



NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

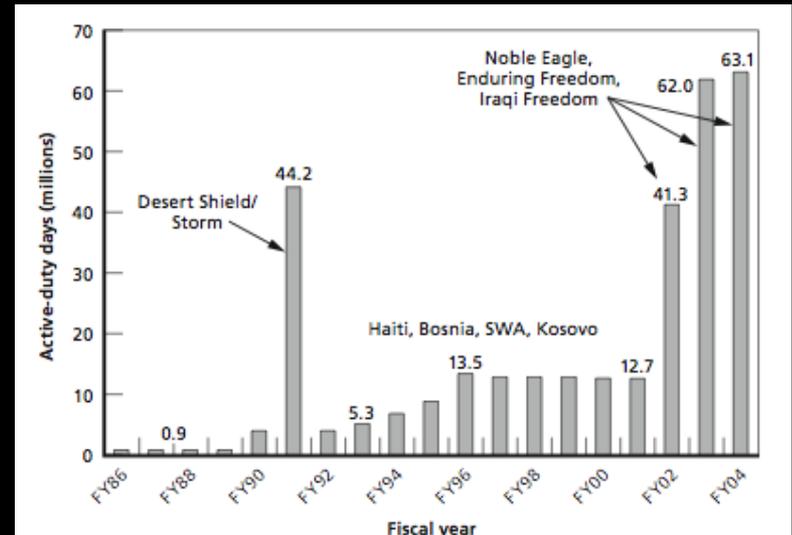
***Understanding the  
Deployment  
Experiences of  
Guard and Reserve  
Families***



**Dr. Laura Castaneda  
Dr. Margaret Harrell**

# *Growing Need to Help Guard and Reserve Families Stems from Changing Role*

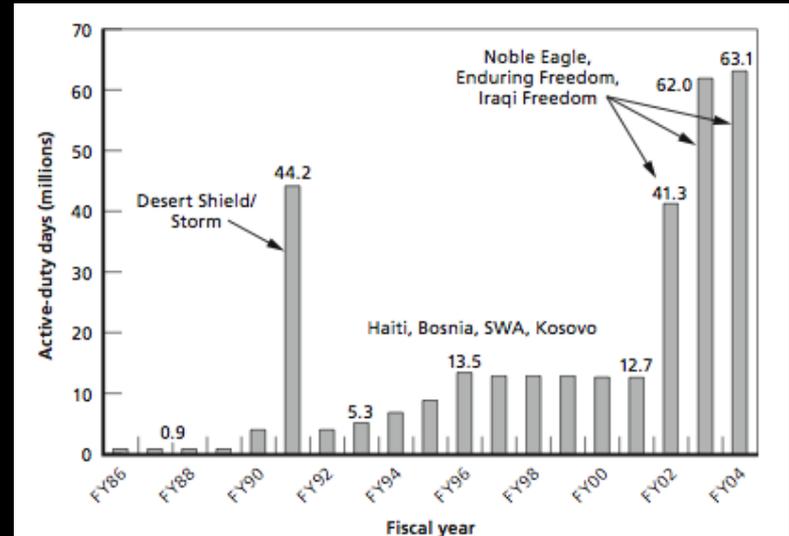
- Nation's reliance on Reserve Component (RC) has grown steadily
  - Involuntary activations grown with operations in Gulf War, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo
  - More than half million deployed to OEF and OIF
  - Shift from strategic to operational reserve



Source: RAND MG-757

# Growing Need to Help Guard and Reserve Families Stems from Changing Role

- Nation's reliance on Reserve Component (RC) has grown steadily
  - Involuntary activations grown with operations in Gulf War, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo
  - More than half million deployed to OEF and OIF
  - Shift from strategic to operational reserve
- Guard has split mission: must deal with both state and DoD crises



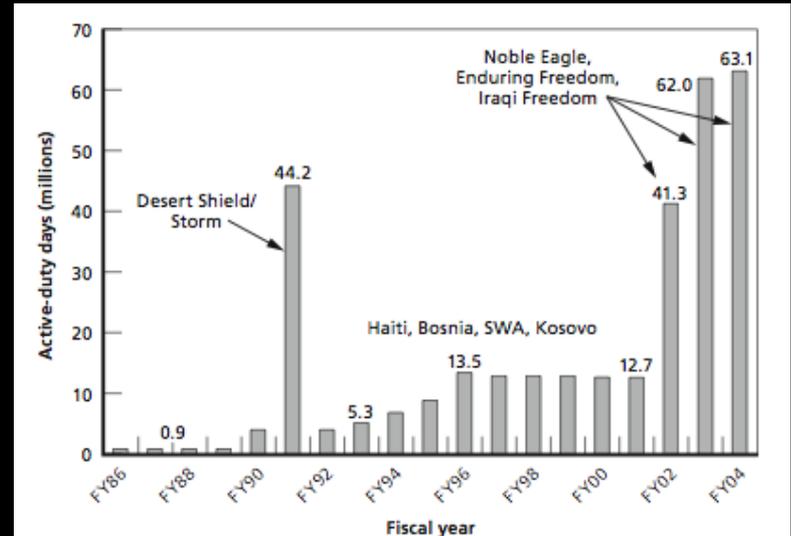
Source: RAND MG-757



# *Growing Need to Help Guard and Reserve Families Stems from Changing Role*

- Nation's reliance on Reserve Component (RC) has grown steadily
  - Involuntary activations grown with operations in Gulf War, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo
  - More than half million deployed to OEF and OIF
  - Shift from strategic to operational reserve
- Guard has split mission: must deal with both state and DoD crises

