin & Cassidy, 1999; Di Nola, 2008; Gibbs et al., 2007; Kelley, 1994; Lester et al., 2010; Lester et al., 2016; Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013; Vormbrock, 1993). These researchers stated that the provision or suspension of deployment-related information from the soldier's military unit through the FRG would have a direct impact on the general well-being of the civilian military wife (Lester & Mogil, 2013; Vasilas, 2009; Warner, 2009).

Investigators noted that deployments have a negative effect on the mental and physical health of civilian military wives with this population reporting elevated levels of anxiety and depression during the deployment cycle (Fields, Nichols, Martindale-Adams, Zuber, & Graney, 2012; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010). Investigators used quantitative research, from military-funded programs, to accumulate data to interpret these struggles of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle (CFSC &ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010). The results provided data demonstrating the minimal percentage of civilian military wives who consider the FRG as an effective program during the deployment cycle (CFSC &ARI, 2006; Caliber, 2006). Researchers further established that civilian military wives who consist of the most psychologically at-risk for experiencing or developing a psychopathology may not participate in the FRG during deployment (De Burgh, 2011; Warner et al., 2009).

This transcendental phenomenological research study addressed the gap in literature regarding the need to focus on the deployment-related emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG. The significant levels of stress on the military wife in comparison to her civilian counterpart places the military family at a higher risk of experiencing deployment-related emotional difficulties (Lester et al., 2016; Marnocha, 2012). Insufficient social support providing opportunities for social or psychological interventions will only intensify the stress levels of the civilian military wife during the deployment cycle (Fields et al., 2012; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010, Marnocha, 2012).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to supplement the limited amount of scholarly research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives and their lack of participation in the Family Readiness Group (FRG) during the deployment cycle. The focus of the study was to fill the gap in current scholarly research on how civilian military wives perceive the FRG, as a social support organization, during the deployment cycle. I anticipated that personal interviews would increase the knowledge and understanding of the real-world management of deployment-related emotional difficulties of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle. I anticipated that interviews would provide insight into whether these emotional difficulties influence the perception of their willingness to participate in the FRG during the deployment of the soldier. The fundamental idea was to provide scholarly research resulting in positive social change as a result of my contribution to the current scholarly research.

**Research Question**

The following research question framed this qualitative study: What are the deployment-related emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in an FRG at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State?

**Conceptual Framework**

Historical review of the impact of stress on the military family has led researchers such as Reuben Hill (1958), Don Lagrone (1976), Hamilton I. McCubbin (1976), and Joan M. Patterson (1983) to research psychological and physiological outcomes of war-

related stress on family functioning. Exploration of the concept of the military family syndrome (Lagrone, 1978) provided insight into the application of the ABCX model (Hill, 1958) and the double ABCX model (McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson, & Robertson, 1976; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) in exploring the emotional experiences of civilian military wives. The application of the ABCX model and the double ABCX model helped in gaining an understanding of the behavioral patterns of current civilian military wives dealing with war-related stress during the deployment cycle.

Lagrone (1978) conceptualized the impact of the military culture on the civilian military wife and the military family unit in his discussion of the *military family syndrome.* This method of understanding the military culture provided insight into the behavioral health issues arising from military-related separation. The military family syndrome also highlighted culture-specific influences on the well-being of the civilian military wife and her influence on the family unit.

The ABCX model (Hill, 1958) and double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) provided a conceptual basis of understanding the implications of stress and the accessibility of resources on the experiences of civilian military wives during deployment. The review of the SAF and its measures demonstrated the need to explore the risks and resiliency factors introduced through these models that are impacting civilian military wives. A transcendental phenomenological study researching these key factors was important when reviewing the stressors and resources impacting the sustainability of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle.

**Nature of the Study**

The implementation of a transcendental phenomenological research framework provided a foundational basis of understanding the genuine experiences of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle.  I solicited five heterosexual civilian military wives with children, who resided in or around Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), and has not participated in the FRG of their soldier's unit during the deployment cycle.  Their active duty soldier was stationed at JBLM when they previously experienced deployment and they met the deployment criteria outlined in this study.  I applied the research method of Collaizi (1978), which was composed of a seven-step method for collecting and analyzing qualitative data.  Through personal interviews, thematic statements on the emotional experiences of this population during deployment were collected to analyze and determine their explicit meanings.  To gather the data necessary to understand the phenomenon, I applied similar methods from the Caliber study on the same military installation where the research was conducted (Caliber, 2006).  I used a Community Intercept Survey (CIS) to gather data on potential candidates.  This survey provided data collected from civilian military wives in the military community to supplement phenomenological interviews.  Candidates chosen based on participant criteria were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview.  I audio recorded and transcribed each interview while recording reflections, ideas, and thoughts about possible thematic connections during the interview.  Subsequent to the interview, I proceeded to describe and interpret the civilian military wife experiences through the ongoing review of survey results, interview responses, and researcher journal reflections for thematic experiences

of research participants. I probed the participant to explore, and examine their experiences, and I asked participants questions for further enlightenment on the phenomenon. This method helped to confirm the reliability of the data collected through discussion with the participant. The results and analysis of the data collected revealed those factors that may be necessary to influence positive change in the emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle.

My goal for this phenomenological approach was to improve the limitation of scholarly research on the stressors and adjustments of civilian military wives. Exploration of these concepts through the ABCX model and the double ABCX model (Hill, 1958; McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson, & Robertson, 1976; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) provided insight into the perspective and experiences of participants who gave their individual perspectives of their interpretation of their deployment-related emotional experiences and participation in the FRG (Lester, 2010). The in-depth review of participant responses and an analysis of the data provided me with the opportunity to understand thematic motivations and actions of research participants. Selection of research participants through purposeful sampling provided the opportunity to understand thematic motivations and actions while getting to the root of what has been determined to be conventional wisdom among members of this population. I recruited participants through social media and word of mouth to obtain a substantial sample of civilian military wives from JBLM, Washington.

**Definition of Terms**

*Civilian military wife***:**  The heterosexual civilian wife of an active duty male

soldier who is currently serving in the United States Army.  She is an at-home caregiver

of the military family during the deployment cycle. (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Erbes, Meis,

Polusny & Arbisi, 2012; Hill, 1958; McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson, & Robertson,

1976; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983)

*Deployment cycle***:**  The series of deployment-related phases involving events and

stressors beginning from the time when the military service member is informed of a

pending deployment (pre-deployment), to the time when military service member

deploys (deployment phase), through a period when the service member returns home

(post-deployment) and reintegrates into the family system (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Riggs &

Riggs, 2011).

*Emotional cycle of deployment***:**  The transitional phases of deployment that

military personnel and their families experience emotionally as they encounter the

various phases of deployment (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Erbes, Meis, Polusny & Arbisi,

2012).

*Family readiness group (FRG)***:** An official DA organization mandated to provide

mutual aid to the military command, soldiers, and military family members (Grace,

2012).  According to Grace, the role of the FRG is significant because its mission is to act

as an extension of the unit through the provision of official and accurate command

mandated information, advocate for the efficient use of those community resources made

available to military families and assist military families with solving problems at the

lowest level of the chain of command.

*Internal working model (IWM)***:** Mental representations one develops of themselves and others during early attachment relationships.  These dynamic mental representations are brought forward as an internal template to help cope with stress, regulate emotions, and moderate interactions in current relationships (Riggs & Riggs, 2011)**.**

*Parental competence*:  Determinants that elucidate the parenting cycle of deployment.  These include (a) parental characteristics (i.e. - mental status), (b) developmental and temperamental status of the child, and (c) sources of contextual stress and support (Devoe & Ross, 2012, p.184)**.**

*Parenting cycle of deployment***:**  The transitional phases parents encounter during the various phases of deployment (Devoe & Ross, 2012).

*Survey of army families (SAF)***:**  An Army-wide assessment used to determine the "effectiveness of the Army's support for soldiers and their families" (FMWRC,p.1). Data collection included information on the attitudes and behaviors of nonmilitary wives of active duty soldiers with reference to their quality of life in the Army environment.  The survey also assists in the identification of emerging family issues, the determination of progress in resolving Army Family Action Plan issues and is used to supplement other studies that are conducted on Army families (FMWRC, 2010).

**Assumptions**

Throughout the interview process, I assumed that research participants would feel comfortable with me as a current civilian military wife.  I also assumed that participants

would be forthcoming in their presentation of biases towards the FRG based on rumors and perceptions shared by fellow civilian military wives. I also assumed that participant familiarity with my biases towards the FRG, would influence their responses by providing conventional wisdom as to the current climate of the military family culture during the deployment cycle. In addition, I assumed that previous experiences with other FRG units on different military installations could impact the research participants' willingness to participate in the FRG of their soldiers' current unit.

### Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was the number of civilian heterosexual military wives with soldiers who experienced or who were experiencing deployment within the past 18 months. The length of deployment will be not less than nine months. The primary focus of this study was the actual experiences of five civilian military wives with children who did not participate in their FRG during the deployment of their soldier. According to the JBLM Population Report (2010), the fiscal year 2016 projected U.S. Army population at JBLM, WA consists of 31,609 soldiers joined by their 53,890 family members. The projected population of Army wives appears to comprise a sufficient sample to locate study participants.

To access potential study participants, I advertised on Facebook and spread the word through contact with other civilian military wives. I concentrated only on those civilian military wives of active duty male soldiers and not on female active duty Army service members who are married to another service member and are at home during deployment. I also did not include single soldiers with significant others who are parents

to their children.  Furthermore, same-sex military couples were not included in this study to provide focus to the participant recruitment.

The emphasis of this study was focused on the Army branch of the Armed Forces and did not include other branches during data collection; therefore, results from this study cannot be generalized to the overall United States Armed Forces.

## Limitations

The study was limited based on the variability found in the units and FRG organizations that exist on any given military base.  The transient nature and demographic make-up of the military community cause variations in the sustainability of the FRG organization in each unit.  The SAF took this into consideration in the inquiry as to whether the soldier's unit has an active FRG.  Civilian military wives may have to communicate with an FRG that does not work directly with their soldiers' chain of command and the civilian military wives of the soldiers in their husbands' unit.

The demographic make-up of the study was also a limitation due to the focus on heterosexual civilian military wives.  Active duty military wives, parents, grandparents, siblings, or romantic partners who may also benefit from the FRG during deployments were not included in this study.  This study did not address male spouses of female soldiers because it was designed to address the demographic reviewed in the research and the SAF.  Most of the information found by me on the topics discussed in this study focuses on the traditional heteronormative military family model of a male soldier and civilian female wife.  The SAF followed this model and did not include the small

population of male spouses of female soldiers due to its small percentage (3%)

(FMWRC, 2010).

As a researcher in this study, there was a potential for bias due to my previous

participation in the FRG as a Key Caller during the deployment of my spouse.  My first-

hand experience with the FRG of my husband could impact my perception of responses

during the study. Recruitment of civilian military wives from FRG organizations that

were not affiliated with my husbands' unit or brigade addressed the potential for bias in

the study.  All interviews were conducted with questions that were reviewed for potential

bias through professional peer-review of the interview questions.  I transcribed and

reviewed all interviews for potential bias prior to the report of results through

triangulation methods such as member checks, which require participants to validate and

confirm transcript data and the interpretation of data.  The feedback provided more

background on initial responses that could further authenticate the initial results obtained

and decrease potential bias.

### Significance

The principle goal of this study was to provide an understanding of the emotional

experiences and motivating factors impacting civilian military wife participation in the

FRG.  This information may be valuable by providing insight into how the FRG can

systematically provide skills development training and evidence-based resources that will

support civilian military wives in their navigation through the deployment process.  This

study presents a focused, solution-oriented approach to filling the gap in research on a

DA organization that is mandated to meet the needs of the military family during the

deployment cycle. The success of this organization accomplishing its mission is contingent upon civilian military wife participation during the deployment cycle.

The study will examine the proposed systematic support of the FRG as it functions as a resource for civilian military wives. Consideration of the civilian military wife perception of the FRG was a focus during the study as participants shared their efforts in coping with the absence of their military soldiers during deployment. I hypothesized that the civilian military wives who obtained systematic support could receive such benefits as decreased stress, skills-development that promoted resiliency, and the promotion of pro-social adjustment-related behaviors in children. These benefits were considered and examined during the study to determine whether research on military wives use of social support organizations could provide the U.S. Army Family and Morale and Recreation Command (FMWRC) with phenomenological insight into the decreased participation of this population in the FRG. The information obtained could provide insight into the low percentage rating of the FRG as a helpful agency among civilian military wives of deployed soldiers in the SAF. Overall, this information may provide an avenue for further research into the emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle.

The social change implications of the expected insight into the lack of participation of civilian military wives in the FRG included the ability to understand how military and civilian social support organizations can train, motivate, and alter negative perceptions or behaviors impacting the behavioral health of military wives during the deployment cycle. The FRG organization is a social change agent that is available to the

Army community.  If this social support structure is not utilized in a highly efficient

manner, the functioning of the military family unit lead by the civilian military wife

during the deployment cycle could deteriorate at a time when the deployed soldier would

need to focus on his duty.  The SAF (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010) demonstrated

an understanding of the need for military families to receive home front support that is

offered by the FRG during the deployment cycle.  Previous qualitative reports

demonstrated a need for a change in the structure of the FRG for civilian military wife

participation.  Further understanding of how to reach the population of military wives

who do not use the FRG during the deployment cycle would help these social change

agents to serve this community better and to ultimately support the Army mission.  The

FRG could utilize the theories on the military family syndrome, the ABCX model, and

double ABCX model to implement organizational change to potentially impact the

sustainability of the military family during the deployment cycle in a more efficient way.

## Summary

The FRG is a DA organization mandated to provide mutual support to the military

organization and family members during a deployment in an effort to offset the

deployment-related stressors impacting the emotional experiences of civilian military

wives.  The effectiveness of this organization in meeting the needs of the military family

is contingent upon civilian military wife participation.  Some researchers view the FRG

as a viable resource for obtaining data on the military family; however, there are those

who believe that the FRG is one of the most underutilized resources of those civilian

military wives who may be deemed the most psychologically at risk of experiencing

mental distress during deployment (De Burgh, 2011; Figley, 1993; Warner et al., 2009).

The SAFV and SAFVI both demonstrated how this population experiences the

psychological and sociological factors contributing to stress during deployment. The

survey summarized the results to delineate how the number of deployments, the length of

deployments, and the potential for future deployments are challenges found to be

problematic to civilian military wives. The SAFVI demonstrated an increase in the

percentage of civilian military wives whose family experienced mental health or marital

issues and a prolonged time of familial post-deployment adjustment upon the soldier

during deployment. The survey summarized the results to delineate how the number of

deployments, the length of deployments, and the potential for future deployments are

challenges found to be problematic to civilian military wives. The SAFVI demonstrated

an increase in the percentage of civilian military wives whose family experienced mental

health or marital issues and a prolonged time of familial post-deployment adjustment

upon the soldier's return home. Both surveys do not provide an understanding of how the

FRG is perceived or used by civilian military wives although they both demonstrate that a

low percentage of civilian military wives view the FRG as a helpful program during

deployment.

A transcendental phenomenological study based on research on the military

family syndrome, the ABCX model and the double ABCX model, was used to explore

the emotional experiences and motivating factors contributing to civilian military wives

who are non-participants in the FRG organization during deployment. The SAFV and

SAFVI provided insight into the experiences of this population; however, it did not provide an explanation for the minimal participation of civilian military wives in the FRG and the low percentage rating for helpfulness among civilian wives of deployed soldiers. The results demonstrated the least participation of this population without further investigation as to the reason for this phenomenon.

