

# Support and Resiliency Inventory (SRI) for Civilian Spouses of Military Members and Veterans: An Overview

Gary L. Bowen, Ph.D.  
Kenan Distinguished Professor

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
School of Social Work

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## SRI: Summary Description

- Self-help assessment tool for civilian spouses of current and former military members living in NC.
- Sponsored by the NC Governor's Focus on Returning Combat Veterans and their Families.
- Assesses civilian spouses' family and community relationships and their success in meeting various life demands.
- Results in an individual profile for respondents and a summary group data.
- Offers civilian spouses helpful strategies for increasing coping effectiveness and access to Web-based resources, including NCcareLINK, CARE-LINE, and Military OneSource.



## Overview of the SRI Initiative

- Who is sponsoring the SRI Initiative?
- Who are the performance team members?
- Who are the key stakeholders for the project?
- What does the SRI provide to its users?
- Who does the SRI serve (primary & secondary)?
- What is the philosophy/science behind the SRI?
- How do we think about the concepts of support and resiliency?
- What are the key distinctions between the SRI and similar websites?
- What are the intended outcomes for the project?
- What activities were conducted as part of the SRI's feasibility test?  
What major conclusions were drawn from the SRI's feasibility test?
- What questions require further discussion?
- What are the next steps in the SRI's development and implementation?
- What are some readings that address the theoretical and research basis for the SRI?

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## Who is sponsoring the SRI Initiative?

- The North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (DMH/DD/SAS) is sponsoring the SRI initiative as part of its continued support of the Governor's Focus on Returning Combat Veterans and their Families.
  - A feasibility test of the SRI was conducted in May-June 2008.
  - The SRI is now ready for implementation as an online assessment tool and support system.
- Michael Lancaster, MD, Co-Director of DMH/DD/SAS and Chief of Clinical Policy, and John Harris, MSW, Mental Health Program Manager and Veteran Service Officer on the Clinical Policy Team, are directing and supervising the effort.

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## Who are the performance team members?

- The School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill received a contract from DMH/DD/SAS (UNC Account No. 5-41972) to conduct the feasibility test of the SRI.
- The UNC-CH team is led by Dr. Gary Bowen, Kenan Distinguished Professor.
- Dr. Bowen is supported by Mr. Mike Kelly, President, Flying Bridge Technologies, Inc., in Charlotte, NC, and Dr. Jim Martin, Associate Professor, Bryn Mawr College, in Philadelphia, PA, and a retired Army Colonel with 26 years service in the Army Medical Department.
- Advisors included representatives from the NC National Guard, Air National Guard, 108th Army Reserve, Durham VA Medical Center, Army Community Services, The Army Integrated Family Support Network, and the NC Citizen-Soldier Support Program.

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## Who are the SRI's key stakeholders ?

- *Key Stakeholders:*
  - DMH/DD/SAS
  - NC National Guard
  - U.S. Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy Reserve Components in NC
  - U. S. Coast Guard in NC
  - State of NC ISFAC
  - Department of Veteran Affairs Programs and Services in NC
  - Veterans Organizations in NC

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## What does the SRI provide?

- The SRI provides users with a rapid assessment of their personal support networks and their resiliency.
- Based on this assessment, the SRI suggests user strategies for enhancing one's personal support network and opportunities for enhancing resiliency.
- The SRI gives the user a direct link to a 24/7 gateway to Internet-based information and resources (to expand knowledge) and/or access to personal assistance (the gateway for Active, NG, and Reserve Component spouses is OneSource; the gateway for the spouses of veterans in NC is CARE-LINE / NCcareLINK).
- Used by program managers and family readiness professionals, the SRI is a policy and program decision making tool.

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## Who does the SRI serve?

- The SRI is intended primarily to serve spouses of NC National Guard members, as well as spouses living in NC whose husband/wife is serving in one of the Reserve Components or is a member of one of the Active Components and serving anywhere in the world.
- The SRI is also designed for spouses of veterans\* living in NC—especially the spouses of veterans of the GWOT.

*\*Veterans are those former members who are no longer serving in the Active or Reserve Components of the Armed Forces, including the National Guard.*

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## What is the philosophy/science behind the SRI?

- Underlying the SRI is a focus on personal connections and a “strengths-based” approach to personal resiliency. The intent is to build human capacity at the individual and collective levels by emphasizing people caring for people. The SRI recognizes the need and value of agency and systems-based interventions as a necessary but not sufficient network of care.
- The SRI is based on the “risk and resiliency” and “community capacity” work of Bowen and colleagues, which focuses on the power of social networks to generate social capital for individuals and families.

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## How do we think about the concepts of support and resiliency?

### **Adversity and Positive Challenge**

- In thinking about military families, we, the performance team members, picture a road of life on which they are traveling. At any one point in time, they are somewhere on this road of life facing a unique combination of needs, demands, resources and opportunities, as well as hopes and dreams, aspirations, and disappointments in the context of historical circumstances and individual and family time. In the rear view mirror, these families see where they have been, including chronic situations that do not go away and past issues that remain unresolved; through the windshield, they see the road ahead, including impending or future situations or anticipations. Without doubt, this road has become more precarious and difficult since 2001—the level of drag from the surface of the road and the number of barriers on the road itself have increased.