*Such reliance puts immense strain on RC families*



Source: RAND MG-757



# ***Research on the Impact of Deployments on RC Families Is Needed***

- **Prior research focuses on Active Component families, but may be less applicable to RC families**
- **RC families differ in key ways from AC families**
  - **Demographically different: older and more female**
  - **Geographically dispersed; live farther from other installations and families in unit**
  - **Likely had different expectations of how much families would sacrifice for their service**
- **Such differences may have important implications on how best to support RC families**

## ***We Conducted Analysis to Better Understand RC Family Needs***

- **Focus on providing broader view of deployment issues by interviewing both spouses and service members**
  - **357 spouses and 296 service members from four reserve components: Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Air Force Reserve, Marine Forces Reserve**
- **Assess issues RC families face as a result of deployment**
- **Explore use of family support resources**
- **Analyze how experiences and perceptions influence their retention plans**

# ***This Briefing Focuses on Answering Three Questions***

- **What were the deployment experiences of RC families?**
- **What is the impact of these deployment experiences?**
- **What should the military do to support RC families?**

# *Questions and Answers*

## **Questions**

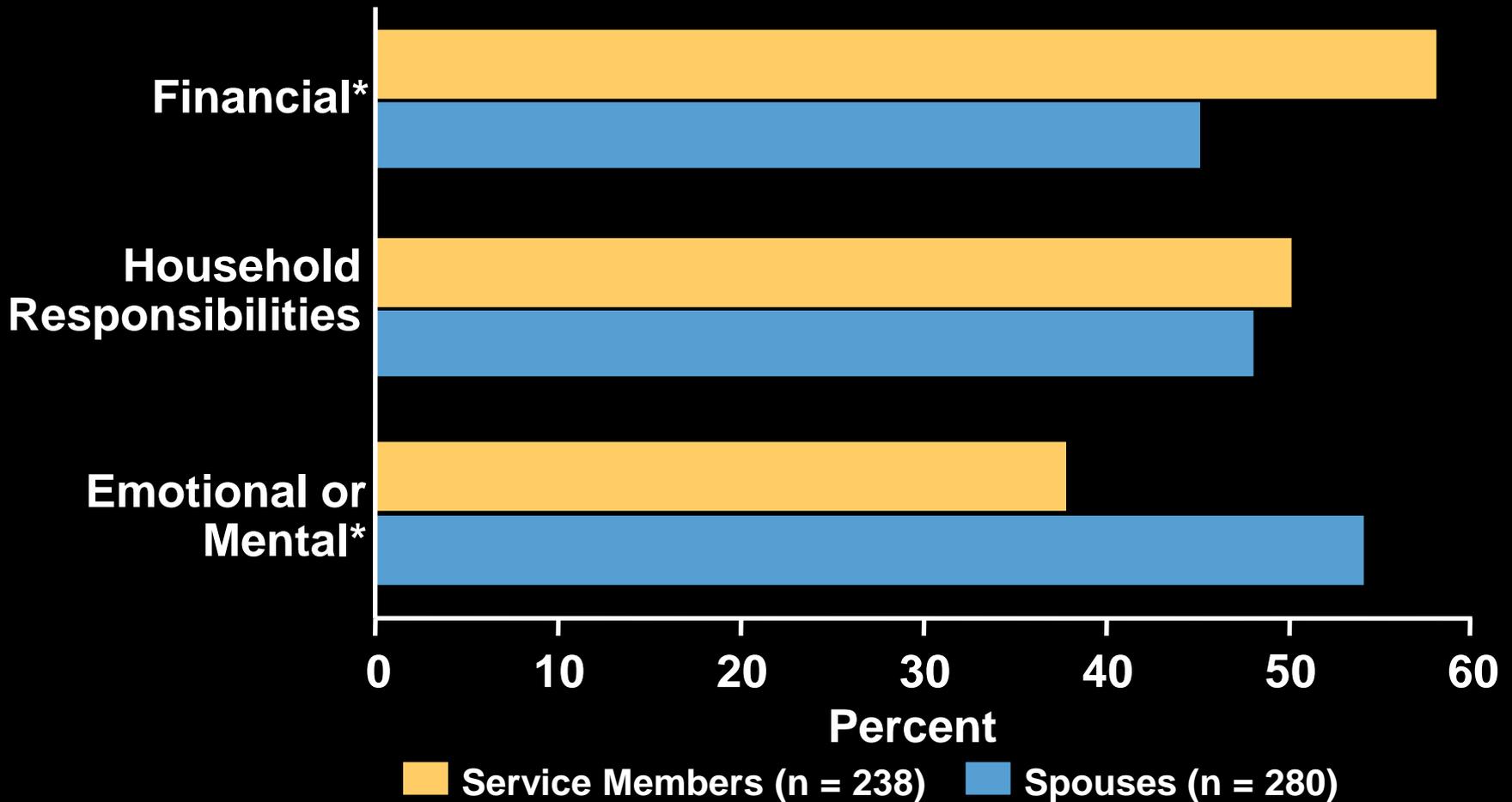
- **What were the deployment experiences of RC families?**
- **What is the impact of these deployment experiences?**
- **What should the military do to support RC families?**