In Chapter Two, a comprehensive review of the existing literature increases perceptual awareness of the research and issues involving the military organization. An increased understanding of the deployment cycle and the FRG will provide further insight into the challenges of the civilian military wife during deployment and the need for the FRG as a social support organization. This comprehensive review will provide information and further comprehension of those topics summarized during the evaluation of SAFV and SAFVI.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Introduction**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to supplement the limited amount of scholarly research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives and their lack of participation in the Family Readiness Group (FRG) during the deployment cycle. The existing literature on the deployment cycle and the FRG will be comprehensively reviewed to demonstrate how significant levels of stress and the importance of social support systems represented in the SAF. This examination of the research literature will increase awareness of the issues involving civilian military wives outlined in the SAF (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010). Critical comparison of the current research and statistical literature will increase understanding of the topic. A contrast and synthesis of this information will also provide further insight into the challenges of civilian military wives during deployment. Discussion of findings will demonstrate the shortfall existing in statistical results from the SAF on the civilian military wife experience and their participation in the FRG.

While previous research explored deployment-related issues (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Erbes et al., 2012; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Riggs & Riggs, 2011), further research into the emotional experiences influencing civilian military wife participation in the FRG during the deployment cycle is scarce. The SAF (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010) overlooked factors that may contribute to the reported low percentage of civilian military wife respondents who participated in the FRG during deployment. The SAF also did not evaluate those factors

impacting the low perception of the helpfulness of the FRG. The implications of these results are important because the FRG is an Army-sponsored program that exists to support military families through the deployment cycle. The organization is designed to provide continuity and stability to combat maladjustment and to promote resilience among military families during deployment.

A review of research that demonstrates how the mental health and the stress levels of civilian military wives are significant factors in determining the crisis state of military families during deployment will provide further insight into factors outlined in the SAF (Figley, 1993; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010; Lagrone, 1978; Lester et al., 2016; Marnocha, 2012; Steelfisher, Zaslavsky, & Blendon, 2008). Some researchers propose that those who do not participate in the FRG may be the most psychologically at risk for the development of some form of psychopathology (De Burgh, 2011; Figley, 1993; Warner et al., 2009). In this chapter, I present a comprehensive review of the existing literature concerning the military organization, the deployment cycle, and the FRG. The information provides insight into those deployment-related issues pertinent to the evaluation of the SAF and those factors that provide foundational support into the emotional experiences of the civilian military wife during deployment. An appraisal of this information can help the reader to obtain a comprehensive description of the gap in research on the emotional experiences of military wives who do not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle.

**Organization of the Review**

This literature review includes an overview of collected research on the theoretical discussion of relevant topics referencing the civilian military wife and the deployment cycle. Research literature includes the military culture, the military environment, and the unique stressors experienced by military families during the deployment cycle. I provide a theoretical framework developed from previous military conflicts that describes military culture, military family roles, and the military organization. Other relative literature includes a demonstration of the impact of parental mental health on children during deployment. Further consideration of the potential implications of the emotional experiences of military wives on the military family unit during the deployment cycle provides insight on the need for the FRG as an organizational change agent within the military culture. Subsequently, a review of the supporting literature connects the data reported on the SAF with research on the military population.

**Literature Search Strategies**

The Walden University online library system was used to conduct a literature search that captured various aspects of military culture, military deployment, and military mental health. I reviewed literature relevant to military families and the deployment cycle from databases such as SocIndex with Full Text, SAGE Psychology, EBSCO, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, PsychARTICLES, and Psych INFO, as well as non-Walden University database sources such as Google Scholar and the National Institutes of Health. I used articles referenced in the research as a foundational basis for

further research on relevant topics. Keywords were individually or conjunctionally used

based on the main topic of the study. The referenced terms found in research articles

included: deployment cycle, resilience, attachment theory, military families, ABCX

model, and double ABCX model. The literature search yielded 110 professional articles,

five chapters from topic-related books, and information from two military website

references, all of which helped to provide a further understanding of those factors that

potentially influenced the responses to the SAF.

## Conceptual Framework

Upon review of the concept of the military family syndrome theoretical

perspectives such as the ABCX model, and the double ABCX model, the defining

concept relative to this study is the impact military deployments have on the functioning

and resiliency of the civilian military wife. The military family syndrome was a

phenomenon introduced to demonstrate how the military culture impacts the civilian

military wife. The ABCX and double ABCX models delineate those factors impacting

the resiliency of the military family during deployment. An interpretive review of these

principles can provide an understanding of how these concepts relate to the study.

Lagrone (1978) concluded that the diagnosed behavioral disorders of the children

seen in the military clinics were developed through exposure to issues related to the

military community. Lagrone mentioned civilian military wives stress levels, boundary

ambiguity, and child maltreatment as a contributing factor to behavioral disorders of

children in military communities. McCubbin (1976) noted that emotional and social

accommodations made by civilian military wives during or after military conflict impact

the children's emotional adjustment. Later, McFarlane (2009) presented a current stance on the issue through research that stated that military deployment of parents challenges the children to withstand a series of developmental demands and stressors, such as the realities of warfare and the changes in the roles and responsibilities. The increase of anxiety and depression has been attributed to boundary ambiguity and role confusion among children and adolescents resulting from changes in parental roles and responsibilities (Mansfield et al., 2010; McFarlane, 2009). The changes in parental roles and responsibilities involve the civilian military wife taking on the responsibility as the sole responsible party for the financial, medical, social welfare of the children (De Burgh et al. 2011; Figley, 1993; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2010; McFarlane, 2009; SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, & Blendon, 2008).

The pathological responses of the children in the military home environment involved maternal psychopathology (De Burgh et al., 2011; Lester et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). The civilian military wife takes on more responsibility, which increases the levels of stress (De Burgh et al. 2011; Lester et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; McFarlane, 2009; SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, & Blendon, 2008). Mansfield et al. (2010) conducted a study of the occurrences of mental health disorders in military families and concluded that lengthy deployments are associated with more mental health disorders among U.S. Army wives. Further research showed an increased risk of child maltreatment from the civilian military wife based on increased levels of stress (Lester et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; McFarlane, 2009).

The SAFVI does not reflect findings of an increased risk of child maltreatment based on collected data relating to the civilian military wives' ability to manage child-related tasks and their ability to cope with soldiers absence (FMWR, 2011). The SAFVI reported that two-thirds to nine-tenths of military wives were able to manage child-related tasks such as taking care of their health needs, discipline, participation in activities, and taking care of their children in the home (FMWR, 2011). The survey reported that 59% of wives were coping well or very well during their soldier's absence (FMWR, 2011). Only one-tenth to one-fifth of this population reported an emotional or nervous problem six months from the time of the survey (FMWR, 2011).

The discrepancy between the research and the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) could be the result of the civilian military wife use of community and social supports to manage the emotional effects of the deployment cycle. Those participants in social support programs are found to be beneficial when civilian military wives can get together to receive mutual support and recognition that they were not alone in their experiences (Fischer et al., 2015). Civilian military wives who receive information, skills development, and support with parenting-related issues during and after deployment benefit from this support (Fischer et al., 2015).

Marnocha (2012) conducted a qualitative study to explore the experiences of wives of deployed soldiers to gain insight into their perception of their transition into the deployment cycle, their adaptation during deployment, and their coping skills throughout the deployment cycle. One of the findings of the study was the importance of the military wife receiving community and social support. Marnocha (2012) suggested that

military wives who experience emotional issues due to deployments seek support services such as the FRG and mental health services to obtain emotional support.

The study of war-related stressors influenced Reuben Hill (1958) in his development of the ABCX family crises model. This theoretical perspective attempted to identify those families, conditions, resources, or coping behaviors will help in the ability to adapt to stressful situations (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). The emotional experiences of civilian military wives are stressors because they incorporate life events or occurrences impacting them in such a way that it promotes a crisis in their life (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

Review of the ABCX model gives insight into deployment-related stressors influencing the emotional experiences of civilian military wives. The model proposes that: A (event), B (family crisis), and C (family definition of the event) interact to produce X (the crisis). The ABCX model explains how each civilian military wife determines whether deployment will cause them to experience normative stress with the ability to cope or distress that produces a crisis in their lives. The A would be the military deployment of U.S. Army soldiers and the demands that it places on family members' lives. The B would be those Army Family Support Programs and services noted by the SAF to help civilian military wives and their families to cope with the demands of deployment. The C would be how each family member views their deployment experience.

The SAFVI quoted one wife as stating, "We are proud of our 'soldier' and all that he does and stand beside him and behind him. He does what is asked of him and we will

do what is asked of us.  Hooah!  A proud Army Family" (FMWRC, 2010, p. 13).  Taking

into consideration the interaction of A, B, and C from the reports from the SAFVI

(FMWRC, 2010), it is understandable that those individuals who utilize community and

social supports and have a positive regard for the Army mission would not experience

great distress due to the deployment cycle.

　　　　The contrast between the SAF (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010) and the

research on military families can also be understood through the double ABCX model.

The SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) reported challenges some military families experienced that

would be the X factor in the ABCX model.  Civilian military wives reported

dissatisfaction with the number of deployments their soldiers experience in the SAFVI

(FMWRC, 2010).  They also expressed that there would be an increase in spousal

dissatisfaction should the amount of time of deployment increased for their soldier

(FMWRC, 2010).  SteelFisher et al. (2008) noted that the extensions of military

deployments on civilian military wives increase their levels of stress.  The SAFVI

(FMWRC, 2010) also reported an increase in the percentage of civilian military wives

who reported their family experiencing emotional, nervous, or marital problems and

adjustment issues.  This reported increase is in comparison to the issues reported on the

SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006).

　　　　Based on the double ABCX model, deployment is a stressor and a crisis for the

civilian military wife.  It is a normative crisis based on research findings on the changes

found in the various areas of military family life.  Family outcomes following the impact

of deployment are directly related to the deployment-related stressors that interact with each other.

The Aa factor is the pile-up of stressors and strains that the civilian military wife experiences after a major stressor. Deployment is a demand and a change that impacts the family system, and the Aa factor emerges from the military community. The overall demands of Army life and the deployment-related demands are part of the pile-up that the civilian military wife experiences during the deployment cycle. The experiences of the civilian military wife that contributes to the pile-up during deployment includes personal, work, and child-related tasks, emotional, marital, and financial issues, in addition to dealing with the number of deployments that the military family may experience during a period.

The Bb factor deals with existing or expanded family resources causing the civilian military wife to be capable of meeting the demands and needs of the crisis. The SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) outlined the numerous programs and services provided to military families and the percentage of military families who utilizes them. Out of the various programs and services provided to support the military family, the FRG was found to be the least helpful program.

The Cc factor is reflective of the family values and the previous experiences of the family in dealing with change and crisis. The defining factors are whether the civilian military wife is experiencing the crisis as a normative stress or distress. Family stress is different from the stressor because of the varying ways that the civilian military wife or family unit can perceive a demand. There can be an imbalance in what is determined to

be an actual demand or a perceived challenge that ultimately impacts the civilian military wife or family unit's capability to meet the demand. These perceptions will impact the overall family's functioning. The civilian military wife who understands the demands placed by an event that has positive regard for the ability to cope with the event, and that has the resources to meet those expectations will experience normative stress. If the military wife subjectively defines the situation as being unpleasant and undesirable, then the family functioning would be in a state of family distress.

The Xx factor ultimately demonstrates the outcome of the interaction of these factors through a demonstration of the family unit after adjustment to crisis that impacts the civilian military wife, family members, family system, and military community. The military has utilized results from the previous SAF to promote programs and services to meet the needs of the military family (FMWRC, 2010).

## Literature Review Related to Key Variables

### Overview

Despite the fact that the claims in the argument against the concept of the *military family syndrome* (Lagrone, 1978, p. 1040) researchers concluded that the deployment cycle impacts the emotional and behavioral health of members of the military family (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Sinclair et al., 2011). A review of the deployment cycle demonstrates the need to understand the psychosocial contextual determinants impacting parental competence (Devoe & Ross, 2012). Esposito-Smythers et al. (2011) reported that military families impacted by war-related stress are at risk of developing emotional and behavioral health issues. Civilian military wives can experience mental health

symptoms due to the interrelation of mental health issues that impact family functioning (Lester et al., 2010).

The various phases of deployment bring about various emotional and psychological implications impacting the civilian military wife (Erbes et al., 2012). Each phase of the deployment cycle involves various emotions outlining changes in roles and responsibilities as the civilian military wife encounters the personal reality of the deployment experience. The predeployment phase is a period where the civilian military wife experience intense feelings of shock, disbelief, and worry about the deployment (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). According to Esposito-Smythers et al., the deployment phase is a period where intense emotions subside, and the civilian military wife struggles with various forms of loss, grief, and fear. This phase is also a time when the civilian military wife is required to take on new duties and routines that may not have been customary before deployment (Fischer et al., 2015). Changes in roles and responsibilities cause some family members to report experiencing elevated levels of distress due to deployment-related stressors (Erbes et al., 2012; Fischer et al., 2015; SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, & Blendon, 2008). Erbes et al. stated there are increased rates of the utilization of mental health services and mental health-related diagnoses for civilian military wives and the internalization or externalization of mental health symptoms among children. They are more likely to feel overwhelmed and more likely to visit a doctor due to deployment-related stressors (SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, & Blendon, 2008). The reunion phase brings forth intense emotions of joy, however; some military wives may experience mixed emotions as they anticipate the issues that could result upon the

military soldier's return. The postdeployment and reunification or reintegration phase involves the adjustment issues and problems with reintegration that can occur in many families. This phase places civilian military wives at higher risk for symptoms of many mental health diagnoses resulting from the care or exposure to the military service member (Erbes et al., 2012; Fischer et al., 2015).

The parental competence of the civilian military wife within the military community is contingent upon parental characteristics, developmental and temperamental status of the child, and various sources of contextual stress and support. The civilian military wife experiences social-contextual determinants that impact the level of her parental competence. The civilian military wife must balance social-contextual stressors such as real-time media coverage of wars, unit support at home, and the community's ability to recognize and attend to the needs of the military family. (Devoe & Ross, 2012)

**Parental functioning.** As Lagrone (1978) suggested by the term, "military family syndrome" (p.1040), parental functioning is representative of the emotional experiences during the deployment cycle and affects the emotional and behavioral health of their youth. Parenting within the context of the military community requires the ability to adapt to planned or unplanned transitions that are uniquely associated with deployment (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Lagrone, 1978). Civilian military wives are vulnerable to the development of psychiatric distress compromising the emotional and behavioral health of their children (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Erbes et al., 2012; Kelley, 1994; Lester et al., 2016).

As noted by Marnocha (2012), there is a great quantity of information on the soldier, child, and military family unit in current literature on deployment.  The main issue is the paucity of information on the effect of deployment on the civilian military wife (Cozza, Chun & Polo, 2005; Erbes et al., 2012; Marnocha, 2012; SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, & Blendon, 2008).  Civilian military wives of deployed soldiers experience stages of grief and loss, emotional problems, relationship dysfunction, and related health problems throughout the phases of deployment (Cozza et al., 2005; Erbes et al., 2012; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010; Kelley, 1994; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marnocha 2012). Deployment can be an overpowering experience and process for the civilian military wife, who must deal with military, family, financial, professional, and educational issues impacting the military family unit (Erbes et al., 2012; Figley, 1993; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010; Lagrone, 1978; Lester et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marnocha 2012).

The deployment cycle influences the emotional experiences of the civilian military wife and how the family functions as an inter-relational system (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Erbes et al., 2012; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Riggs & Riggs, 2011).  The civilian military wife can experience increased rate of use of mental health services and elevated rates of internalization and externalization of problematic symptoms among their children (Erbes et al., 2012). Sinclair et al. (2011) described this phenomenon as the "crossover effect" to describe how the experience of the civilian military wife can interrelate to impact the mental health of the family, causing family members to experience symptoms over time.  There are increased rates of child maltreatment in the

home by some civilian military wives during the emotional cycle of deployment (Erbes et al., 2012). The responses to the crossover effect demonstrate how the needs of the parent and child are reciprocal and cumulative as they impact the individual family members, various relationships between family members, and the collective family unit (Devoe & Ross, 2012). There is a buffering effect against danger, stress, and trauma when civilian military wives can fulfill their parental roles through using of social support systems (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Erbes et al., 2012; Fischer et al., 2015; Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013).