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# How do we think about the concepts of support and resiliency?

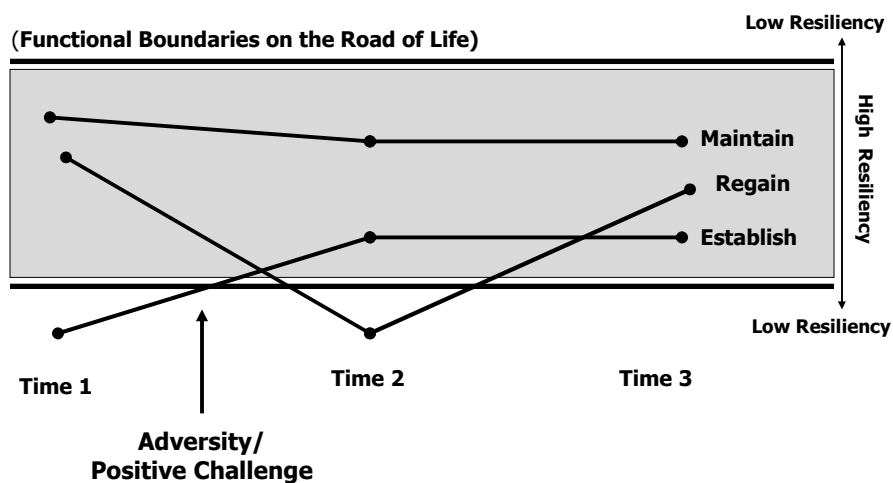
## Resilience versus Resiliency

- Resilience is the ability of families to cope and adapt successfully in the context of developmental transitions, adversities, and positive challenge (to stay on the road [maintain] or, if they go off the road or they are off the road at the start, the ability to get back on [regain or establish]). The width of the road represents normative expectations—what constitutes “staying on” or “going off” the road varies within groups, within military occupational specialties, and across communities (see next slide).
- Resiliency is different from resilience, which is a process. Resiliency is the outcome of resilience, and it ranges on a continuum from low to high. In other words, resiliency is the ability of members and families to “get the job done” (bills paid, kids to school, groceries bought, the dog fed).
- The SRI assesses 12 resiliency dimensions: physical well-being, emotional well-being, personal safety, financial welfare, coping success, support for others, help-seeking orientation, family management, deployment readiness, community participation, spouse support, and quality of life.

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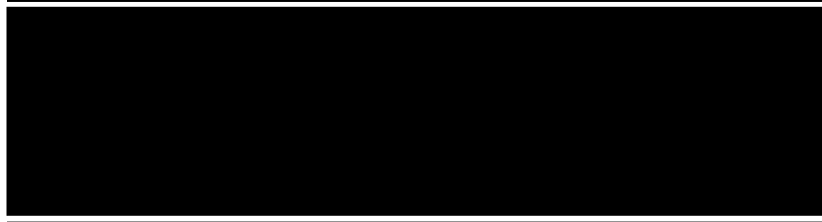
## Pathways of Resilience



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## The SRI: 12 Resiliency Dimensions

(Functional Boundaries)