## **Answers**

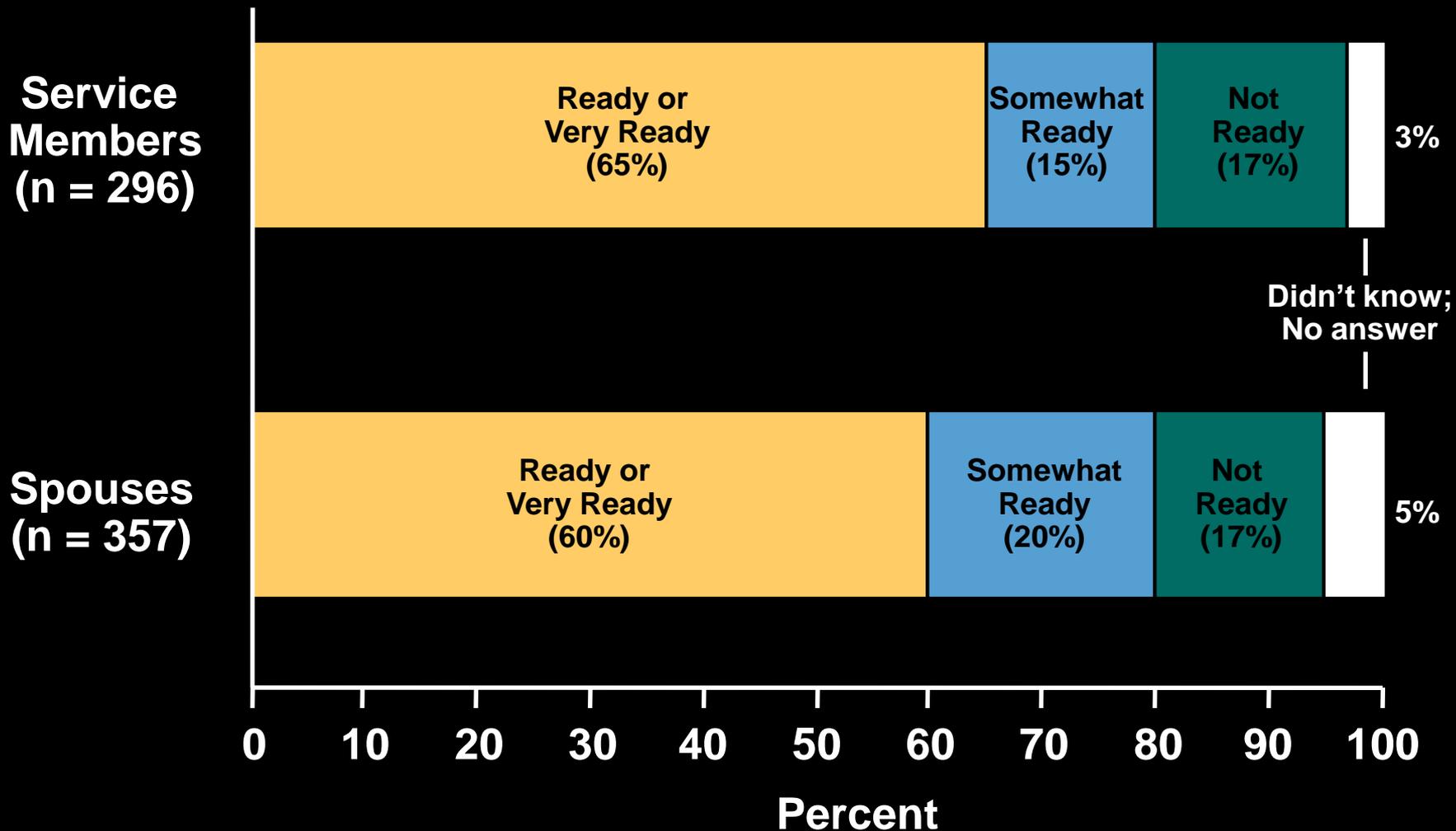
- **Most ready for deployment and able to cope with it, most also experienced deployment-related problems and positives; variations by groups**