The parenting cycle of deployment model describes the adaptation process of the civilian military wife to describe how the realities of the constant adjustment to developmental and social factors impact the military family unit (Devoe & Ross, 2012). The pre-deployment phase is a period that requires the civilian military wife to consider the stability of the family in the context of the pending deployment.  It is a time when she is "looking ahead" (p. 185) at what is viewed as a "holding pattern" (p. 186) for the family (Devoe & Ross, 2012).  This "holding pattern" is due to their inability to begin the adaptation process to pending changes resulting from the future deployment (Devoe & Ross, 2012).

Deployment causes the military service members to begin the process of providing parental support from the war zone; however, the civilian military wife provides parental support within the home environment.  Both parental entities work to address parenting routines despite of the challenges brought on by the nature of deployment (Devoe & Ross, 2012).  The key issue during this process involves the

adaptive nature of civilian military wives during this time. The high prevalence of

civilian military wives developing psychopathology with reports of major depressive

disorders and generalized anxiety disorders (Fields et al., 2012) causes them to develop

an inability to respond to children's distress properly, and their concerns and queries in

varying ways (Devoe & Ross, 2012).

The redeployment period introduces the *surviving the homestretch* phase (Devoe

& Ross, 2012, p.187). This phase results in the military service member continuing to

focus on safety and survival during deployment and the civilian military wife giving in to

the exhaustion from their experience (Devoe & Ross, 2012; SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, &

Blendon, 2008). The civilian military wife becomes concerned about the reunification

process that can bring about various responses from the children. The family members

have an anticipatory experience with notification of the return date of their service

member (Devoe & Ross, 2012).

*Postdeployment* and *reintegration* phases are family-oriented periods of

adjustment that are meant to promote finding new familial routines. The Postdeployment

period is a time that begins with a honeymoon phase that is filled with joy and celebration

for family members. This period can be demanding as the process of reconnection, and

role negotiation demonstrates a need for familial adjustment to changes in family

dynamics (Devoe & Ross, 2012). The reintegration period is a time when the family

"Face Reality and Move Forward" with the incorporation of the deployment-related

experiences of the military service member, civilian military wife, and children (Devoe &

Ross, 2012, p. 187). Throughout each phase, parents attempt to continue to invest in their

children through their relationships and parental efforts to navigate through the process of finding the new normal in their family routine (Devoe & Ross, 2012).

**The deployment cycle and the FRG.**  The FRG is intended to play a pivotal role during the deployment cycle as it works towards providing support to family members, volunteers, and soldiers who belong to the sponsored unit (Di Nola, 2008; myarmyonesource.com).  It functions as a network of communication among the family members, chain of command, and the various military community resources.  One of the crucial roles of the FRG during deployment is to promote a climate of mutual support within the unit and the community by providing outreach and information to family members throughout every phase of the deployment cycle (Di Nola, 2008).  It functions as a vital component in the unit in providing family and soldier readiness for deployment (myarmyonesource.com).

**The FRG and the civilian military wife.**  The FRG is a family support group that historically has been implemented to provide families with the support needed to be equipped to handle those challenges that are often the result of deployment and/or the military lifestyle (Di Nola, 2008, Erbes et al., 2012).  Di Nola (2008) noted that group dynamics of family support groups could impact family members' coping mechanism.  Two key factors of the FRG mission is relates to the advocacy of civilian military wives use of available community resources and to help them to solve problems at the lowest level of the chain of command in their soldiers' unit (Grace, 2012).  The civilian military wife's perception of the FRG is important to the likelihood of the successfulness of the mission of the organization (Huffman, Culbertson, & Castro, 2008).  Bowling and

Sherman (2008) noted the importance of civilian military wives receiving support during the reintegration process of the deployment cycle by nurturing protective factors found in the FRG.

The FRG serves as a community and social support that is a valuable protective factor in promoting mental health (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Erbes et al., 2012). It is an extension of the military unit; providing official and accurate command-related information to benefit the civilian military wife (Grace, 2012). The FRG can provide this population with the necessary support needed to make the challenging lifestyle occurring during deployments more comfortable to manage (Grace, 2012). Erbes et al. (2012) noted the importance of the FRG in reporting the levels of clinical distress in civilian military wives and their provision of information on mental health services during deployment. The FRG provides support and information to civilian military wives for assistance during the deployment cycle (Erbes et al., 2012).

The problem reported by some civilian military wives is the inconsistent provision of support by the FRG (Caliber, 2006). Di Nola (2008) mentioned the 2007 survey that questioned the commitment of support group leaders by family members of deployed soldiers. Issues described by the sample of this survey included "lack of communication from leaders, slow dissemination of information from leaders, cliques within the family support groups (FRG), gossip, drama in the group, and limited group activities" (Di Nola, 2008, p.vi). Caliber (2006) previously reported the same findings in their qualitative follow-up to the 2004/2005 SAFV. These researchers noted that factors

such as those outlined by Di Nola (2008) were characteristics influencing the effectiveness of FRGs on the three installations that were part of their qualitative study.

The findings outlined by Di Nola (2008) led me to conclude that the FRGs face the dilemma of organizational-related issues that will hinder their ability to help civilian military wives to attain family readiness prior, during, and after the deployment cycle. The attainment of family readiness requires them to build a support network that provides preventative services to alleviate feelings of solitude, worry, and despair (SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, and Blendon, 2008). Caliber (2006) noted recommendations from civilian military wives stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA; Fort Eustis, VA; and Caserma Ederle Vicenza, Italy on how the organization could improve. Findings were made available in sufficient time for further evaluation in the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010).

The SAFVI did not reflect the findings of the Caliber report (Caliber, 2006). The SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) reported that civilian military wives ranked the FRG as the least helpful program during deployment. The SAFVI reported weighted results based on a total Army wife population of 269,745. These numbers include wives of officers and enlisted active duty soldiers. The SAFVI reported that only 36% of civilian military wives found the FRG to be helpful (FMWRC, 2010). The SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) also noted that "one-half of wives of currently deployed soldiers were satisfied with the information briefings that are generally hosted by the unit FRG" (FMWRC, 2010, p.5). It also outlined that "over one-third to almost one-half of wives of currently deployed soldiers were satisfied/very satisfied with information briefings" (FMWRC, 2010, p. 5) from FRGs. These included pre-deployment briefings. The review of the research

findings demonstrated that although active FRGs were available for soldiers' unit, civilian military wives of currently deployed soldiers were less likely to participate in the FRG by attending meetings.  Civilian wives of currently deployed soldiers provided a subsequently higher percentage (73%) rating of the FRGs helpfulness to their families as good or fair compared to the civilian wives of the deployed and returned soldiers and civilian wives of the not deployed soldiers. (FMWRC, 2010)

My efforts through this study will be to facilitate considerations of the issues as outlined, promote additional research, and contribute to existing literature on the topic. Further qualitative analysis provides the opportunity to present a compelling case based on research findings.  The analysis will also present the opportunity to bring forth an awareness of those stigmas, paradigms, or stereotypes shaped by the emotional experiences of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle projected onto the FRG organization.

## Gap in the Literature

The comprehensive review of existing research was conducted to gain insight into relevant literature addressing the significant levels of deployment-related stress causing civilian military wives to experience emotional difficulties during the deployment cycle. There are gaps in research that exist on the civilian military wife's perception of the FRG's fulfillment of their goal of serving the military community during the deployment cycle.  In particular, the civilian military wives' emotional experience during the deployment cycle that is statistically represented yet not explored.  The abundance of information on the impact of insufficient social support during deployment and the effect

of insufficient social or psychological interventions inadvertently highlights the importance of the FRG and the inadequate attempts to gather information or attention on the deployment's effect on the civilian military wife (Erbes et al., 2012; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Fields et al., 2012; Fischer et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2016; Sinclair et al., 2011). Research has noted the importance of military wives learning strategies to deal with deployment-related stressors because of their influence on the functioning of the military family during the deployment-cycle (Fischer et al., 2015; Gabany & Shellenbarger, 2010; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marnocha 2012; Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013). As such, I found it most useful to include a review of the military family syndrome, ABCX and double ABCX model, to conceptualize the importance of understanding the need for the FRG in addressing the emotional experiences of the military wife during the deployment cycle.

## Summary

Research supports the "Military Family Syndrome" in that civilian military wives experience a variety of stressors that impact the behavioral health of family members and the family unit. Stress levels, boundary ambiguity, and child maltreatment are contributing factors to the behavioral disorders of the children of civilian military wives in military communities. Various theorists and researchers outlined through their research that the deployment cycle brings about various stressors that can either send civilian military wives into a normative or non-normative crisis with different implications. If civilian military wives have access and utilize resources and social support organizations such as the FRG, they are more capable of handling stressors that

can negate their family situation from reaching crisis proportions. Researchers agreed that social support organizations, such as the FRG, are important in helping civilian military wives to cope with the deployment cycle.

The FRG is a historically based organization with a mission that evolved to address the needs of civilian military wives and their families with the onset of each military conflict. The organization is mandated as a lifestyle approach that would train, motivate, alter negative habits, and promote a positive self-identity during the deployment cycle (Di Nola, 2008). The SAF (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010) and other research (Di Nola, 2008) demonstrated that the FRG has not adequately fulfilled this function as an organization, based on the results from the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) and SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010). It will represent a key step in the comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by civilian military wives during the deployment cycle, which can, in turn, be used to increase the efficacy of the FRG.

The chosen phenomenological approach to the study will be described in chapter 3. The chapter will include the rationale for the chosen research design methodology, means of recruitment, and the selection of the study sample. The chapter will also address the study data collection and data analysis procedures that are associated with the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Method

**Introduction**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to supplement the limited amount of scholarly research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives and their lack of participation in the Family Readiness Group (FRG) during the deployment cycle. The foundational understanding of the implications of emotional experiences of the civilian military wife on their perception of the FRG has implications in the sustainability of the military family during the deployment cycle. This understanding may lead to further research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives and their use of the FRG as a social support during the deployment cycle.

Through the collection of phenomenological data, information describing the various emotional experiences of civilian military wives during deployment provided insight into their perception of the FRG to sustain military family resiliency. The interviews of civilian military wives will enrich the civilian and military professionals' knowledge of how the FRG could potentially be useful in the sustainability of the military family during deployment. The data collected could lead to the FRG implementing the necessary changes that may be needed to inspire positive change in the emotional experiences of military wives as they recognize and accept organizational assistance during deployment.

This chapter describes the research design of this phenomenological study and the methods for participant recruitment. I describe the criteria for recruitment, the ethical

procedures to safeguard participants, and the procedures for data collection.  I also describe my role as the researcher in this chapter.

## Research Design and Rationale

Previous phenomenological research exploring the civilian military wife and the FRG employed the research design of the SAFV (Caliber, 2006, CFSC & ARI, 2006). The studies to address concerns with civilian military wife participation in the FRG in the subsequent SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) have not been conducted to date.  I proposed to learn more about the behavioral patterns statistically quantified and qualitatively studied from the SAFVI by targeting civilian military wife emotional experiences and lack of participation in the FRG (Caliber, 2006, CFSC & ARI, 2006).  Sokolowski (2000) recognized the need to target specific human activity in order to explain behavioral trends demonstrated during human interaction.  The SAFVI provided statistical data representative of the civilian military wife and the FRG that cannot be quantified through research because there is not sufficient research on the civilian military wife emotional experience and non-participation in the FRG during the deployment cycle.

One central research question was the basis for this study: What are the emotional experiences of military wives who do not participate in a Family Readiness Group (FRG) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State?

A qualitative follow-up study was conducted on the 2004/2005 SAFV by Caliber, an ICF company in 2006 to investigate civilian military wife perception and participation in the FRG.  Caliber (2006) suggested the use of qualitative methods to provide insight on civilian military wives' responses to questions outlined in the SAFV.  I believed that

qualitative methods would shed light on their responses to questions on the FRG during

the deployment cycle on the SAFVI. A comparison of the SAFV and SAFVI may

demonstrate the need for further qualitative research on the impact of emotional

experiences of civilian military wives on their limited participation in the FRG.

**Transcendental Phenomenology**

The proposed research study employed a transcendental phenomenological

research approach designed to understand the deployment experience of civilian military

wives. This approach enabled me to obtain a complete description of the civilian military

wife emotional experience during the deployment cycle and their perception of the FRG.

The data obtained provided a foundational basis to analyze and reflect upon those

underlying factors impacting the military wife emotional experience and the potential

impact on their perception of the organization (Moustakas, 1994). This approach allowed

me to obtain specific descriptions through open-ended questions and dialogue with the

participant. I subsequently described the experience through reflective analysis in

addition to the interpretation of the dialogue (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014). The

information obtained provided real life experiences that illuminate the phenomena

statistically outlined in the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010).

The current military climate requires civilian military wives to become acquainted

with the demands of the deployment cycle. The research previously presented

demonstrated that the experiences of each civilian military wife are subjective (De Burgh

et al. 2011; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; McFarlane, 2009). Civilian military

wives were asked to relate their perspective and overall experience with the deployment

cycle and the FRG in one qualitative study (Caliber, 2006). These insightful accounts provided detail about their experiences during deployment as they expressed ways the FRG leaders could improve their level of commitment to those whom they serve (Di Nola, 2008).

The existing literature did not provide sufficient information on civilian military wives' perspective of the functioning and role of the FRG in helping them with their emotional adjustment to new roles, responsibilities, and stressful experiences during the deployment cycle. The qualitative research did not seek to understand the emotional experiences of military wives during the deployment cycle nor did it identify their perception of the fulfillment of the FRG mission during deployment which is to promote continuity, stability, and resilience to combat maladjustment during the deployment cycle. The literature also did not provide information on how the FRG can improve to become a helpful social support system during the deployment cycle (Caliber, 2006; Di Nola, 2008; FMWRC, 2010).

Previous research noted deployment impacted civilian military wife socialization (Vombrock, 1993). Current research does not account for their perception of how the FRG can train and motivate civilian military wives to deter stress-related negative habits that can develop during deployment. Research suggests that social support organizations such as the FRG can provide support to civilian military wives through motivational training in order to promote a positive self-identity (Di Nola, 2008). A greater in-depth understanding of the information statistically described in the SAFV and the Caliber study (Caliber, 2006) contributed to existing literature on the topic. Through the

examination of the ABCX model, and the double ABCX model, supplementary

qualitative research on the statistical results of military wife participation in the FRG

from the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) may provide further understanding of the preventative

strategies the FRG can provide based on results from previous qualitative research

requested by the Department of Defense (Caliber, 2006).  Results from this current

qualitative research study provided an awareness as to how the emotional experience of

the military wife during the deployment cycle may impact their perception of the FRG

and willingness to participate since the Caliber study was conducted (Caliber, 2006).

**Role of the Researcher**

As the primary researcher in this transcendental phenomenological study, I

performed the role of observer-participant.  I use the term *primary researcher* because

participants in this research study are *coresearchers* in phenomenological research

(Moustakas, 1994).  The primary researcher as observer-participant works with

participants as coresearchers in understanding their status and role in the research study.

I informed them of how they relate to the research purposes and the questions asked

during the interview.  This tactic facilitated a friendly flow of communication that helped

me as the primary researcher to identify and provide cues for participants during the

interview process (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

As an observer-participant, it was important for me to conduct an epoche (Chun,

2013; Moustakas, 1994; Sheehan, 2014) to avoid using subjective opinions, experiences,

and prejudices that can harm this research study.  The epoche required having an

awareness of those possible personal biases to isolate them from becoming a hindrance

during the interview and throughout the research process. This evaluation set the stage to relinquish bias and view the phenomena clearly as an observer of the phenomena (Chun, 2013).

