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Chapter Title: Introduction

Book Title: Analysis of Financial Support to the Surviving Spouses and Children of Casualties in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

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Published by: RAND Corporation

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.7249/j.ctt1q60qv.8>

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## Introduction

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Military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan lasting more than a decade have focused national attention on meeting the needs of military families, especially families of service members who were injured or killed in combat. According to official casualty records, between October 7, 2001, and March 5, 2012, 6,370 members of the U.S. military were killed during their deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan or died as a result of injuries sustained during those deployments (Defense Casualty Analysis System, undated).

Little is known about the economic impact of combat deaths on surviving household members. This study provides some of the first empirical evidence on this issue. The analysis includes married active component (AC) and reserve component (RC) service members whose deployments ended between 2003 and 2006 and examines their and their spouses' subsequent labor market and other compensation through 2010. By comparing earnings trajectories of uninjured households with those of households that experience a combat death, we can quantify the financial impact of combat-related deaths on surviving spouses and children. We first estimate the impact of a service member's death on household earnings. Next, we measure the extent to which survivor benefits and compensation from various federal government sources provide financial replacement for lost earnings. The study does not attempt to quantify the non-financial losses experienced by spouses and children or the non-financial types of support that may be available to them.

Similar to this report, a 2007 report assessed the financial status of military widows, considering both spousal earnings and compensation from the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including the tax advantage from such payments (Christensen et al., 2007). However, that study differs from the present study in several ways. First, Christensen et al. used data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) to compare different groups of widows (military and civilian), whereas we estimate the impact of combat deaths relative to outcomes for spouses of service members who return from their deployments without injuries. The Christensen et al. study was also a cross-sectional analysis that compared levels of income, rather than changes in income following a service member's death. Many widows in that study were observed years or decades after their spouse's death. Unlike the present analysis, it was not focused on combat-related deaths; the population was older, and the deaths were mainly non-combat-related.

This report is organized as follows. Chapter Two describes the data we used to define our sample and measure key variables, including combat deaths, labor market earnings, and survivor compensation, and presents descriptive statistics related to these variables. Chapter Three describes our empirical approach. Chapter Four reports the estimated effects of combat

death on labor market earnings and total household income, including survivor compensation. Chapter Five discusses the fraction of earnings losses that are replaced by existing survivor compensation mechanisms, and Chapter Six presents our conclusions.