# Service Members and Spouses Defined Readiness Differently

Readiness Aspects Cited by 2 out of 5 Interviewees

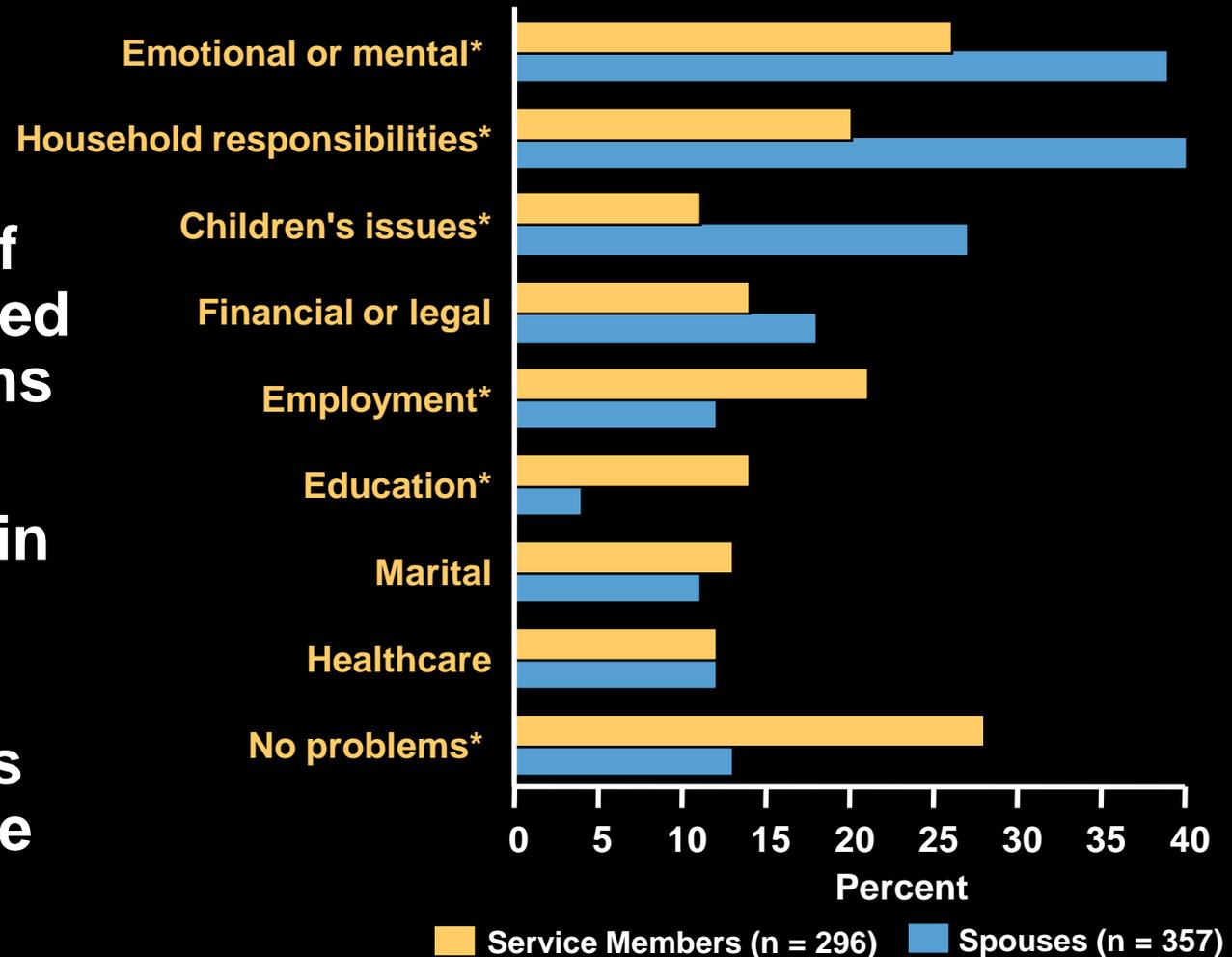


# *But Most Felt Their Family Was Ready or Very Ready for Deployment*



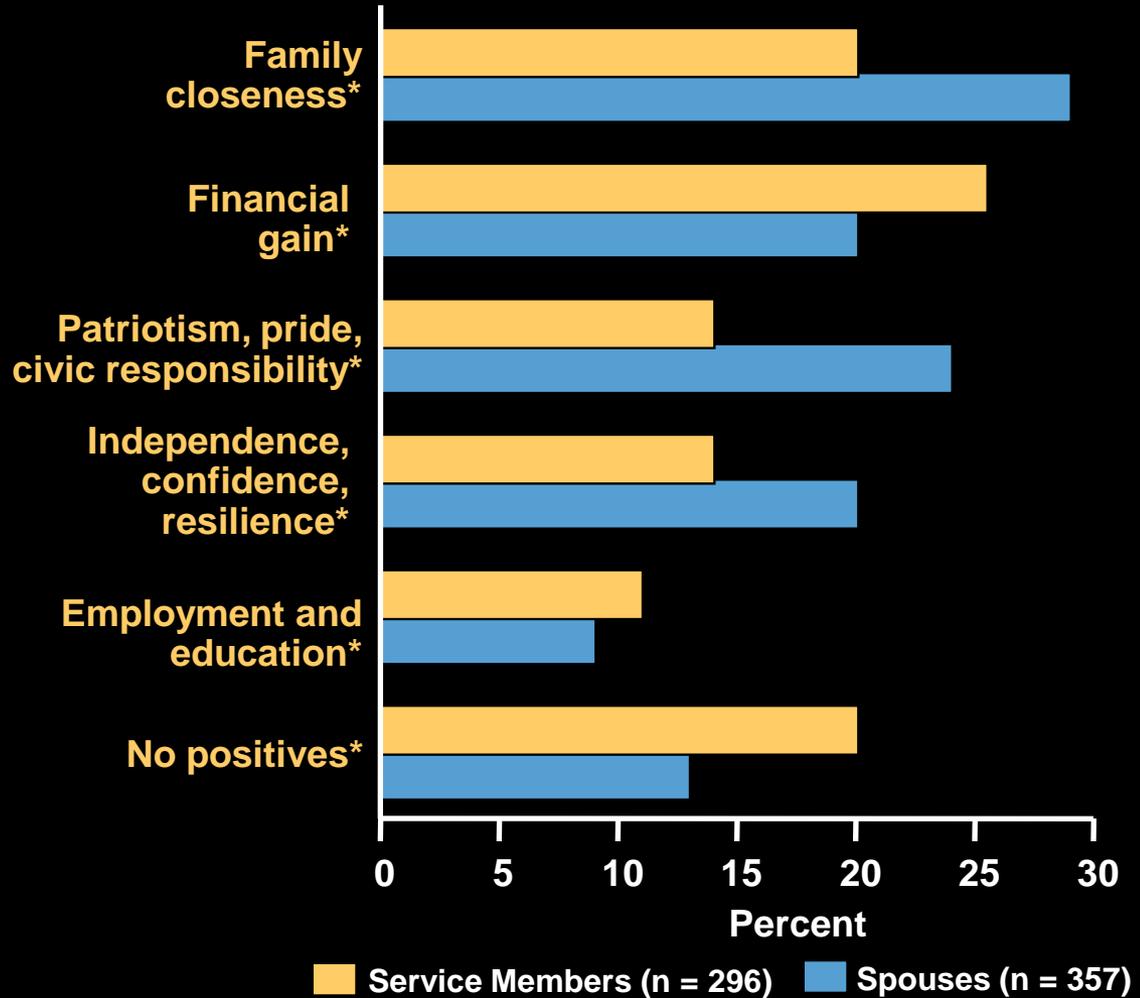
# Most Mentioned Deployment-Related Problems; But Again Group Differences

- 4 out of 5 cited problems
- Different types of families mentioned different problems
- Problems range in their severity
- Service members more likely to cite no problems