I considered the role of the researcher as a participant in this phenomenological research methodology. The Collaizi method (1978) called for the researcher to be a participant just as the participants' in the study become fellow researchers of the phenomena (Chun, 2013). The experience as a military wife set the foundation for the researcher to make a connection with the participants which is important in this research approach (Chun, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The keen awareness, the reserved subjectivity, and the explanations provided by the primary researcher, when they are appropriate, were crucial to the phenomenological study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 2014). My experiences as the primary researcher and my participants as co-researchers evolved to describe the same entity from different perspectives (Chun, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

I am a military wife of an active duty U.S. Army soldier who experienced deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. As a military wife of a deployed soldier, I participated in the FRG as a general member during his deployment to Iraq and as an FRG Key Caller during his deployment to Afghanistan. A Key Caller is an FRG member who volunteers to assist the FRG Leader in disseminating information to other wives of the unit who are assigned to the Key Caller.

This study required that I create safeguards that would control personal biases, subjective experiences, and personal attitudes about this topic. The process of

interviewing civilian military wives to gain insight into their emotional experience during the deployment cycle and their perception of the FRG may be challenging when separating personal subjective conclusions and biases from the phenomenon. The absences of my active duty husband during deployment involved anxiety, sadness, stress heightened by household management, single parenthood, and the preservation of a long-distance relationship. The deployment cycle was a concern before, during, and after the deployment of my deployed soldier. I anticipated being cognizant of subjective experiences, yet not allowing for them to be a factor during the interview process based on past research and training on the importance of being objective (Polkinghorne, 2005).

My firsthand experience and knowledge of the phenomenon under examination required a focused approach to understanding the participant's deployment-related experiences and their perspectives of the FRG. Their firsthand account of their emotional experiences was what substantiated and expounded upon the statistical findings of the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) and SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010). Documented bias was imperative throughout the research process to differentiate between the primary researcher's experience and the co-researcher's experience.

Current research on epoche and bracketing (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014) required that I become open to gaining insight into other perspectives. The examination of other perspectives enabled me as the primary researcher to consider objectively other revelatory findings. It also allowed me to accept the unique perspectives of participants as relevant to the phenomenon.

My understanding of the military culture and the military family followed my current experience as a military wife. My father served in the military as an active duty soldier for 22 years. Experience as a "military brat," a child raised in the military environment, and a civilian military wife who is currently raising children in the military environment, allowed for this primary researcher to be able to develop a rapport with my participants as co-researchers in this research study. My ability to relate to the challenges faced by the military family during military-related separations provided each study participant with a certain level of ease in participating in a dialogue about their deployment-related experiences, their beliefs about deployment and the FRG, and their overall outlook on the phenomenon.

This study was an opportunity for me to gain insight into how some civilian military wives interpret their emotional experience and the FRG organization. The objective of understanding the study participant's experience helped to comfort these study participants who participated in a dialogue about military culture, the deployment cycle, and the FRG. My background and experiences allowed for participants to experience the freedom of not having to explain those shared experiences of civilian military wives that are prevalent among members of the military community. I did not anticipate that participants would feel constrained in the discussion of their emotions about the phenomenon during the interview process. My experience in the military culture did not provide sufficient discernment into the civilian military wife's perception of the FRG during the deployment cycle. Personal awareness of the opinions of various civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG was not sufficient to interpret

the statistical findings of the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) and SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010).

The chosen research approach allowed for the magnification of the participants' outlook

and the minimization of my personal bias. The maintenance of a journal that captured

personal reflections on the issues presented during the study facilitated this goal of

avoiding personal bias.

As an observer participant in this empirical phenomenological approach, I needed

to participate in self-reflection to bring awareness of personal biases, experiences, and

views. Self-reflection ensured that these factors did not take away from the unique

experiences of the civilian military wives I interviewed. The approach required that I

determine those underlying experiential constructions of civilian military wives during

the deployment cycle by interpreting the originally given descriptions provided in the

SAF. The SAF provided a foundational basis for obtaining further descriptions necessary

for open-ended questions and dialogue. The general desire was for the actual phenomena

to speak for itself through the description of participants' emotional experiences. I

expected to negate presenting the appearance of the phenomena to be something more

than what it is by providing a comprehensive description based on the individual

descriptions.

The way that I anticipated avoiding personal bias from my experiences was to

apply methods such as epoche (bracketing) and the use of a reflective journal

(Moustakas, 1994, van Manen, 2014). This approach helped me to apply a disciplined

and systematic method of addressing preconceived judgments based on subjective

experiences as a civilian military wife who experienced the deployment cycle and a

former FRG volunteer. This research methodology required that I set aside preconceived beliefs on the topic and any knowledge that I may associate with the phenomenon studied. I approached participants in a manner that was open-minded so that they would accept me as the primary researcher as they described their experience. (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015)

## Methodology

To gain insight into the experiences of civilian military wives during deployment, it was imperative that I obtained data that described their understanding of the FRG. I anticipated using Husserl's method (1931,1965), as amended by Clark Moustakas (1994), as a foundational approach to examining the essence of the civilian military wife experience. Transcendental phenomenology as described by Husserl (1965) required for me to organize and suspend any personal prejudices, preconceived notions, or prior experiences related to the study of this phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's theoretical approach involves the concept of intentionality, which is the contribution of various experiences that generate an awareness of the perception of an individual. The other relevant feature of this research approach was phenomenological reduction that required purposeful reflection of descriptions of experiences or words that resulted into an essential feature of one's life.

### Core Practices

Through the focus of six core practices of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), a methodological structure was engaged in developing this research study. The epoche process was the first core practice requiring the researcher to reserve

personal biases, judgments, and attitudes on civilian military wives, the deployment process, and the FRG to obtain objective and subjective findings.

This process also helped to develop new knowledge that was free from personal biases, judgments, and attitudes.  The second core practice of this approach required the collection of data through an interview process with civilian military wives who experienced the deployment process.  The third core practice necessitated the labeling process, found in transcendental phenomenology reduction that required capturing and describing a unique portrayal of the civilian military wife experience using their perspectives instead of my prejudices, judgments, and attitudes.  The fourth core practice required instituting horizontalization that allowed for all the data to be viewed through specific criteria of equal importance and relevance to obtain a fresh perspective on the total experience.  This core practice permitted me to develop textural descriptions of the phenomenon under study.  The fifth core practice entailed that I engage in utilizing each study participant's textural description to obtain real meanings of their experience.  The sixth and last core practice required producing a composite textural description to examine the meanings and common themes depicted by each civilian military wife's experience.  This practice required synthesis and integration of known structural themes, meanings, and essences of experiences that allowed for me to capture and describe the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) as statistically demonstrated in the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) and SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010).

**Participant Selection**

The transcendental phenomenological framework of this study required a homogenous group of participants who had experience with the phenomenon investigated in this study (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).  The use of purposeful sampling to meet the criteria of the research study was the foundational method of studying the selected population (Maxwell, 2013).  This methodology allowed for the deliberate selection of a population representing the phenomenon that is particularly relevant to the questions of this research study (Maxwell, 2013).  The goal of this method of sampling was to achieve the representativeness of the population and phenomenon I studied.  Those participants selected for the study were chosen based upon common qualities necessary to meet study criteria: civilian heterosexual married women between the ages of $18 - 60$, who were currently experiencing or previously experienced the deployment of their active duty spouse stationed at JBLM within the past eighteen months, and who have not participated in an FRG during the deployment cycle.  The minimal standard length of Army deployment was nine months (McIlvaine, 2011).

Purposeful sampling was also used to understand the views of this homogeneous population in order to make sure that the conclusions were sufficiently reached to capture the diversity in the population (Gibbs et al., 2007; Maxwell, 2013).  This method was vital to understanding the insightful experiences of those civilian military wives who recently experienced deployment of their active duty soldier.  The information obtained was indispensable to conducting a phenomenological study that detected other meanings of perspectives and experiences with validity.

I was initially unable to locate the necessary number of participants for this study, therefore, I used a snowball sampling technique to locate additional participants. This word of mouth technique was useful for the encouragement of other participants who meet similar criteria. Participants were able to recommend others for interviews (Babbie, 1995; Patton, 2002) based on their general knowledge of their peers within their soldiers' unit who may contribute to the study. Implementation of both the purposeful and snowball sampling techniques in participant selection were vital means of obtaining informative data from the population in question (Patton, 2002).

I used a variety of data collection methods to explore the ideas, perceptions, and experiences of research study participants from the Fort Lewis military wife groups' Facebook pages. Use of these social media groups for participant recruitment was based on the likelihood of shared experiences, willingness to be open, and likelihood of participation in this study (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). These methods included informal telephone interview, an open-ended semi-structured interview, reflective journaling, and a follow-up interview. The aim of these methods was to certify the building of a solid foundation of information gathered to provide solid observable analysis of data collected and to ensure the validity of the data collected during the interview.

**Participant Recruitment**

The recruitment of participants occurred upon receipt of notification for authorization to conduct this study from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The following Facebook pages were chosen to recruit participants because Army wives created them for those whose soldiers are stationed at Fort Lewis, the Army

installation that is part of Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM). The population of civilian military wives who are members of the Fort Lewis Army Wives (9,581 members); Fort Lewis Wife Network, a service of Martinsburg College (4,484 members); Fort Lewis~Army Wife and Mommy Life (793 members); Fort Lewis Army Wives (1,373 members); and Fort Lewis Wife Network 2.0 (3,285 members) all have a sufficient pool of potential participants.

The sample of civilian military wives of United States Army active duty soldiers consisted of five study participants to demonstrate the phenomenon that is the topic of discussion. The small sample size of individuals recruited to participate in this study was judged to be suitable to illuminate the experiences statistically outlined in the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) and SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Maxwell,2005). The Caliber study (2006) recruited the same sample size from JBLM for their qualitative study of military wives and the FRG. A similar phenomenological study on civilian male spouses of active duty female soldiers during the deployment cycle utilized a small number of participants to inform others of the experiences of this population (Porter, 2014). Saturation for this homogenous population should be sufficient with the selected sample size given there is only one type of civilian military wife (Army) studied about the deployment cycle for military wives (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Latham, 2013).

**Instrumentation**

Several data collection instruments assisted me during the data collection process in this research study. I was an essential instrument for the data collection process

throughout the qualitative research process as an observer-participant (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The journal used to record my epoche was an important tool because it described subjective experiences and underlying feelings on the topic. This information served as important data during the analysis process (Chun, 2013; Moustakas, 1994, Sheehan, 2014).

I posted the CIS on the Fort Lewis military wife groups' Facebook pages to randomly attain civilian military wives' responses to the research question of this research study. The CIS was an instrument serving as a pre-interview that would assess previous experience with the phenomenon investigated (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). I understood that although there appeared to be a sufficient number of members on the military wife Facebook pages, the number of respondents who qualified for this study may vary.

**Qualitative Interviewing**

The information obtained from the CIS was used to screen and recruit five to eight eligible and interested participants who were willing to provide supplemental information through a semi-structured interview. Through in-depth interviewing, I planned to explore study participant's attitudes, experiences, and perspectives concerning the deployment process and the FRG. The goal for employing an in-depth interview was to obtain a thorough description and meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) of the transcendental essence of the phenomenon depicted by civilian military wives. This information was essential to understanding the momentum of change between the SAFV and SAFVI. Responses to interview questions revealed whether civilian military wives

believed in the competency of the FRG to address their emotional experiences during the deployment cycle (Beck, Bruderl, Woywode, 2008).

This qualitative study obtained data from community surveys and semi-structured interviews that provided insight into ways the FRG could address emotional experiences to promote participation of the civilian military wife who does not participate during the deployment cycle. The *Qualitative Follow-up to the 2004/2005 Survey of Army Families* (Caliber, 2006) gave a general framework that provided updated information on civilian military wives' participation and perception of the FRG. It did not provide insight into the emotional experiences of civilian military wives' and their understanding of the primary objectives of the organization. The study did not address whether they perceived those objectives were being met adequately. The study did not also address those incidents that would build momentum in promoting positive change in civilian military wife potential participation in FRG meetings. The survey and interview questions addressed these factors to highlight statistical findings of the SAFVI (FMWRC,2010).

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I developed the CIS (Appendix A) to screen and recruit study participation of civilian military wives. Those civilian military wives who were members of the Fort Lewis Army Wives; Fort Lewis Spouse Network, a service of Martinsburg College; Fort Lewis~Army Wife and Mommy Life; Fort Lewis Army Wives; and Fort Lewis Spouse Network 2.0 community Facebook groups were targeted based on the pool of prospective participants who may be willing to participate in this study. The survey allowed me to identify qualifying criteria for study participation. Criteria included (a) self-disclosure as

being the civilian wife of an active duty soldier who has not participated in the FRG while their soldier was deployed, (b) soldier was deployed within the past 18 months, (b) deployment length was a minimum of 9 months, and (c) affiliation with one of the military battalions on the Fort Lewis military installation at JBLM in Washington State during time of deployment.

Prospective participants were chosen from those who completed and met the criteria for those common qualities needed to meet the study criteria from the CIS. The frequent physical mobility and duty status of military families were not always reflected in membership on Facebook military wife communities. The Facebook communities used to obtain potential participants may have included respondents who have recently had a permanent change of duty station to or from JBLM within the last 18 months. It also potentially included those whose Army soldier recently transitioned out of the military. These individuals may have met the criteria for participation based on experience with deployments and exposure to the FRG within the last 18 months. I followed a script (Appendix B) to conduct telephone screening interviews with prospective study participants to certify participant eligibility. It was important that study participants were located in the state of Washington during deployment and their Army spouse were active duty within the past 18 months. Any information relative to their experience with the FRG during their deployment cycle was contingent upon this information. The telephone screening interviews with prospective study participants confirmed that potential candidates met the criteria, understood the intent of the study, and they were interested in participating in an interview.

At the time of the interview with those who agreed to participate in the study, I reviewed the Informed Consent Form with each participant before beginning the interview. The form consisted of information on the study, procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risks, benefits, confidentiality of participants, compensation, storage of data, and important contact information. I included a discussion of and permission to record and transcribe individual interviews. Each study participant was also informed of her right to withdraw without reason from the study at any time. I also required that each participant sign the consent form after review and our discussion. Each participant needed to submit the form to me before participation in this study. The Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) followed Walden University's IRB specifications.

The goal of this research study was to conduct a semi-structured interview (Appendix D) that allowed participants to freely communicate their understanding of the phenomenon. It was important that participants understood that I was open-minded, empathetic, and appreciative of their willingness to share their experiences, attitudes, and perspectives on participation in the FRG during the deployment cycle. The ability to question and probe study participants as they share relevant information demonstrated the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Probing the participant during the interview involved exploring, examining, and asking questions that will provide enlightenment on the phenomenon (Patton, 2005).

The interview questions provided information as to the participation and perception of civilian military wives to answer the main research question of this study. The first two interview questions requested information on civilian military wife

emotional experience during the deployment cycle.  The last three questions pertained to how the civilian military wife perceived the FRG organization could become more effective in promoting their participation during the deployment cycle.  The basis of this information was the overall emotional experience that contributed to their perception of the FRG.

I used probing questions after offering the main question during the initial interview.  This method generated a deeper response from research participants to provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.  I assumed the possibility that prompting may clarify, confirm, elaborate, and promote the continuation of nonverbal probes.  The following verbal prompts may be included but not limited to:

1.  Can you give me an example of that?

2.  What happened after that occurred?

3.  In what way…?

4.  Tell me more about that?

5.  What do you mean by…?

6.  How do you know that?

The use of audio recording allowed me to obtain a transcription each interview.  I used the interview transcriptions to support research notes taken during the course of the interview.  I also reviewed the transcripts and notes to document any common themes between interview participants.  These common themes and relevant data obtained during the interview are discussed in Chapter 4.

