

The Navy's Support to Sailors in Operations and their Families in France

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THE FAMILY SURVEY PROGRAM WITHIN THE FRENCH NAVY

In the French Navy, military psychologists and psychiatrists often organize support groups or other therapeutic interventions in times of crisis or severe stress[1,2]. Mental health care professionals (child psychologists) often aid in the explanation of the effects prolonged absences of a family member on the family (marital and parental relations) before and during deployment.

For a few years, the French Navy has taken into account social support to sailors and their families during deployments. The description of this support in the Navy is illustrated by a survey conducted among 270 families during Heracles mission, in 2002.

1.0 SOCIAL SUPPORT TO THE SAILOR AND HIS/HER FAMILY

1.1 French Navy's support poles

Since 2001, willing to achieve unity, modernity and efficiency, the French Navy has developed an organisation and structures to provide all ports with accommodation, information, counselling, health care and social welfare, aid for daily living as well as leisure activities within three entities; "Marine accueil", "Marine emploi" and "Marine loisirs".

Support to families during the units' participation in external operations is assumed by these poles under the responsibility of the local command, in close cooperation with the organic commanders, along the

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engaged units' expressed needs. The Families Liaison Bureau (BLF) (bureau liaison familles) of the "Marine accueil" pole, acts as an interface with the families to coordinate the actions (information meetings, letters, flyers, support and cohesion actions...). In accordance with the scale of the deployment, a specific support cell may be set up within the force.

The organisation is:

1.1.1 Before the departure of units:

- an information meeting is organized by the units' commanders for the personnel and their families to introduce the actors of the support initiative; social workers, the families liaison bureau, the force support cell... ;
- each family is given an information sheet (drawn up by the organic command or the unit) stating, if it is known, the mission's programme and the support details;
- each family is informed by mail of the unit's social worker details.

1.1.2 During the mission:

- the BLF and the support cell may be contacted by the families.
- the BLF regularly organizes cohesion activities, helped by the "leisure" pole and funded by the armed forces welfare services and the leisure management. Should the deployment take place during the Christmas and New Year celebrations, specific actions are held to ease the effects of absence.
- the social worker specially and closely attends to "fragile" families.

1.1.3 At the end of the mission:

- the BLF and the organic authority organize the reception of the force by the families;

1.2 Support to injured personnel

In 2005, as an extension of this policy, the Naval Staff Headquarters decided to set up an organisation to better help the injured or seriously ill civilian or military personnel and their families, independently of any notion of service imputability

Specific procedures have been designed to materially and morally support the families of personnel repatriated for health reasons and hospitalised in the Paris area. To coordinate the action of the various support organisations, a Naval Support Cell to Injured and Ill (Cellule d'Aide aux Blessés et aux Malades de la Marine (CAB2M)) was created in the Family and Disability bureau of the Naval Supply Branch in Toulon. This cell is also tasked with advising the command and the actors and with maintaining a long-standing solidarity bond with those going through hard times, as it is the Navy's moral duties.

2.0 THE SEARCH FOR AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION VIA/THROUGH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Aware of the consequences of the sailor's absence on his family life during operations at sea or long navigation periods, the French Navy decided to strengthen its support to those serving on operational units and their families. The French Naval Staff thus sought a partnership with the private sector and contacted a French group in order to set up a support programme. The programme began on January 2nd 2006.

Among the services the company could provide, the Navy retained two essential paths: “child and family care”, “household support”. These services complement those already provided by the Navy or the French MoD.

2.2 Child and family care:

- assistance to find a babysitter (on a regular or one-off basis);
- information on academic guidance and pertaining administrative procedures;
- information and search for extra-teaching and homework assistance;
- information and search for leisure and activities for children;
- information and support in the administrative procedures relative to the family (civil status, family allowances fund, hiring procedures for home care service);
- individual support (family relationships, isolation, personal difficulties, psychological support).

2.2 Household support:

- search for home help service (housekeeper, gardener...);
- search of craftsmen and estimates for works;
- urgent repair 24 hours a day (plumber, locksmith, glazier...);
- computer repair;
- home-related administrative and legal assistance (insurance, purchase, building works, rental);
- car-related information and assistance.

This programme is only intended for sailors assigned for a whole year away from their families and personnel in operational units that may have to leave the base port on short notice (72 hours) and for a significant duration (over 30 consecutive days), which amounts to about 14,000 beneficiaries.

Should the sailors face any difficulty in one of the above-mentioned fields, regardless of their family background (single, married, free union contract, unmarried cohabitation), a call centre may be contacted by e-mail or phone by themselves or their families. A counsellor will inform the sailors and search for the service provider they need, free of charge. The Navy, through its leisure centres, will finance the call centre while the sailors will assume the cost of the phone call and of the labour at market price.