# Most Also Mentioned Positives from Deployment

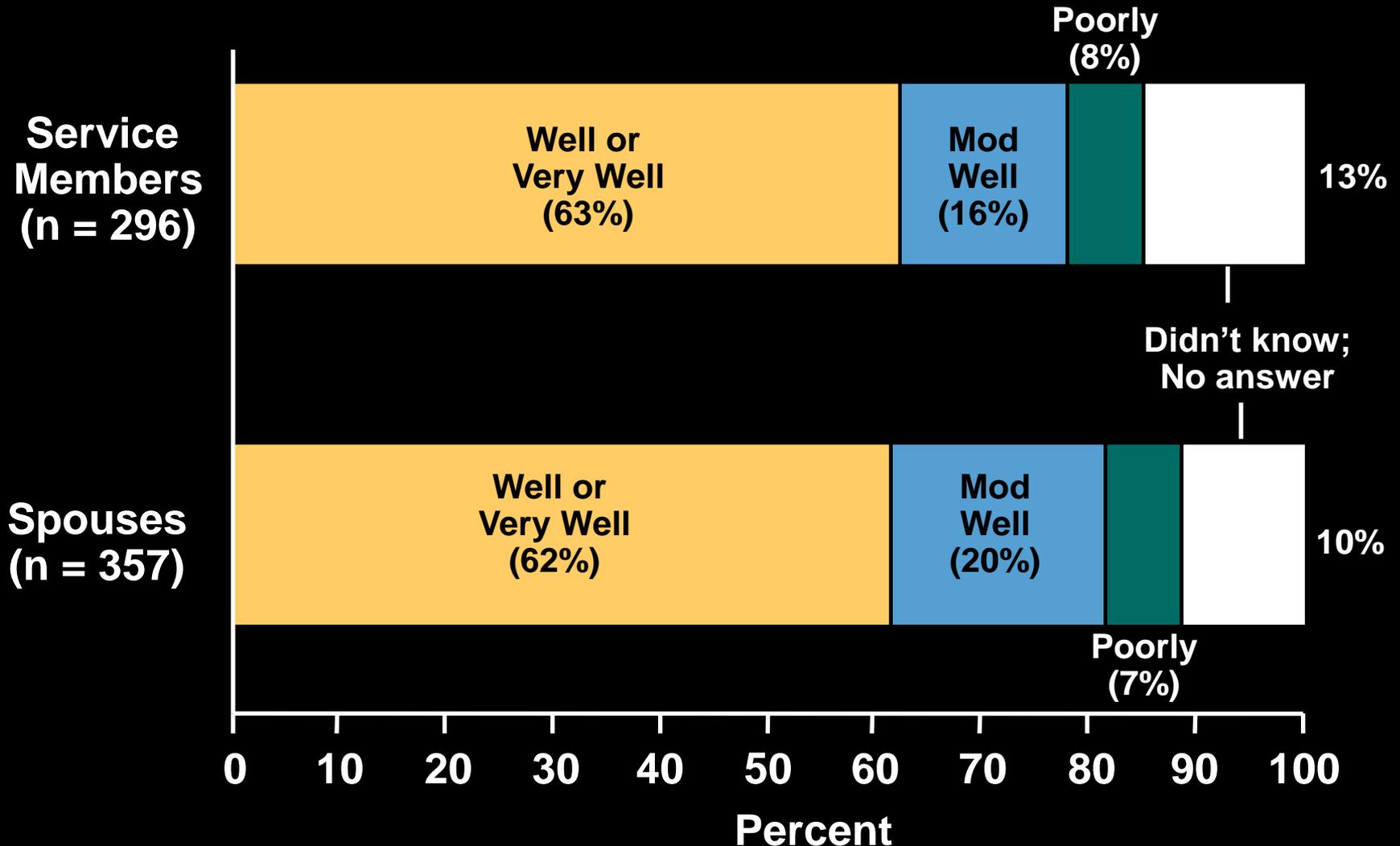
- 3 out of 4 reported positive aspects
- Again, there are differences across groups
- Service members more likely to cite no positives



# ***We Assessed Meaning and Levels of Coping***

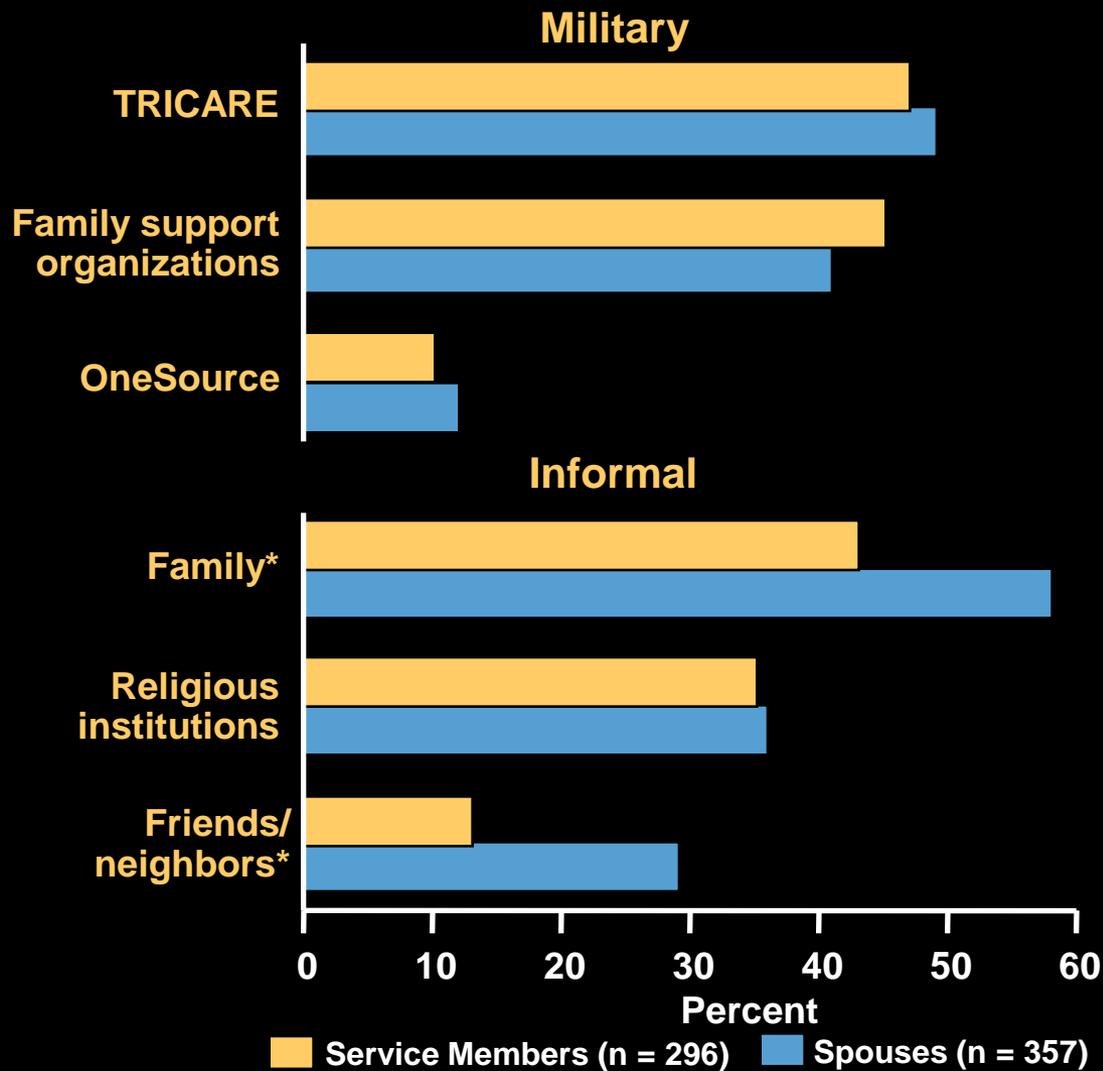
- **2 out of 3 were able to provide a definition of coping**
- **Most common definitions included emotional coping and coping with household responsibilities**
- **Small percentage also discussed coping in terms of family finances**