**Data Analysis Plan**

The research procedure in this transcendental phenomenological study began with the collection of data from civilian military wives of previous, current, post-deployed soldiers. These civilian military wives performed the role of co-researcher (Moustakas, 1994) providing data through a CIS, telephone screening interview, and semi-structured interview. The data obtained through these methods were prepared for analysis to be reduced phenomenologically so that an imaginative variation of the issue could be uncovered to reveal the nature of the civilian military wives emotional experience during deployment and its' impact on their non-participation with the FRG. (Moustakas, 1994)

Data analysis began with bracketing the researcher's clarification of preconceptions throughout the study. This process was previously described as epoche. The phenomenological reduction process was a part of epoche. It required for the researcher to first create a list of all relevant statements to the phenomena, treating all statements as having equal value (Moustakas, 1994). This information was compiled from the transcript of the interview, deleting all expressions that were outside the scope of the study. Thematic clusters were then created from this list with each cluster creating a textural language that provides further meaning to the phenomena and core themes (Moustakas, 1994). A comparison across data sources was used to validate the accuracy and representation of data from the researcher observations, CIS, a telephone survey, semi-structured interview, and literature (Moustakas, 1994).

An imaginative variation of the phenomena is a part of the data analysis that provides the researcher the opportunity to consider how civilian military wives reached

their conclusions and creating structures for describing the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). This was done for each participant to provide a structural description of their experience. Two narratives were then created for each participant describing the "what" and "how" of an occurrence. Meaning units were created as is applicable to all participants to synthesize the narrative of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). The narrative was written from the third person in order to provide a universal description of the investigation. The result of this process of analysis was to provide the essence of the civilian military wives experience with the FRG. (Moustakas, 1994)

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

Since the validity of this qualitative research was contingent upon the trustworthiness of data interpretation (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015), I implemented the appropriate strategies necessary to establish the credibility of the results obtained from the community survey and semi-structured interviews. Generally, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately attest for their experience of the phenomenon; however, previous quantitative research (CFSC & ARI,2006; FMWRC,2010) and qualitative research (Caliber, 2006) served as a foundational basis for judging the legitimacy of the data obtained on the topic under review.

Previous phenomenological research provided a basis for understanding the generalizability and transferability of the potential research findings of this study (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Caliber (2006) conducted their qualitative research of the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) on three separate military installations. I returned to one of the military installations used by Caliber (2006) to determine whether the data collected

would shed light on the relevance of the study on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle and their perception of the FRG. I anticipated that the results of this study and the results of the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) would provide sufficient contextual data to shed light on the phenomenon for further review.

To support phenomenological reduction, I heard each research study participant's real-life experience to provide a description of the phenomenon that exposed the uniqueness of each participant's experiences. The in-depth description of the phenomenon experienced by civilian military wives uncovered the distinctiveness of the participant's experience. This was accomplished through their provision of an accurate account of their understanding of the deployment cycle and the functions of the FRG in their words. I also attempted to gain insight into their emotional experience during the deployment cycle and the FRG at this time (Moustakas, 1994). These encounters provided various emerging themes that could characterize the experiences described in the research literature.

The various experiences of the research participants have an impact on the dependability of the research study. To account for contextual changes of the research I understood that each military installation has several units with separate FRG organizations. Each FRG has separate leaders, members, and potential members (based on those soldiers assigned to the unit). The perception and experiences of respondents to the survey were assumed to be reflections of their experiences of their current interaction

with FRG organizations on their current installation or past interactions with FRG organizations on previous military installations.

The participants of the semi-structured interview provided a generalized description of the phenomenon that offered confirmability of the phenomenon. I anticipated that the data obtained would corroborate the results of the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010), provide current insight on the phenomenon, and would potentially give some perspective on what is needed for future research. One method used as a means of examining and analyzing the process for bias or distortion was using a reflective journal that allowed for me to memo throughout the process of the research study. The reflective journal assisted in the characterization and description of the provided experiences while providing documentation.

Journaling assisted me in the confirmability of the phenomenon as well. Confirmability can be obtained by exhausting and excluding possibilities for my personal biases and interpretations that would include personal experiences about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, van Manen, 2014). The use of reflexivity through journaling helped me to evaluate the inter-subjectivity of the investigation between me as the primary researcher and the participants as co-researchers. Journaling to record observations of body language, tone, eye contact, conversational flow, and any other reflective notes that arose during the data collection process provides insight into the validity of the data collected. The use of these practices assisted me in obtaining an overall description of the participants' experiences without personal assumptions, feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and experiences (Moustakas, 1994, van Manen, 2014).

**Ethical Procedures**

I understood the ethical need to respect and protect the rights of all participants during this study. The guidelines for participation in a research study determined by the Institutional Review Board of Walden University (2009) was followed to obtain the assent to participation in the research study. All participants were provided with information on the research study and procedures as outlined in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) prior to their participation in this research study. All participants were provided information as to their right to withdraw from the study and their right to confidentiality. The participants' right to confidentiality was addressed by removing all identifiable information from transcribed notes prior to submission to the transcription service. The interview materials were assigned codes to each research participant during the data collection process. I am the only individual who has access to the participants' identifiable information to ensure that confidentiality was maintained. All data is stored in a locked file cabinet within my home for a period of 5 years to which only I have access to this information. All data will be disposed upon completion of the five-year period.

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**Summary**

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The process of conducting a transcendental phenomenological research study contributed to the analytical review of the phenomenon statistically represented in the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006) and SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010). I explored the military family syndrome, and ABCX model and double ABCX model in chapter 2. An exploration of relevant literature to demonstrate the needs of the military family during the deployment

of the active duty spouse established the need for an analysis of how the emotional

experiences of military wives impact their perception and participation in the FRG

throughout the deployment cycle.  In chapter 3, I described a method of conducting a

qualitative phenomenological research study to illustrate the research problem.

Discussion of the research questions and the significance of the research study, the

population, methods of data collection, along with the discussion the method of acquiring

and examining the data to be acquired are in this chapter.  I discussed methods for

preventing personal bias and experience from influencing the research study so that

participants may share their experiences, opinions, and perspectives of the phenomenon.

In chapter 4, I will provide the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

**Introduction**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to supplement the limited amount of scholarly research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives and their lack of participation in the Family Readiness Group (FRG) during the deployment cycle. Researchers found that significant levels of stress placed military families at a greater risk of experiencing deployment-related emotional difficulties in comparison to their civilian counterparts (Lester et al., 2016; Marnocha, 2012). Research findings demonstrated that insufficient social support would only intensify stress levels during the deployment cycle for military families (DiNola, 2008; Vasilas, 2009; Warner,2009). The focus of this research study was to gather data that would address the gap in scholarly research on how civilian military wives perceive the Family Readiness Group (FRG) as a social support organization during the deployment cycles.

Previous investigators used quantitative research from military-funded programs to accumulate data to deduce the struggles of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle as statistically detailed in the Summary of Army Families (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010). Using the data derived from these studies, researchers identified perceptions of FRG participants who represented a marginal percentage of civilian military wives and considered the FRG as an effective program during the deployment cycle. I based this research study on interviews from civilian military wives who have not participated in the FRG, and their interview responses provided further awareness of those perspectives influencing non-engagement in the FRG during the

deployment cycle. I established the framework for this study on one essential research question: What are the deployment-related emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in an FRG at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state.

In this chapter, I will provide the results from the civilian military wives' interview responses about their shared experiences during the deployment cycle. The results will include information about how the present data supports the findings that address the research question of this study. I will describe the influence of data collection strategies on changes in instrumentation and data analysis strategies. This chapter will also include a description of the setting for the research study to give insight as to those personal conditions potentially influencing the experiences of participants during the research study. I will provide relevant demographic information, variations in data collection, and details about unusual circumstances encountered as it relates to data analysis. The data analysis section will include details about how I inductively coded information to represent categorical themes in the study. The chapter will include key factors demonstrating evidence of trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). The chapter will conclude with a summary of the results from the responses of civilian military wives' interview responses.

**Setting**

The use of social media for the community-intercept survey and Gotomeeting.com, a web-based meeting positively influenced participant accessibility and participation. The on-line survey provided respondents with the opportunity to

provide responses to survey questions with more anonymity than community-based recruitment. The web-based face-to-face meetings provided respondents with greater flexibility and comfort in participation in the semi-structured interview. Some respondents were in-route to a different military base and were able to use social media and the web-based meeting forum to participate in the study.

## Demographics

The demographic focus of this research study was those civilian military wives who were between the ages of 18 to 65 and married to male soldiers of the United States Army. They were individuals whose military spouses experienced or were experiencing deployment within the past 18 months. The initial focus on length of deployment was no less than nine months, however it was amended to 6 months during the study. I determined the need to amend the length of deployment due to feedback from civilian military wives on the variations of unit deployment of their soldier. The primary focus was on the actual experiences of five civilian military wives who did not participate in their FRG during the deployment of their active duty soldier. These participants are noted within this study as Participant 10-A, Participant 20-B, Participant 30-C, Participant 40-D, and Participant 50-E. Those who were not included in this study were: female active duty Army service members who are married to another service member and were at home during deployment, single soldiers with significant others who are parents to their children, and same-sex military couples.

The small sample size of individuals recruited to participate in this study from the CIS was judged to be suitable to illuminate the experiences statistically outlined in the Survey

of Army Families (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Maxwell,2005). The Caliber study (2006) recruited the same sample size from JBLM for their qualitative study of military wives who participated in the FRG. A similar phenomenological study on civilian male spouses of active duty female soldiers during the deployment cycle utilized a small number of participants to inform others of the experiences of this population (Porter, 2014). Saturation for this homogenous population should be sufficient with the selected sample size given the emotional experiences during the deployment cycle of only one type of civilian military wife (Army) was studied.

## Data Collection

I sought and obtained the approval of the Institutional Review Board to conduct this study with the five civilian military wives, prior to data collection. I obtained the CIS through use of the online tool, Survey Monkey, to gain a pool of respondents who could be potential participants as shown in Table 2. The respondents to the CIS were screened through telephone interviews and emails to obtain the final five participants who will become participants for the semi-structured interview. I conducted semi-structured interviews with five selected participants from the pool of respondents to the CIS. I used TapMedia, Ltd. audio-recording application to audio-tape interviews lasting between 30 to 60 minutes and used an alpha-numerical code to protect the identity of the five participants. I analyzed the transcripts of the interviews for thematic codes, theoretical categories, and the specific procedures for analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Moerer-Urdahl & Cresswell, 2004).

Table 1.

*Results from Community Intercept Survey*

| Question | Number of Respondents answering "Yes" | Percentage of Respondents | Number of Respondents answering "No" | Percentage of Respondents |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Question 1: Are you an Army wife between the ages of 18-65 whose husband is stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM)? | 40 | 95.24 | 2 | 4.76 |
| Question 2: Has your military spouse deployed within the past 18 months while stationed at JBLM? | 12 | 28.57 | 30 | 71.43 |
| Question 3: Was the length of deployment of your soldier at least 9 months? | 22 | 52.38 | 20 | 47.62 |
| Question 4: Have you participated in the Family Readiness Group (FRG) or attended FRG activities within your soldiers' unit during the deployment cycle? | 24 | 57.14 | 18 | 42.86 |
| Question 5: Have you participated in previous FRG functions at previous military installations? | 27 | 64.29 | 15 | 35.71 |

I conducted the online data collection process, over a period of 6 weeks to obtain a sufficient pool of potential interview participants who met the criteria to participate. I reviewed responses from the survey daily, as notifications were received on the completion of a survey. I made attempts to obtain the necessary number of participants

for the study using the snowball sampling technique, by requesting potential participants to recruit other participants who met the criteria necessary to participate in the study. I recycled the survey on Facebook pages every other week until I found a sufficient number of eligible and interested participants to participate in the semistructured Interview.

I attempted telephone outreach to prospective study participants; however, I found most respondents to be more responsive by email. My initial interview participant was receptive to a telephone interview and accepted an invitation to participate in a Semi-Structured Interview because she was in-route to her husband's next duty station. Other eligible participants were not responsive by telephone, so I used the telephone screening interview as an e-mail script with the Informed Consent and my phone number attached to the email. I contacted each eligible participant three times by telephone before sending an email. Interested participants responded through text messages and emailed to confirm eligibility, interest in the study, and to schedule a date and time for the interview. I provided participants with a link to the web-based conference to participate in the Semi-Structured Interview on the agreed upon date and time of the interview.

Selected participants, who became co-researchers in the study, participated in what became a 30-60-minute audio-recorded interview. The audio recording app, used during the interview, also transcribed the interview responses for my review. Over the course of three days, I reviewed transcriptions from the audio recordings to ensure words were not misidentified or miscommunicated due to noise during the interview. I attempted to conduct follow-up interviews with participants, over the course of 10 days,

to review responses to interview questions to ensure I captured their intentions. However, due to the transient nature and time constraints of the participants, I could not successfully schedule follow-up interviews with them.

I recorded data through the internet and web-based applications. Survey Monkey was the web-based application used to record and collect data from the CIS. This web-based application provided me the opportunity to create a specialized survey to send out in various formats and to track desired results. The TapMedia audio recording application used during the interview transcribed the interview responses for my review. I used a journal to conduct epoche to describe subjective experiences and underlying feelings during the interview process.

There were some variations in data collection that delineated from the plan presented in the previous chapter, due to lengths of deployment. The initial criteria for minimum length of deployment was nine months. However, I changed the participation criteria to include civilian military wives who had husbands who deployed for 6 months. Findings from the CIS demonstrated that the minimum length of deployment was six months and not nine months for many units on the military installation. I posted the CIS to other military-based closed group Facebook pages organized for military spouses. These postings were another change made to increase the potential for identifying those meeting inclusion criteria and those who may qualify for the pool of participants.

Other variations to data collection included the tools and services used to collect data. I initially anticipated the use of a transcription service to transcribe the audio recorded interviews. However, the audio-recording application that I used was able to

record and transcribe the semi-structured interview responses, thus eliminating the need for the transcript service. I also anticipated having to scan paper data into an electronic format for data storage. Web-based applications provided the opportunity to collect, transfer, store, and archive data.

I unintentionally conducted this research study during a season of transition for many military families. The months of May through August are often called "Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Season" because many soldiers and their spouses attempt to move their families after their school-aged children have completed the school year (Lange, 2018). Many of those civilian military wives who responded to the CIS and some of the participants were in the process of a move or impacted by this transition in duty stations. This meant limited access to email, online or web-based programs when available. This PCS season posed an issue when scheduling civilian military wives for initial and follow-up interviews.

**Data Analysis**

My goal was to analyze the phenomenological data via systematic procedures outlined by Collaizi (1978) and further developed by Moustakas (1994). Collaizi provided a fundamental approach to describing a phenomenon data analysis that includes: (a) familiarization, (b) identification of significant statements, (c) formulation of meanings, (d) clustering themes, (e) development of exhaustive description, (f) production of fundamental structure, and (g) seeking verification of fundamental structure (Collaizi, 1978). Moustakas (1994) included these descriptive steps with the use of objective and subjective reviews and evaluations of the researcher's intuition and self-reflection along

with the participant's experiences.  These steps include (a) epoche, (b)phenomenological

reduction, (c) thematic clustering, (d) imaginative variation, and (e)synthesis of

composite textural and structural descriptions.

I used epoche to become liberated from suppositions and to differentiate between

what is known in advance or believed to be known about the phenomenon.  I first

described my own experiences during the deployment cycle as a civilian military wife.

The identification of key aspects from my subjective experiences helped me to identify

potential preconceived notions.  The evaluation of participants' significant statements,

made during the interviews, was an essential step in data analysis.  Clustering these

noteworthy statements into meaningful units and themes helped me to organize my

findings.  Synthesizing those meaningful units and themes was the following step to

describing the participants' experiences.  Moreover, a composite meaning of the

participants' familiarities with the FRG provided textual and structural descriptions of the

essences of the emotional experiences of the civilian military wives.  I selected the

transcendental phenomenological qualitative method as a research approach because the

systemic process complemented previous quantitative and qualitative efforts by Caliber

(2006), Di Nola (2008), and the Survey of Army Families (CFSC & ARI, 2006;

FMWRC, 2010) to understand the perception of civilian military wives of the FRG.