This support programme is truly innovative and provides peace of mind to the sailors, as it complements what already exists within the Navy or the MoD (armed forces welfare services, travel centre, legal counselling, families liaison bureau, administrative and military bureaus).

3.0 AN EVALUATION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG SAILORS' SPOUSES IN 2002

On 21 November 2001, France decided to send the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* (with two Rafale, 16 Super Etendard, one E-2C Hawkeye and several SA365 Dauphin helicopters) to the Indian Ocean to support UN operations against Afghanistan (Heracles mission), integrated in an international force. During June 2002, the *Charles de Gaulle* and his group (Rafale) carried out interposition missions to ease the tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

At that time, we have used an anonymous self-administered questionnaire sent to a representative sample of spouses of sailors [3], including naval aviation and naval action force, as we did first in the French

Army in 1999 [4]. The aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of deployment (spouse and children), the impact of means of communication, and family requests: absence issues, support and role of the military institution and of communities agencies (Figure 1). The sample size was 270 (33.8 ± 0.9 years old with 1.7 ± 0.1 children).

Some questions were focused on support proposed during deployment:

- During deployment, how do you perceive any exterior support?
- In which area do you need any support?
- In which area have you received any support?
- Was the problem solved by the support?
- Did the support correspond to expectations?

One-third of these women think an exterior support is useful (37.2%) and one-fifth think support is necessary or essential (19%). An exterior support is perceived as useless for 53 people (19.7%), and 45 other people (16.7%) don't know (table 1).

Support is needed for family life (baby-sitting, homework assistance) and to share experiences with other people in the same situation (table 2). In these areas, effective support has been given to families (table 3). On the other hand, problems are less solved in two areas: leisure (71%) and administrative procedures (67%).

During deployment, problem resolution is observed in 70% and corresponds to expectations in 70%. This support is given by the Navy (11%), social workers (30%), military family associations (4%) and civilian family associations (6%).

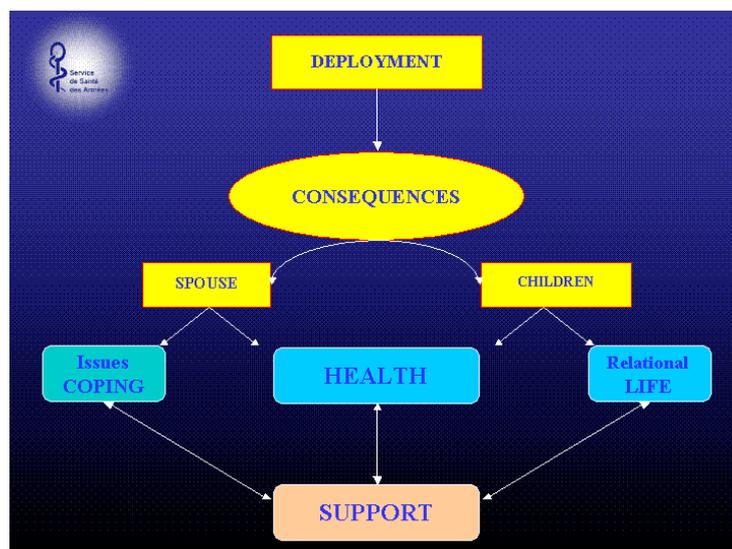


Figure 1: Familial impact of deployment model used in the French Navy study.

Table 1: Description of the perception of any exterior support.

Support perceived as:	N	%
Useless	53	19.7
Useful	100	37.2
Necessary	29	10.8
Essential	22	6.2
Don't Know	45	16.7

Missing: 20 (7.4%)

Table 2: Description of support asked for and received during deployment.

	Support Needed (%)	Support Received (%)
Family life	43	15
Sharing experiences	41	25
Leisure	34	10
Home help service	15	3
Administrative procedures	21	8
Care	17	12

Table 3: Appropriateness of support between supply and demand.

	Problem solved (%)	Fit with expectations (%)
Family life	95	85
Sharing experiences	82	81
Leisure	71	80
Home help service	80	67
Administrative procedures	67	86
Care	84	85

- [1] Instruction n° 105/DEF/SPMM/SPAHMM du 4 mars 2003 relative à la mise en oeuvre de la cellule medico-psychologique lors d'évènements graves par le service de psychologie appliqué et d'hygiène mentale de la Marine.
- [2] Clervoy, P. (2005). Naval psychological support. Médecine et armées, 2005, 33, 5, 433-440.
- [3] Arvers, P. (2003). The Impact of Deployment on Army Family Members in the 27th Brigade of Mountain Infantry. Technical report #7/CRSSA/DFH (french).
- [4] Arvers, P. (2004). The Impact of Deployment on the Military Family in the French Navy (spouses and children) – Survey among 270 families during the year 2001-2002. Technical report #11/CRSSA/DFH (french).