# Most Felt Their Family Had Coped Well or Very Well



# Both Military and Informal Resources Are Used

- 9 out of 10 indicated their family turned to a resource
- Family the only resource cited by a majority
- TRICARE and family support organizations most commonly reported military resources
- Some differences between spouses and service members



\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.10$

# *Questions and Answers*

## **Questions**

- **What were the deployment experiences of RC families?**
- **What is the impact of these deployment experiences?**
- **What should the military do to support RC families?**

## **Answers**

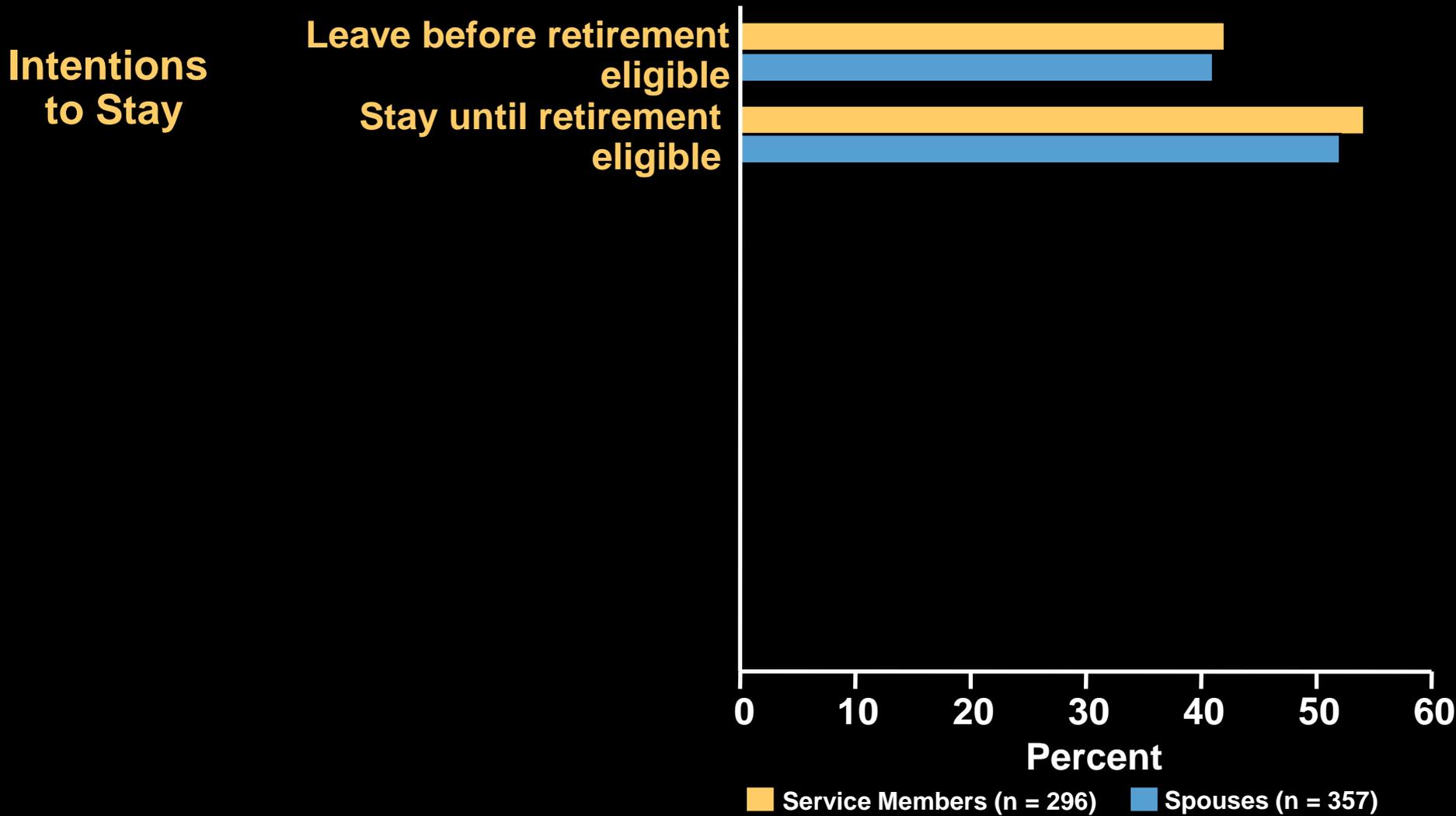
- **Most ready for deployment and able to cope with it, most also experienced deployment-related problems and positives; variations by groups**
- **Families' deployment experiences are related to their retention plans**