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I evaluated the credibility of research findings through a review of research

methods, the triangulation of sources, and the use of different data collection methods.

The data obtained from the CIS served to enhance data collected from the semi-structured

interview by providing demographic information about the participants. I used the CIS as an online recruitment tool, for a pre-interview assessment, to determine potential participants with previous experience with the phenomenon. Forty-two civilian military wives responded to the CIS, and 40 of them responded that they met the age requirement, 12 responded that they had a military spouse who deployed within the past 18 months while stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), 22 respondents with husbands who deployed for at least nine months, and 18 responded that they have not participated in the FRG during the deployment cycle. The CIS, telephone interview, review of the informed consent form with the participant, all served as triangulation methods to validate that the participant met the criteria for participation in the semi-structured interview. I previously noted that participants are the only ones who can legitimately attest for their experiences of the phenomenon, however, previous quantitative resources (CFSC & ARI, 2006; FMWRC, 2010) and qualitative research (Caliber, 2006) served to provide a foundational basis for judging the legitimacy of the data obtained from the results of the CIS.

The use of previous phenomenological research, as a source of information, was a foundational basis for the current study that provided a basis for understanding the generalizability and transferability of the research findings. JBLM was one of the research sites reported in the research study conducted by Caliber (2006) with military wives and the FRG. Caliber (2006) conducted their qualitative research study based on the qualitative reports of the SAFV (CFSC & ARI, 2006). The implementation of this study with the same demographic (military units), although a different population

(transient civilian military wives), gave contextual data that supports previous studies on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle and their perception of the FRG. The use of phenomenological reduction to capture the real-life experiences of the participants gave credence to the distinct nature of their emotional experience in their own words or their emic voice. The emic voice is the predominant voice when participants tell their story, while keeping your personal interpretations out of the narrative as much as possible, as a means to remain neutral, based on ideas by Mehra (2002). Each participant provided an in-depth description of the phenomenon. They provided an account of their understanding of their emotional experience during the deployment cycle and the functions of the FRG. Collection of personal interviews captured emerging themes that characterized the experiences described in the research literature.

Since the population of civilian military wives is transient, due to the mission-oriented nature of their soldier, I accounted for the contextual changes of the research in determining the dependability of the research study. I used the CIS as a screening tool to ensure that only those participants who did not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle of their military spouse unit at JBLM in the last 18 months became participants. This demographic criterion was an important determination given that many military spouses who move to JBLM may have experienced a deployment in the last 18 months at another military installation; causing them to report of their experience with the FRG from another military installation. Civilian military wives, who may have recently moved to another military installation, had access to the CIS as well. The

participants' responses during the semi-structured interviews reflected the variation in units with separate FRG organizations, separate leaders, members, and potential members, based on those soldiers assigned to the unit. The perception and experiences of the participants reflected this variation of experiences as they reported on past and current experiences with the FRG organization.

The results from the semi-structured interview provided confirmability as it enhanced survey results through a generalized description of the phenomenon. The data obtained did corroborate with the results of the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010), providing current insight on the phenomenon. I used a reflective journal to provide further documentation that characterized and described the provided experiences of research participants.

Since I have experience with this topic, it was important to set aside prejudgments about the participants' experiences with the FRG during deployment cycles. This process of epoche, where I refrained from judgment, allowed me to view the phenomenon and the participants' experiences freshly and without bias or judgement. I had to be open, as if I were hearing these experiences for the first time. I evaluated notes for personal biases and interpretations to further assist with confirmability as I noted any subjective experiences with the phenomenon. I used journaling to help me evaluate the inter-subjectivity of my role as the primary researcher and the role of participants as participants in the study. My use of journaling to note observations on the conversational tone and flow of communication, and other reflective notes that arose during the data collection process, provided further validity to the data collected.

**Results**

The following section presents a qualitative thematic analysis of the results

obtained from the participants responses to the semi-structured interview questions.

These civilian military wives completed the online CIS to help determine whether they

met the criteria for the study (civilian married women, between the ages of $18 - 65$,

currently experiencing or previously experienced the deployment of their active duty

husbands stationed at JBLM within the past 18 months and have not participated in an

FRG during the deployment cycle). The semi-structured interview inquired as to the

impact of the deployment cycle on their daily life, their emotional experience,

participation and/or use of the FRG, communication with FRG leaders, and constructive

opinions on the functioning of the FRG as an organization during the deployment cycle

as a civilian military spouse.

Moustakas (1994) recommended that transcendental phenomenological studies

have one central research question which was: What are the deployment-related

emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in an FRG at

Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State? I chose transcendental phenomenology

as an approach to studying this phenomenon to gain insight into the meaning of the

emotional experiences of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle as it related

to their lack of engagement with the FRG. I identified specific statements from

transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with participants through horizontalization.

**Significant Statements**

Horizontalization is the process where I identified specific significant statements

from questions and comments made during the semi-structured interview.  The specific

statements provided valuable information about the emotional experiences of the

participants, which contributed to quantitative and qualitative research literature on the

mental health of the participants and how they participate in social support groups.  I

collected and listed statements in a table where the reader could recognize the assortment

of viewpoints about civilian military wives' emotional experiences and perspectives on

participation in the FRG during deployment cycles.

 I showed the significant statements, from the transcripts of the civilian military wives'

responses to the semi-structured interviews questions, in Table 2.  I identified 24

statements from the civilian military wives' transcripts, which I identified as significant,

based on their emotional experiences and perceptions about participation in the FRG.  I

subjectively extrapolated non-repetitive statements shared by the participants and

grouped the statements to provide context to the responses to the semi-structured

interview questions.  I did not arrange the statements in any particular order.  The point of

this phase of analysis was to gain overall insight into the civilian military wives'

emotional experiences and perceptions of their engagement in the FRG during the

deployment cycle.  A review of their statements provided more details about how the

civilian military wives experienced the deployment cycle and non-participation in the

FRG. I followed Moustakas (1994, p. 95) recommendations and identified and defined

each statement as a "horizon" that gave each statement a condition of the phenomenon

and a distinct character. As I thought about each horizon, I gained insight into the experiences of civilian military wives' personal self-reflections and awareness of the phenomenon.

Table 2.

*Selected Significant Statements*

| Research Question | Participant | Significant Statements |
|---|---|---|
| How does being a military spouse during the deployment cycle affect your daily life? | #10-A<br><br>#20-B | • "I wouldn't say that it affects my life at all…"<br><br>• "… I think it is trying to make the phone calls with my husband work … and so I'm trying to maintain his schedule… … maintain my kids schedule and maintain my work schedule" |
| | #30-C | • "It definitely makes it more difficult and some days are easier than others for sure …It definitely puts a strain on and I think on my emotional resources because you are kind of playing that ...that dual parent role and I am a full-time student and I do a lot of volunteer work and interning as well so doing that and then being the only parent you know it is really hard…" |
| | #40-D | • "um…personally it just makes my day-to-day much harder because I don't know certain things…" |
| | #40-D | • "… still dealing with all the household things…we own a home so dealing with having to fix things … he was just gone and everything broke down at once…" |
| | #50-E | • "…it sometimes gets a little lonely… just not having that family …it just makes for more hardship and work frustrations along the way for sure…" |

Table 2. continued

Table 2. continued

| Research Question | Participant | Significant Statements |
|---|---|---|
| How would you describe your emotional experience during the deployment cycle? | #10-A | • "I would say that my emotional experience during the deployment cycle is maintained um… I have my own resources that I go to …which is my family…" |
| | #20-B | • "It is very up-and-down, um, it really depends on ..you know sometimes I'm having a really good day…then other times one of my kids... you know, may be kind of testing the limits a little bit and then I just really like you know that's a bad week for me…" |
| | #30-C | • "Yeah, it's very back-and-forth and it's kind of like, I always tell my kids, like a roller coaster and sometimes we are doing really well when dad's not here and other times were just not feeling so great…" |
| | #40-D | • "…we can just stay home and order pizza and just kind of like be sad together and you know then then we feel better for a little while, you know, it's kind of just getting that out for a moment and…and letting yourself dwell on it and then kind of, you know, going back to your daily life…" |
| | #50-E | • "What I have learned over the years, that has really helped me, is not to force myself to feel like doing the best job or that I'm happy all the time…" |
| | #20-B | • "This time emotionally was pretty easy. We got three boys are home and they are old enough to be kind of self-sufficient and they are pretty well-behaved so emotionally this time around wasn't too bad and having a bit of a support system in place also helped out a lot…." |
| | #30-C | • "…the emotional experience that I had way back when I was younger …like 10 years ago …a lot worse… now that I'm older and I have more of my life going on…I just got out of school… I work …I keep myself busy so the emotional experience is a lot more positive than it used to be…." |
| | #40-D | • "Yeah, so I would never go back to those days (being a new spouse who has never encountered a deployment) now it's' like now another deployment is coming, ok, I mean obviously I do get upset before the experience is to occur but at the same |
| | #50-E | • "I think it's very subjective you know I heard a lot of seasoned wives tell new wives, "It hurts less each time, you know, you just, you just get used to it " and ...I don't think it could hurt less ... I don't think it gets easier time as time go by… you just learn to gather resources…" |

Table 2. continued

| Research Question | Participant | Significant Statements |
|---|---|---|
| How do you feel about participation and use of the FRG as a source of support during your spouse's deployment? | #10-A | • "It's feeling a little bit isolated, but it's because I can't be part of it… does that make any sense at all… so if you have a detailed work schedule and they have their own schedule you're trying to merge your schedule along with your kid's schedule… it's difficult to maintain three types of schedules on a daily basis…." |
| | #40-D | • "It's a little like being left out of the group…" |
| | #10-A | • "It is problematic because when it comes to attending… I think… as a mother …. I have to bring my kids to school …. I have to also go to work and when I'm trying to do this when you're doing your schedules …they will have a meeting at 6 o'clock, well,…the kids have their own schedule. So I have to be flexible to them and also the fact that they'll tell me maybe two weeks before and it's hard to get out off…" |
| | #10-A | • "…the problem…trying to get all of us together doesn't really happen because if you live off-base …You're commuting 20-30-45 minutes to get to Post because that's where you want to have a meeting ...there's no flexibility and sometimes it's just like … it's convenient for one but it's not convenient for the masses…" |
| | #40-D | • "You know I think it's a wonderful thing…" |
| | #10-A | • "I think that the FRG, if it's used in the correct way, and you have leaders that or more flexible and or actually working …with the other spouses, that would be great but sometimes you have that FRG leader that doesn't …. that brings out the information but doesn't make me feel like ... part of the unit, ... as a spouse that makes you feel like you can …contact her …" |
| | #30-C | • "I personally do not use it whatsoever and the reason why is because I just had some pretty bad encounters with the FRG..." |
| | #40-D | • "…it was just a really negative experience, I took a break from it and roughly about a few years ago I tried to do another little activity with them and again it was just very negative, very toxic, very childish, and I just decided, "OK I have a more positive support system with the people that I know..." |

Table 2. continued

| Research Question | Participant | Significant Statements |
|---|---|---|
| How do you feel about participation and use of the FRG as a source of support during your spouse's deployment? | #30-C | • "I feel that ... for me personally the support wasn't there and it wasn't something I enjoy it but I do know people that got a lot out of it and have really great experiences, so I might |
| | #20-B | • "I tend to view participation in the FRG as very subjective I think it really depends on the person...I'm a little more introverted I don't necessarily seek out groups of people in general...I usually kind of stick to smaller groups, and I've utilized everything in the past and it was helpful…however, over the years I felt like...I do better on my own |
| | #20-B | • "Yeah, its' a lot of the same people that's been up here … the unit doesn't really PCS that often so it's' the same people, the same places, the same amount of years and so everybody knows everybody and it's not like the fresh new faces that brings new light to things; it's the same ladies that has been running the same FRG … yeah it's a lot different than a lot of other people that you hear that had really good positive experiences with the FRG |
| How often do you communicate with FRG leaders or participate in FRG activities during the deployment cycle? | #30-C | • "Actually, I will say I think I'm a little more likely to not have participate in this particular FRG that we are a part of because when we first moved here … my husband was in a very serious parachuting accident, in the first few months that we were here and we were still new and haven't met anybody really yet and that whole time ...I did not hear a word (from the FRG)…I was like and they weren't there for me then and I don't feel like they would be particularly supportive during a deployment so I'm even less inclined to want to get involved…" |
| | #30-C | • "I don't remember hearing from anybody when we first got here... like any sort of like "Hey, you know this is who we are and this is your leader…" we usually have a key caller and I don't remember hearing from anybody at all and that's continued for the duration of our time here …in October will be four years…" |
| | #30-C | • "I've never heard from anybody other than a mass email about you know like an Easter party or something um… so yeah kind of weird definitely different than other places I've been to and have had spouses call me, you know to check in, in order to introduce themselves in the first couple months of us being here so yeah…" |

Table 2. continued

| Research Question | Participant | Significant Statements |
|---|---|---|
|  | #20-B | • "Hmmm… I don't really know, this is like, this wasn't our first deployment but it was the first time we been somewhere where we had an FRG..so…you know… this group had some…um… I want to say some "Seasoned Army Spouses" um… I think they did a really, really stellar job of making sure everybody was kept in the loop..." |
|  | #40-D | • "Um they will not be someone that I would even be remotely call… at all…Like it's not even that I would purposely not be calling them it's that they're not actually in my mind to want to call if that makes any sense at all…" |
|  | #50-E | • "I don't even know the name of the FRG Leader in my husband's unit. It may be listed on the mass emails but I never paid attention to it." |
|  | #10-A | • "It's really surprising how bad is the communication especially since many of those who participate are seasoned…you would think it would be better and they would..." |
|  | #20-B | • "I think for some people that could have been beneficial and they may well may have reached out to maybe younger wives or wives with smaller children or anyone that they knew... have been given a heads up...um I personally I don't know if I would have benefitted from that or not …it could be that a personal reach out could have been beneficial…" |
| Do you have any constructive opinions of how the organization can improve the civilian military wife emotional experience during the deployment cycle? | #30-C | • "I think definitely reaching out personally instead of like a mass email or something... I think you taking the time to even just send an email to that one person to say, "Hey, this is who I am, and this is how you can contact me" …just reaching out at all in a personal way instead of in a mass email will go a long way to making the other person feel comfortable…" |
|  | #20-B | • "…having an annual new spouse's get together so everybody can meet everybody." |
|  | #40-D | • "I don't, as a whole, have constructive criticism or opinions on how to handle it…as far as the unit… I think just being less catty about stuff…" |
|  | #10-A | • "I guess being more of a resource for new wives that are coming in or current wives… people going through hard times ..you know…" |

Table 2. continued

| Research Question | Participant | Significant Statements |
|---|---|---|
| How do you believe you could assist FRG leaders in understanding how they can assist military families during the deployment cycle? | #40-D | • "I would personally tell them that in their role they are almost like an untrained, they're almost like the therapist …I look at these leaders as the therapist of the military unit or company or whatever it might be…because they are,... to be confidential, to hear issues…provide resources to people to fix their situation and I think a lot of these women or men for that matter…a lot of these they get into it and think "This is the way that I'm going to make friends…this is what I'm going to do" and they take the whole thing and make it very personalized…" |
| | #30-C | • "I would tell the FRG leader like…listen up, make it a personal experience for you, yes you can make friends but you need to leave the things that you are being told outside and keep it to yourself…to me, like that's what a really good  FRG leader…there to help, to assist, maybe their husband might need to know because he or she be in a higher leadership position, obviously, but otherwise, like to tell other family members or friends what's going on I would say that's where you cross the line and don't build trust between spouses..." |
| | #20-B | • "…just reaching out at all in a personal way instead of in a mass email way will go a long way to making the other person feel comfortable because no matter how long a person has been a military spouse, moving to a new place can be pretty overwhelming and you don't know the women who have been in these groups for months or years and its' like being the new kid at school and it doesn't matter whether you are a 20 year spouse or a 40 year spouse…you are still coming into a new area so I think that just…reach out…maybe the spouse is interested, maybe they're not but even just putting it out there goes a long way just making the other spouse feel like, "Hey there's somebody out there if I need to speak to somebody or support if I need it" because I don't think most spouses are going to seek out the FRG on their own…" |

The next step in this process of analyzing the data required the deletion of those statements that either proved to be irrelevant, repeated, or overlapped in meaning. I treated every statement as significant and having equal value. I used the remaining statements as textural descriptions that I examined carefully before clustering them into themes, based on recommendations from Moustakas (1994). The double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) provided a framework for clustering statements into themes that describes the phenomenon. I utilized themes from the literature review of the double ABCX model to illuminate the themes exemplified through the participants' statements.

The double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) provided a contextual structure for explaining and understanding the emotional experience of the participants during the deployment cycle. The semi-structured interview responses exemplified how the deployment cycle is a stressor in the lives of the civilian military wives. The events and stressors involved in the deployment cycle have become a normative crisis, impacting various areas of the military family life. The outcomes evidenced through the impact of deployment demonstrated that the interaction of deployment-related stressors and support networks are directly related.

**Aa Factor:  Stressors and Strains the Civilian Wife Experiences After a Major**

**Stressor Such as Deployment**

- "… I think it is trying to make the phone calls with my husband work … and so I'm trying to maintain his schedule… in that sense … maintain my kids schedule and maintain my work schedule."

- "It definitely puts a strain on…and I think on my emotional resources because you are kind of playing that you know playing that dual parent role..."

- "I am a full-time student and I do a lot of volunteer work and interning as well …."

- "… finding emergency childcare if someone got sick or anything became more trouble than it was worth so I ended up taking the rest of that deployment cycle off from school

- "…also trying to keep up your house and make sure your bills are paid on time and all the normal things and still spend time with your kid and still keep a connection with your spouse while they're, while they're gone uh... is yeah, I mean, it's pretty taxing on you."

- "… he was just gone and everything broke down at once… it just makes my life a lot more difficult on the day-to-day and even future as far as trying to plan things are you know."

- "…it sometimes get a little lonely… just not having that family …it just makes for more hardship and work frustrations are along the way for sure…"

**Bb Factor: Existing or Expanded Family Resources Causing the Civilian Military Wife to be Capable of Meeting the Demands/Needs of the Stressor**

- "I have my own resources that I go to …which is my family…"

- "I have close connections on my own and civilian friends or you know my family um I am friends with other military wives…"

- "…having a bit of a support system in place also helped out a lot so I had someone so if I was stressed out I have someone I could kind of vent to so that, that was pretty beneficial."

- "…you really need a lot of mental help and guidance through that because …it was a very

- emotionally difficult thing to be in (deployment cycle)…"

- "…like I did end up making good friends with (husband) battle buddy, his wife, …"

- I want to say some "Seasoned Army Spouses" um… I think they did a really, really stellar job of making sure everybody was kept in the loop

- "….my husband command contacted us…."

- "…so when I talk to my FRG key leader or my FRG leader she'll just… I wouldn't say brush me aside… but it all depends on the person but I feel like you. "Oh you should know this already… I don't…my husband and I don't have that type of communication and it's not the type of conversation I wanna have with my husband …if that makes sense…

**Cc Factor: The Family Values and Previous Experiences of the Family in Dealing with Change and Meeting Crisis**

- "…it's an honor to have... you know… be married to somebody who is serving the country"

- "…you know this is the lifestyle that I'm in and you know it's an honor to be a military spouse"

- "…have a bad day for yourself but don't let it turn into seven bad days in a row because if that's the case then… you know… you should talk to somebody you know …you need some help and there's no problem with that…"

**Xx Factor: Outcome of the interaction of these factors through demonstration of Family Unit Post Crisis Adjustment impacting the individual, family, and community**

- "…we had a very intense um recovery process and you know ... it really impacted our family hard and it wasn't until maybe six months later when things started to calm down a little bit…"

- "…the emotional experience that I had way back when I was younger …like 10 years ago …a lot worse… now that I'm older and I have more of my life going on…I just got out of school… I work …I keep myself busy so the emotional experience is a lot more positive than it used to be …"

- "… yeah so I would never go back to those days (being a new spouse who has never encountered a deployment) now... "Another deployment is coming, ok, I mean obviously I do get upset before the experience is to occur but at the same

time I know it is part of the whole thing and when it happens I can just stay upset or you can just move on with your life and just deal with…"

- "I still remember you know our first deployment and I mean I was a completely different person than I am now and I know that some of that it's just you know such an age difference and because my husband was 18 when I married my husband and his first deployment occurred and you know we had a new I'm baby and I was 20 years old and I was just had no idea what to expect and handle it so so differently than how I handle it now"

**The FRG: Interaction with the Civilian Military Wife During the Deployment Cycle**

- "…in October will be four years that we've been here and I've never heard from anybody other than a mass email about you know like an Easter party or something um…"

- "Hey, I never even heard from the FRG that's kind of weird like no one from my husband unit said anything to us or offered to help or anything and we were still pretty new and um after that I really was like you know I am just not interested in even getting to know anybody there like I just feel kind of like feel as if they failed us at that point."

- "Um…they (FRG) will not be someone that I would even be remotely call… at all…Like it's not even that I would purposely not be calling them …it's that they're not actually in my mind to want to call that makes sense all…"

- "Um, I just kind of think getting to know the leadership in FRG which I did towards the end … just kind of seeing what they do, the kind of help they could

use…because it is kind of easy to attend or decline a social thing…its' kind of different to see the planning that goes into it."

- "… I was like and they weren't there for me then and I don't feel like they would be particularly supportive during a deployment so I'm even less inclined to want to get involved"

- "…I don't remember even remember hearing from anybody when we first got here like any sort of like "Hey you know this is who we are and this is your leader…"

- "…we usually have a key caller and I don't remember hearing from anybody at all and that's continued for the duration of our time here …"

- "I feel like the FRG is mostly wives that don't really have a work schedule yet …so they could be the stay at home moms. It is a younger crowd …um... and being an older participant... I already know my resources …with the younger ones it's hard for me to ask them for help …if I wanted to know anything they wouldn't know the information…"

**The Emotional Experience of Civilian Military Wives During the Deployment Cycle and Their Non-Participation in the FRG**

My thematic summation of significant statements, under the Aa factor, led me to conclude that participants perceive their emotional experiences, during the deployment cycle, as a pile-up of normative stressors.  These stressors occurred when one became a single-parent who handled personal, professional, and child-related tasks that presented emotional, marital, and financial issues.  I noted a vital difference in how participants

defined levels of experience as I conducted the interviews.  There was a distinction between newly married military wives or military wives who had not experienced a deployment (newbies) and military wives who had experienced multiple deployments (seasoned wives).  The testimony of these civilian military wives suggested that this determination is important to how one navigates the deployment cycle, although there may not be a difference in the levels of emotional distress experienced.

The Bb factor, as described by civilian military wives, is composed of non-military organizational supports that enable them in meeting the demands of the stressors during the deployment cycle.  The participants specifically noted that they did not utilize the FRG as part of a social support service during the deployment cycle and some provided reasons why they chose not to participate.  Participant 20-B noted:

I tend to view participation in the FRG as very subjective.  I think it really depends on the person … I'm a little more introverted, I don't necessarily seek out groups of people in general … I usually kind of stick to smaller groups, so and I've utilized everything in the past and it was helpful um…however, over the years I felt like if I do better on my own ... I know people who love FRG and it's a great resource for them, I personally just don't feel like I benefit much from it so I choose not to participate in it and that's what works for me.

Participant 40-D stated:

Unfortunately …I've seen people go and try to confide in FRG leaders or members and then everybody knows and everybody's judging this person for what they're going through and its' like oh yeah, no way am I going to go through that.

The sentiments expressed by these participants during the interview were quantitatively exemplified through the rating of the FRG being the least helpful program as a social support service during the deployment cycle in the SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010). Participant 40-D further noted that some leaders, going through the deployment cycle, might use the FRG as a vehicle for personal interests instead of as a professional institution,

> I look at these leaders as the therapist of the military unit or company or whatever it might be…because they are there ... to be confidential, to hear issues…provide resources to people to fix their situation and I think a lot of these women or men for that matter…a lot of these (people) they get into it and think this is the way that I'm going to make friends…this is what I'm going to do...and they take the whole thing and make it very personalized…. Civilian military wives are left to develop their resources for meeting the demands and needs of their stressful situation.

The Cc factor reflects those values held by the participants that help them to deal with the stress of the deployment cycle. The two defining factors that participants outlined, when dealing with the deployment cycle, were the development of coping skills for the family and maintaining schedules that provided structure. These factors demonstrated that they were experiencing the deployment cycle as normative stress rather than distress. Participant 20-B explained:

> I taught my children how to perceive the experience as a normative stressor to help them to perceive the challenge resiliently, so they can meet the demand. I really tried to instill that in my kids... that it's OK to have a day when you just do

absolutely nothing and you can feel sorry for yourself. That's fine, you just can't

let too many of those days happen in a row. Let yourself cry it out and then pull

yourself back together.

Participant 10-A maintained the importance of providing flexibility, structure, and a

schedule despite of the difficulty in accomplishing this goal. She stated, "…. I have to

also go to work and when I'm trying to do this …when you're doing your schedules …the

kids have their own schedule… So, I have to be flexible to them…." McCubbin &

Patterson (1983) noted that the positive regard for the ability to cope with the event

(deployment cycle) and the resources to meet those expectations will be factors in

experiencing normative stress. The participants' ability to experience normative stress

was made evident through their descriptions of their emotional experience during the

deployment cycle.

Participant 20-B demonstrated a state of normative stress during the deployment

cycle although, she described her children's perception of the situation as unpleasant and

undesirable. Her perception of events as normative stress impacted their general level of

functioning as a family unit. She stated

...you know sometimes I'm having a really good day…then other times one of my

kids you know may be kind of testing the limits a little bit and then I just really

like you know that's a bad week for me…

She goes on to describe comments from her children, "We all still have days where we

are just like… you know this sucks, … they'll tell me like, so and so dad is home all the

time, or… they never have a parent that leaves…" I determined how this participant

subjectively described her experience during the deployment cycle as being an "honor" that requires "personal maturity" defines the reason the entire family would not be in a state of family distress as described by McCubbin and Patterson (1983).

The Xx factor, according to civilian military wives, is how the family units, post-deployment, adjustment as they relate to the family system and the military community. During the semi-structured interview, civilian military wives provided insight as to how the FRG leader and the FRG, as an organization, can improve to provide support to individuals such as themselves during the deployment cycle. Their review of the Xx factor allowed the participants to reflect upon all the factors of their deployment-related experiences and how the FRG organization addressed their needs. Most participants maintained that the use of the FRG, as a social support service, would not have been beneficial due to meeting times, demographics of participants, means of communication, and lack of personal engagement by leadership. Meeting times were not conducive to work schedules, Participant 10-A noted "…they will have a meeting at 6 o'clock, well, they'll tell me maybe two weeks before and it's hard to get off…" and "…it's just stay-at-home moms…they sometimes have gatherings during the day…".

The participants reported that the means or methods of communication were by email or text messages, which Participants 20-B,30-C,40-D, and 50-E found to be unfavorable. Participant 40-D noted, "It's really surprising how bad is the communication especially since many of those who participate are seasoned…you would think it would be better …" Participant 30-C, 40-D, and 50-E noted the importance of

personal engagement as an important factor since email and text communication was not

an effective means of communication with participants.  Participant 50-E noted that,

> it doesn't matter whether you are a 20 year spouse or a 40 year spouse…you are
>
> still coming into a new area so I think that just…reach out…maybe the spouse is
>
> interested, maybe they're not but even just putting it out there goes a long way
>
> just making the other spouse feel like, hey there's somebody out there if I need to
>
> speak to somebody or support if I need it.

In consideration of the civilian military wife interaction with the FRG during the

deployment cycle, all the participants disclosed relatively limited interaction with this

social support organization.  The participants all noted how the FRG did not play a

pivotal role in their lives during the deployment cycle, despite what investigators noted in

their research reports about their need to participate (Di Nola, 2008;

myarmyonesource.com).  Di Nola (2008) noted a key feature of the FRG organization

was to operate as a network of communication among family members, chain of

command, and various military community resources.  In addition to this function, Army

literature and social media presents the FRG as a key component in the unit in providing

family readiness for deployment (myarmyonesource.com).  Participants did not describe

these features of the FRG during their description of their experience with the FRG

during the deployment cycle.  Participants did not report FRG provision of information or

support that would equip them to handle the challenges of the deployment cycle as it is

suggested in other research (Di Nola, 2008; Erbes et al., 2012).  Grace (2012) noted that

the FRG mission advocates for assisting spouses in solving problems at the lowest level

in the chain of command for their soldier's unit.  Huffman, Cultbertson, and Castro

(2008) noted that the likelihood of civilian military wives successfully addressing

challenges during the deployment cycle was contingent upon the civilian military wife's

perception of the FRG.  These researchers demonstrated how participation and

communication between civilian military wives with FRG leaders and unit chain of

command is necessary for the resolution of deployment-related challenges that occur

during the deployment cycle (Huffman, Cultbertson, and Castro, 2008).  Participants'

interview responses about the FRG provided insight into the success of this mission as

demonstrated by a comment shared by Participant 30-C,

> I was like, they weren't there for me then and I don't feel like they would be
> particularly supportive during a deployment, so I'm even less inclined to want to
> get involved….Hey, I never even heard from the FRG that's kind of weird like no
> one from my husband unit said anything to us or offered to help or anything and
> we were still pretty new and um after that I really was like you know I am just not
> interested in even getting to know anybody there like I just feel kind of like feel as
> if they failed us at that point.

The participants' statements do not support research by Bowling and Sherman (2008) and

Erbes et al. (2012) referencing the importance of social support organizations in

managing emotional distress during the deployment cycle.  These researchers noted the

importance of the FRG organization as a protective factor in promoting mental health and

providing emotional support, assistance, and reporting levels of clinical distress.

Caliber's (2006) qualitative research study, partially conducted at JBLM,
supported the problem noted by some civilian military wives in this study through the
report of the inconsistent provision of support by the FRG. Comments by participants, in
this study, exemplified descriptions in Di Nola (2008) sample survey, which described
issues such as "lack of communication from leaders, slow dissemination of information
from leaders, cliques within the FRG, gossip, drama, and limited group activities" (Di
Nola, 2008, p. vi). Both studies, with inclusion of comments from this study, further
illuminate the perceptual experiences of these civilian military wives as related to their
non-participation in the FRG during the deployment cycle. Participants described their
use of family values and the use of non-military social supports to conceptualize their
emotional experiences as normative stress during the deployment cycle. The
effectiveness of FRGs on previous installations was deliberated based on research
findings noted by Caliber (2006) and Di Nola (2008).

**Imaginative Variation**

Imaginative variation provides structural textures of the emotional experience of
civilian military wives that essentially structures the phenomenon under review. Through
the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview responses, structural descriptions
of the "what" and "how" provided the textural description of the civilian military wives'
experiences. I also considered textural descriptions and evaluated possible additional
meanings from different perspectives and roles, as recommended by Moustakas (1994).