# *We Wanted to Understand Implications of Deployment Experiences on Retention Intentions*

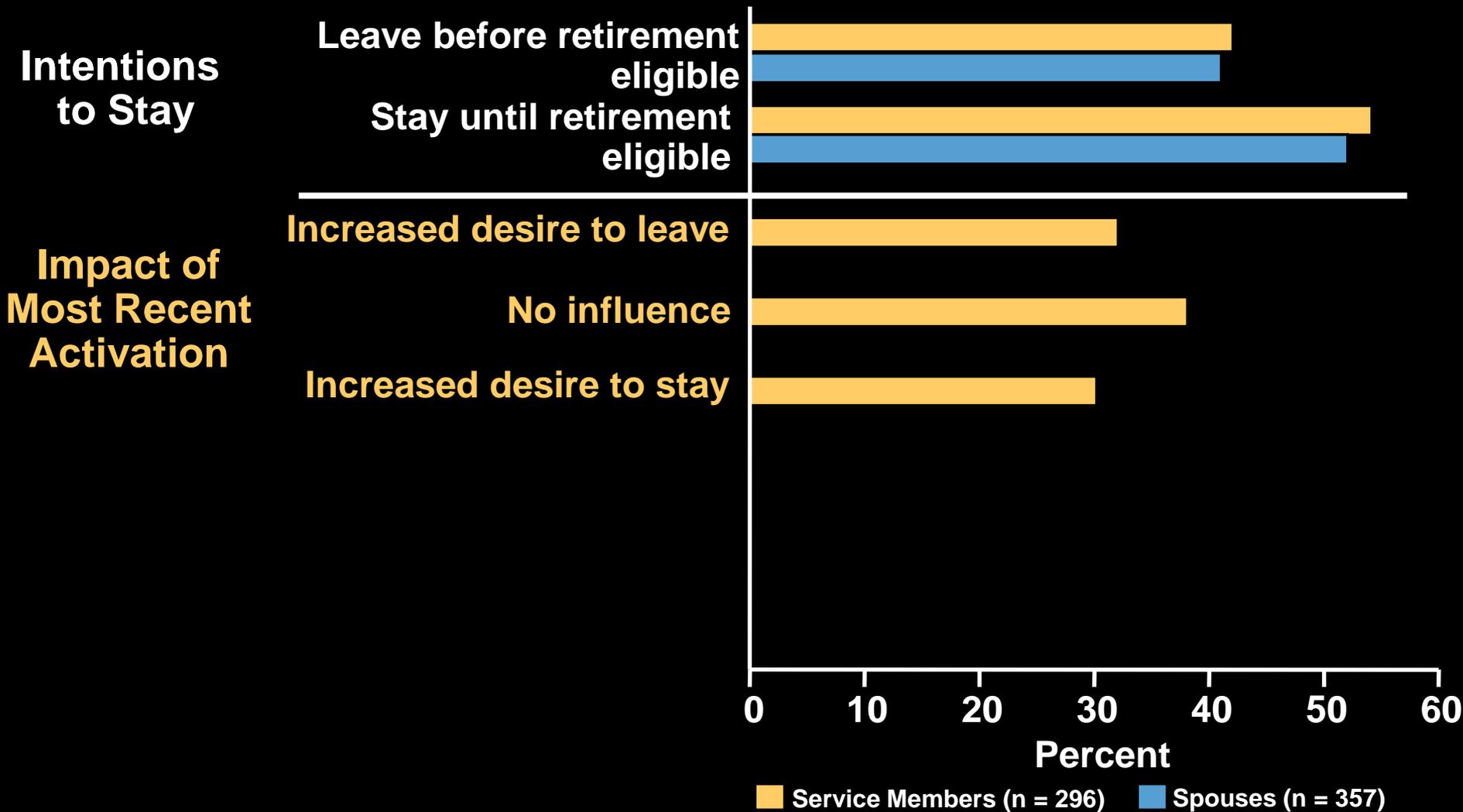


- **Intentions to stay until retirement eligibility?**
- **Impact of most recent activation on service member's career plans?**
- **Spouse's opinion about service member's military career?**