One of the main questions that provided a textural description of the experiences
of the civilian military wives was, "What were the civilian military wives experience

throughout the deployment cycle?" When the civilian military wives discussed their experiences, using words and phrases such as, "maintained," "hard to ask for help," "up-and-down," "not too bad," and "a little bit better," they described the acknowledgment of the challenges of deployment as they perceive those challenges to be normative to the stress of deployment. Participant 20-B talked about the difference between the last deployment and the one she experienced ten years ago by stating that it was "a lot worse." This participant attributes becoming a "seasoned spouse" as the reason that "the emotional experience is a lot more positive than it used to be…." Participant 40-D credited her experience with deployments and the self-sufficiency and good behavior of her children as being the reason that deployment was "…emotionally this time around wasn't too bad…"

The study participants described the availability of resources and a support system as vital components towards their emotional experiences. Participant 10-A stated, "…having a bit of a support system in place also helped out a lot…". This individual described the importance of the support system by stating, "…if I was stressed out, I have someone I could kind of vent to so that was pretty beneficial." Participant 30-C stated that "…close connections…civilian friends or you know, my family...I am friends with other military wives…" School and work took the form of a resource that was vital to their emotional experience because it provided structure and something to do during the deployment. Participant 20-B noted, "I have more of my life going on…I just got out of school…I work…I keep myself busy so the emotional experience is a lot more positive than it used to be…" Participant 40-D stated, "I don't think it gets easier as time goes

by…you just learn to gather resources…you know, you prepare for…that they're about to go away…"

Another context was, "How did FRG leadership attempt to engage participants' participation during the deployment cycle." I asked participants if FRG leaders contacted them directly, and they all responded, "No, not at all," "um, no, and I never heard from them…" These civilian military wives described the FRG as "not very flexible," "not personable," "bad previous experience," and "absent." Most of the participants discussed receiving email communications or text messages from the FRG; however, they never received a phone call from FRG leadership or their Key Callers. Participant 20-B stated, "…they made it really easy to contact them, made sure everyone had their information and that everyone is getting invitations to social events".

The participants spoke of ways the FRG organization and its leaders could have influenced their participation through the context of their non-participation. Personal communication in addition to email and text messages was a theme during the interviews. Participant 50-E noted, "…it could be that a personal reach out could have been beneficial…" Participant 30-C noted, "…just reaching out offering support…" would have been beneficial." Statements such as, "I think reaching out personally instead of like a mass email…taking the time to even just send an email to that one person….in a personal way…will go a long way to making the other person feel comfortable." Providing a point of contact was a key theme since many of the spouses did not know the name or contact information of their FRG leaders or Key Callers. Participant 40-D

stated, "I don't even know the name of the FRG leader in my husband's unit. It may be listed on the mass emails but I never paid attention to it."

Although all interview participants chose not to participate in FRG meetings and activities during the deployment cycle, there were two participants who had a favorable view of the organization. Participant 30-C stated, "this wasn't our first deployment but it was the first time we been somewhere where we had an FRG..so…you know…this group with some…um…I want I want to say some "Seasoned Army Spouses" um… I think they did a really, really stellar job of making sure everybody was kept in the loop." Participant 20-B stated, "… they were really well organized and really reached out, I'm just in it and take advantage of it…".

## The Essence of the Civilian Military Wives Experience During the Deployment Cycle

The synthesis of the textual and structural descriptions of the emotional experience of civilian military wives provides a composite description of the phenomenon through intuitive integration. Intuitive integration is a research process described by Moustakas (1994, p. 100), as being an essential structural component of the "essence" of the encounters of this population that captures the meaning attributed to their experience. The emotional experiences of civilian military wives, during the deployment cycle, essentially depends on their familiarity and perception of the impact of deployment and their use of resources available to them. Experiencing the pile-up of stressors, brought on by the deployment cycle as normative stress, is a good indication of the strong mental and emotional capacity to address personal, work, and child-related

tasks in addition to emotional, marital, and financial issues. Members of the FRG

communicated with civilian military wives through mass communication; informing

them of social engagements that could be a social support service during the deployment

cycle. Personal contact or engagement from FRG leaders were factors in whether civilian

military wives will participate in FRG functions. Another consideration would include

whether the civilian military wives will gain the beneficial emotional support FRG

leaders could provide during the deployment cycle. Theoretically, the availability of the

FRG as a social support service does not positively impact the emotional experiences of

civilian military wives, so civilian military wives do not pursue the FRG as a resource to

turn to during the deployment cycle.

## Summary

In summary, I conducted a transcendental phenomenological research study to

contribute to the analytical understanding of the emotional experiences of civilian

military wives during the deployment cycle. I used the Collaizi (1978) foundational

framework and Moustakas (1994) research processes (epoche, phenomenological

reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of textural and structural descriptions) to

address the data collected during the study. The results of the data analysis I conducted

contributed to the exploration of the application of the double ABCX model to the

emotional experiences of this population on their perception and participation in the

FRG, throughout the deployment cycle. I concluded, based on the findings of this study

that the availability and depersonalized nature of the FRG, as a social support

organization, did not have a positive impact on the emotional experience of "seasoned"

civilian military wives. This factor influenced the engagement in FRG meetings and activities of a select population of military wives during the deployment cycle. In chapter 5, I will provide a summary of the research study that describes how the FRG organization can increase resilience in civilian military wives during the deployment cycle.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

**Introduction**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to supplement the limited amount of scholarly research on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives and their lack of participation in the Family Readiness Group (FRG) during the deployment cycle. One of the challenges I noted during the study was the complication that could arise when there is a breakdown in the interaction between the civilian military wife and the FRG during the deployment cycle. Although researchers previously studied the complications and demands of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle, few researchers endeavored to research their use of military-sponsored social support organizations. Only one researcher was found to investigate civilian military wives use of the FRG as a source of support during the deployment cycle. This researcher endeavored to address the gap in the literature on the deployment-related emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG.

The results from this research study suggested that familiarity with the deployment cycle was a determinant in how civilian military wives experienced the deployment cycle and could use the FRG as a source of support. There were those research participants who clarified the difference between *newbies* and *seasoned spouses* in defining the emotional experiences of civilian military wives. Participants in the study classified those who are new to the military culture and the deployment cycle as newbies and they identified seasoned spouses as those wives who have been through multiple deployments with their military spouse. I recognized that participants were "seasoned

spouses" in this research study.  These seasoned spouses had established social support

and resources and developed coping skills that influenced their perception of the use of

the FRG as a social support service during the deployment cycle.

Participants perceived detached communication and limited engagement from the

FRG organization and leaders as contributing factors in determining the use of the FRG

for support during the deployment cycle.  These seasoned spouses' primary suggestion

for improving FRG participation during the deployment cycle was leaderships' personal

engagement with civilian military wives through phone calls or emails.  They mentioned

that these actions would demonstrate that FRG leadership cared about matters occurring

in military family members' lives.  Seasoned spouses remarked that they received all

communication from the FRG organization through email or text messages.  This method

of communication posed a problem for many participants because it contributed to the

disconnectedness experienced by civilian military wives.

Many of the participants who chose not to participate in the FRG during the

deployment cycle disconnected from the organization by choice.  Some participants

reported having the observational experience of what occurs during meetings from

previous deployments.  Other participants noted how meetings are run by "newbies' who

may not have any insightful information to offer to "seasoned spouses."  There were

those who noted that "newbies" were "stay-at-home" moms who scheduled meetings at

problematic times for "seasoned spouses' who work.  There were those participants who

commented on the lack of professionalism or confidentiality in addressing problems,

issues, or concerns as being a determinant in their lack of participation during the deployment cycle.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

Various aspects of the findings of this research study confirmed, disconfirmed, and extended knowledge in the exploration of the experiences of the wives of deployed soldiers. Use of the double ABCX model to explore the experiences of civilian military wives confirmed that the perception of their proficiency to handle the challenges of deployment-related issues made the difference in whether civilian military wives would experience 'normative stress' or 'emotional distress' during the deployment cycle. Each factor illustrated how the participants experiences could confirm, disconfirm, and extend knowledge of the experiences of this population. Evaluation of the pile-up of stressors contributing to the emotional experience (Aa Factor), existing or expanded family resources enabling the civilian military wife to meet the demand (Bb Factor), family values providing internal motivation and support (Cc factor), and the outcome of interaction of all of these factors (Xx) ultimately demonstrates how this research can be used to develop the FRG further to address the needs of this population during the deployment cycle.

The review of literature on the experiences of the military family during the deployment cycle demonstrated how researchers based their investigation of the emotional experiences of civilian military wives through evaluation of the impact of stress, boundary ambiguity, and role confusion among children and adolescents during the deployment cycle (De Burgh et al., 2011; Figley, 1993; Gabany & Shellenbarger,

2010; Lester et al., 2016; Marnocha, 2012; Mansfield et al, 2010; SteelFisher, Zaslavsky & Blendon, 2008). This research study confirmed that members of this population do experience stress and boundary ambiguity, however; results demonstrated that the proficient nature by which participants experience the deployment cycle enables them to support their children during the deployment cycle. Participants reported maintaining a schedule, obtaining social supports such as child care, teaching coping skills, and engagement in activities, as meaningful ways of decreasing the risk of child maltreatment during the deployment cycle.

Marnocha (2012) described the essential need for civilian military wives to use social supports, such as the FRG, due to the emotional issues experienced during deployment. Marnocha went on to recommend that that this population seek services such as the FRG and mental health services to obtain emotional support. The CIS demonstrated that 52.14% of respondents participated in the FRG during the deployment cycle while 42.86% did not find it essential to participate during the deployment cycle. The SAFV (CFSC &ARI, 2006) and SAFVI (FMWRC, 2010) both demonstrated the limited use of the FRG as social support used to manage the emotional effects of deployment. The disproportionate use and perception of the FRG confirmed current quantitative research from the SAFV and SAFVI and qualitative research (Caliber, 2006) that civilian military wives do not always utilize nor believe the FRG is essential as a social support during the deployment cycle. This research study also disconfirms research that the population of civilian military wives who do not participate in social support organization experience some form of emotional distress.

This research study extends the knowledge of the culture-specific difference in the civilian military wives' proficiency in handling what is considered to be 'normative stress'. Previous research did not note this difference ("Newbie" vs. "Seasoned Spouse") in the determination of whether the spouse would experience deployment-related issues as "normative stress" or "emotional distress." This aspect is an important factor presented for further exploration of the issue within this research study because it directly impacted participants' willingness to engage in FRG activities. The "Seasoned Spouses" felt proficient in handling matters that arose during the deployment-cycle without the support of the FRG because of past experience.

<center>**Limitations of the Study**</center>

In addition to those limitations that were previously noted before the execution of the study, the "seasoned" status of the civilian military wives provided a limited perspective as to the emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle. Each interview with participants revealed the importance of the familiarity of the civilian military spouse in handling normative stressors, their experience with the FRG organization, and availability of social supports within the community, as determining factors in their participation in the FRG. Participants noted the difference in how they emotionally experienced the most current deployment cycle in comparison to previous involvements. The differentiation made between their experience and involvement with the FRG in comparison to those who have never experienced a deployment previously, limited the scope of this research study.

This research study did not represent those civilian military wives who were less experienced with the deployment cycle and who did not participate in the FRG.

## Recommendations

Since it was important to understand whether civilian military wives perceive the FRG as the primary source of support for avoiding effects of stress, trauma, or danger to the military family unit during the deployment cycle, I used transcendental phenomenological research to investigate the emotional experiences of this population. I explored the concept of the military family syndrome through the double ABCX model to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the cognitive and behavioral patterns of civilian military wives during the deployment cycle. Study participants provided insight into my research question, exploring the phenomenon to understand the implications of non-participation in the FRG organization during the deployment cycle. My analysis of research findings suggest that additional information is needed to obtain a complete understanding of the civilian military wife experience during the deployment cycle. Additional information on the emotional experiences of new civilian military wives during the deployment cycle may provide a different perspective than what was offered in this research study. Participants expressed their ability to cope with deployment-related stressors as a seasoned spouse. All participants experienced the deployment-cycle on numerous occasions and have developed coping skills that caused them to no longer to participate in the FRG.

Further research into the emotional experiences of new civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle is recommended to gather

further data on how these women cope with stress during the deployment of their spouse. One of the strengths of this study was when participants defined themselves as seasoned spouses who were able to manage deployment-related stressors as normative stress because of their experience with the deployment cycle. The participants commented on the difficult experiences of new civilian military wives who have never experienced the deployment-cycle. Many of these new civilian military wives may not actively participate in the FRG at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Additional information on the experiences of members of this population would further elaborate on current findings on the emotional experiences of civilian military wives who do not participate in the FRG during the deployment cycle. A comparative review of the emotional experiences of new and seasoned civilian military wives could provide insight into how the FRG could implement changes to engage all civilian military wives during the deployment cycle.

## Implications

This research study is significant to members of the military community because it provides an understanding of the emotional experiences and motivating factors influencing civilian military wife participation in the FRG. The civilian military wives who participated as participants in this study provided qualitative data that brought awareness as to how the FRG organization can fulfill their mandate to meet the needs of the military family during the deployment cycle. The qualitative data is valuable because it provides FRG leaders and the chain of command with insight on how the FRG can systematically support seasoned civilian military wives during the deployment cycle. This insight provides a foundation for positive social change within the military

community as the participants described a phenomenon that researchers statistically quantified in the Survey of Army Families.

As a researcher in partnership with other civilian military wives as participants, we endeavored to promote positive social change on the organizational level of the FRG so that FRG group of leaders can have an understanding as to how they can promote social change in families. I chose a solution-focused research approach towards filling the gap in research focusing on this population to promote an awareness of the concerns of non-participants of the FRG. The participants suggested personal communication as a potential factor that may have influenced their participation in the FRG during the deployment cycle. I recommend improvement in personal communication to provide systematic support that could help facilitate civilian military wives receiving such benefits as decreased stress, skills-development promoting resiliency during deployment, and the promotion of pro-social adjustment-related behaviors in children. This recommendation can be accomplished through Key Callers managing small groups of civilian military wives whom they will invite to FRG meetings or events and conduct a weekly check-in to assess the needs of members of the group. The personalized communication between Key Callers and their group members presents the opportunity for civilian military wives to perceive they have the support of the FRG and they are a valued participant at FRG meetings and events. The successful accomplishment of the FRG's mission is contingent upon civilian military wife modification of their perception and participation during the deployment cycle.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study examined the emotional experiences of civilian-military wives who do not participate in the FRG at JBLM during the deployment cycle.  I collected qualitative data to determine whether research on civilian military wives use of social support organizations could provide the U.S. Army Family and Moral and Recreation Command (FMWRC) with phenomenological insight into the decreased participation of the civilian military wives in the FRG.  The FMWRC obtained quantitative data affirming the decreased participation of this population in the FRG and the SAF participants' subsequent rating of the organization as the least helpful organization among civilian wives of deployed soldiers.  Participants in this study described the phenomenon based on their years of experience processing deployment-related stressors as normative stress without the use of military-related organizational support.  These participants in the research study expressed the difference between their seasoned status in comparison to their initial deployment-related experiences when describing their emotional experience and their lack of need of the FRG.  The participants comparison of the "seasoned" vs. "newbie" status highlighted the difference in the emotional experience of civilian military wives and their perception of participation in the FRG.  The findings from this research study suggested that those with more experience managing deployment-related stressors will feel less inclined to seek support from the FRG if the organization limits communication to electronic sources and does not personally engage with potential members.  Further research is needed to determine the

emotional experience of those civilian military wives with less experience managing

deployment-related stressors who do not participate in the FRG.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview

1. How does being a military wife during the deployment cycle affect your daily life?

2. How would you describe your emotional experience during the deployment cycle?

3. How do you feel about participation and use of the FRG as a source of support during your spouse's deployment?

4. How often do you communicate with FRG leaders or participate in FRG activities during the deployment cycle?

5. Do you have any constructive opinions of how the organization can improve the military wife emotional experience during the deployment cycle?

6. How do you believe you could assist FRG leaders in understanding how they can assist military families during the deployment process?