# What Are Families' Retention Intentions?

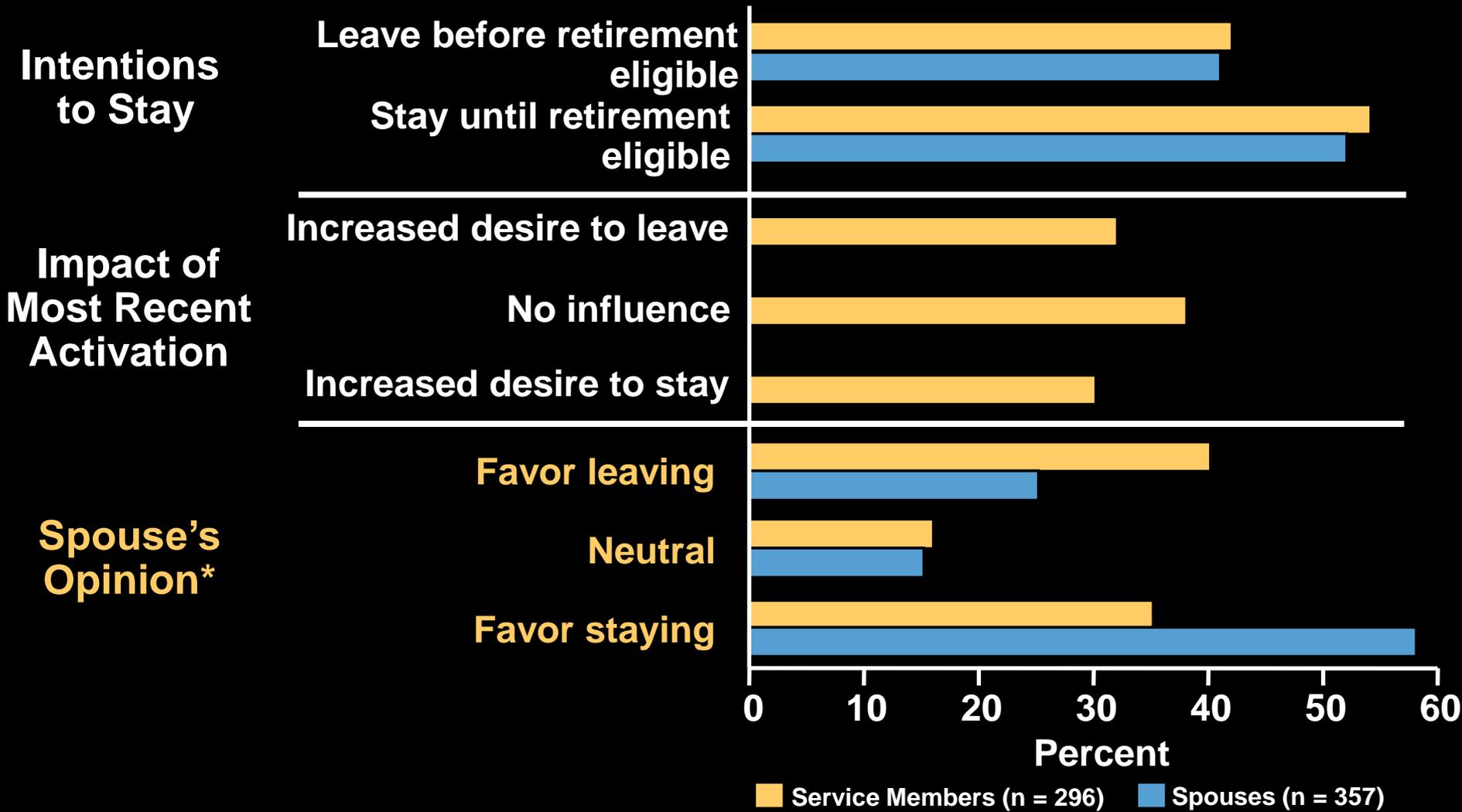


# What Are Families' Retention Intentions?



\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.10$

# What Are Families' Retention Intentions?



# Retention Intentions Are Related to Many Deployment Experiences

	Intention to Stay Until Retirement Eligibility	Impact of Most Recent Activation on SM Career Plans (SM only)	Spouse Opinion About SM Career Plans
<b>Family readiness</b>	SM SP	SM	SM SP
<b>Problems</b>			
Emotional/mental	SP		SM SP
Employment		SM	
Education	SM	SM	
Marital		SM	SM SP
Health care	SP	SM	
No problems	SP	SM	SM SP
<b>Positives</b>			
Financial gain	SM		SM SP
Family closeness	SM	SM	SM
Pride, patriotism			SP
No positives	SM	SM	SM SP
<b>Family coping</b>		SM	SP

# Questions and Answers

## Questions

- What were the deployment experiences of RC families?
- What is the impact of these deployment experiences?
- What should the military do to support RC families?

## Answers

- Most ready for deployment and able to cope with it, most also experienced deployment-related problems and positives; variations by groups
- Families' deployment experiences are related to their retention plans
- Focus on activation/deployment personnel practices, perceptions/expectations, and providing support/information

# ***Activation and Deployment Personnel Practices: Suggestions for Improvement***

- **Ensure that any notice sufficient for service members and families to prepare for deployment is also sufficient for military**
- **Pursue predictable mobilizations of limited average length**
- **Reduce use of cross-leveling for RC personnel**

# ***Perceptions and Expectations: Suggestions for Improvement***

- **Ensure family expectations are consistent with DoD's vision of an RC that is both operational and strategic**
- **Recognize that family perceptions are sometimes more important than actual experiences**
- **Recognize that families focus on “boots away from home,” not “boots on ground”**
- **Emphasize the positive aspects of activation and deployment**

# ***Support and Information for Families: Suggestions for Improvement (1)***

- **Increase levels of readiness among not-yet-activated families**
- **Tailor efforts to avoid and mitigate deployment-related problems**
- **Recognize that severity and consequences of problems vary**
- **Seek ways to make deployment-phased and “on demand” information available to families**

## ***Support and Information for Families: Suggestions for Improvement (2)***

- **Know how to find families**
- **Explore ways to connect families to one another**
- **Seek ways to improve awareness of, and work with, local and community resources for families**
- **Bear in mind the limited capacity and capabilities of volunteer-based resources, either military or informal**
- **Reinforce and learn from families who seem to proceed through deployment cycle with fewer problems**

# *Conclusions*

- **Deployment experiences must be studied broadly**
- **Different types of families were vulnerable to different types of problems**
- **Understanding and addressing families' needs is key to ensuring well-being and to health of RC**
  - **How RC family members handle deployment may influence their retention intentions**
- **Family support successfulness should be assessed in terms of family readiness, family coping, retention intentions**



NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INSTITUTE