Low Resiliency

High Resiliency

Low Resiliency

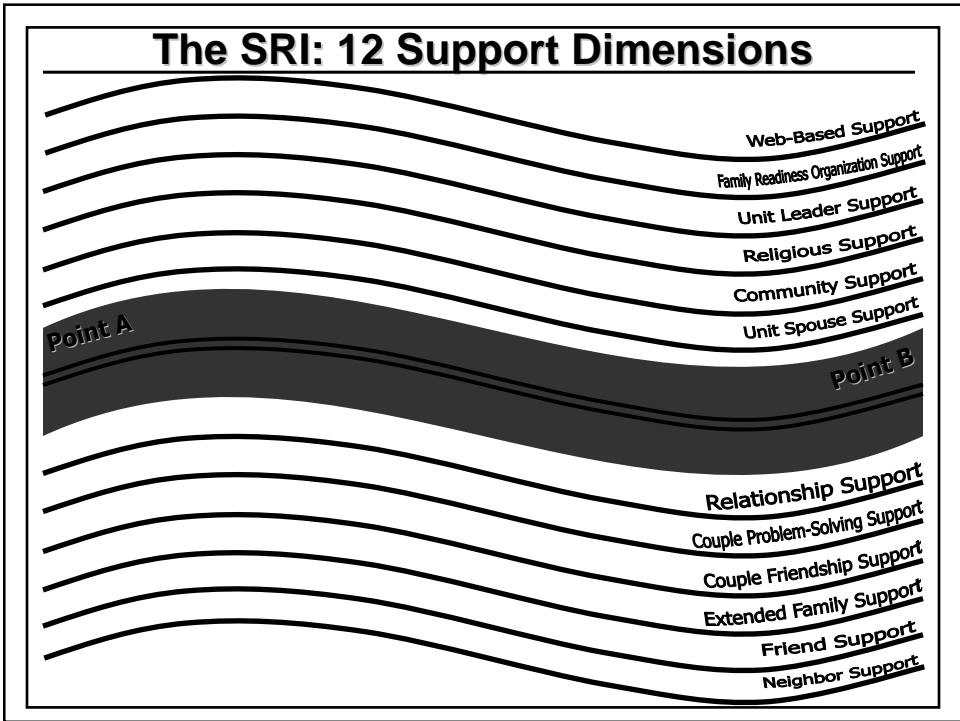
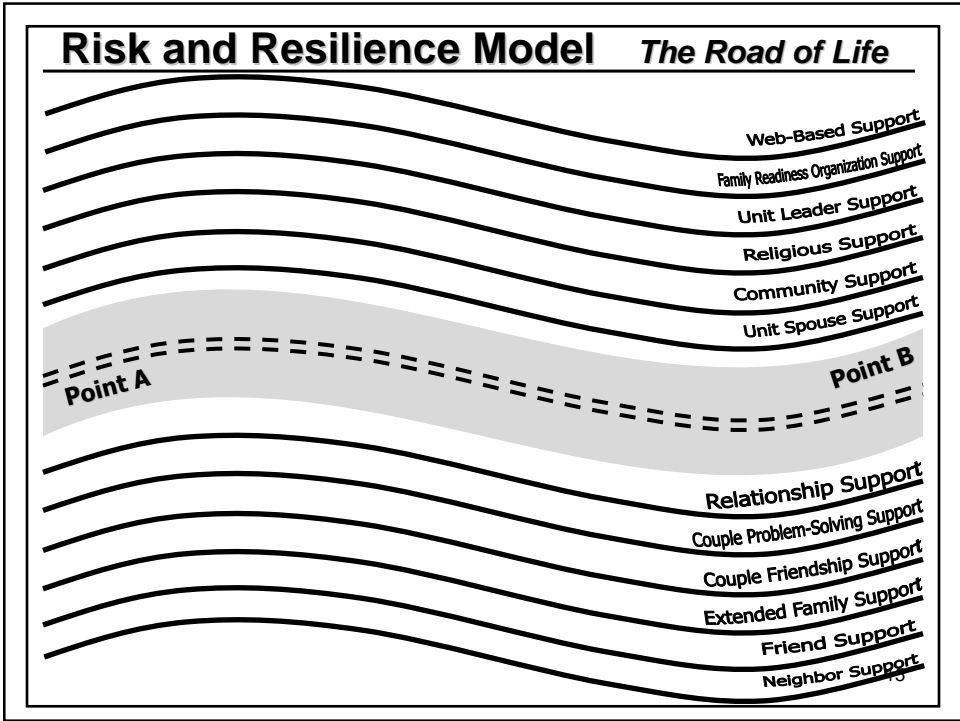
## How do we think about the concepts of support and resiliency?

### Vulnerability/Capacity Ratio

- The fundamental question is, "What distinguishes those families who are able to stay on the road from those who are not?" No family is invincible or invulnerable to the vagaries of life. At any one point in time, families have a ratio of vulnerability to capacity.

### Support

- Military and civilian researchers have given considerable attention to investigating what allows individuals and families to demonstrate resilience in the context of positive challenge and adversity. Connections with others and informal and formal social support have been identified in study after study. We see these connections with others and informal and formal mechanisms of support as guardrails on the road of life (see next slide).
- From the perspective of intervention and prevention planning, an important function of formal networks is to strengthen informal community connections. Formal networks may grow at the expense of informal networks. (For example, community agencies may plan and sponsor events for community members that community members are capable of planning and sponsoring for themselves.) When formal networks, such as unit leaders and base agencies, perform functions that the informal community is capable of providing for itself (i.e., overfunctioning), informal community networks may be diminished.
- The SRI assesses 12 support dimensions: relationship support, couple problem-solving support, couple friendship support, extended family support, friend support, neighbor support, unit spouse support, community support, religious support, unit leader support, family readiness organization support, and Web-based support (see next slide).



## What are the key distinctions between the SRI and similar websites?

- The SRI is focused on providing its users with personal information (an Individual Profile) that they can act on to enhance their life (based on a confidential self-assessment). In this regard, the SRI shares a similar goal as some health and mental health self-assessment on-line tools that have been developed by federal agencies, and profit and non-profit health and mental health organizations.
- The key difference is that rather than measuring health and mental health outcomes, the SRI assesses two key factors that influence health and well-being – one's support networks and one's personal resiliency.

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## What are the key distinctions between the SRI and similar websites?

- The SRI also yields aggregated data that can be used by policy makers and family readiness practitioners to inform intervention and prevention activities, including an advanced query system for viewing results for respondent subgroups. The SRI can be set up for ticket code administration by family readiness practitioners for units and groups. Summary data can be merged across units/special groups to produce summary group profiles at higher levels of aggregation. This highly flexible and multipurpose data management system is unique in the field of online assessments.

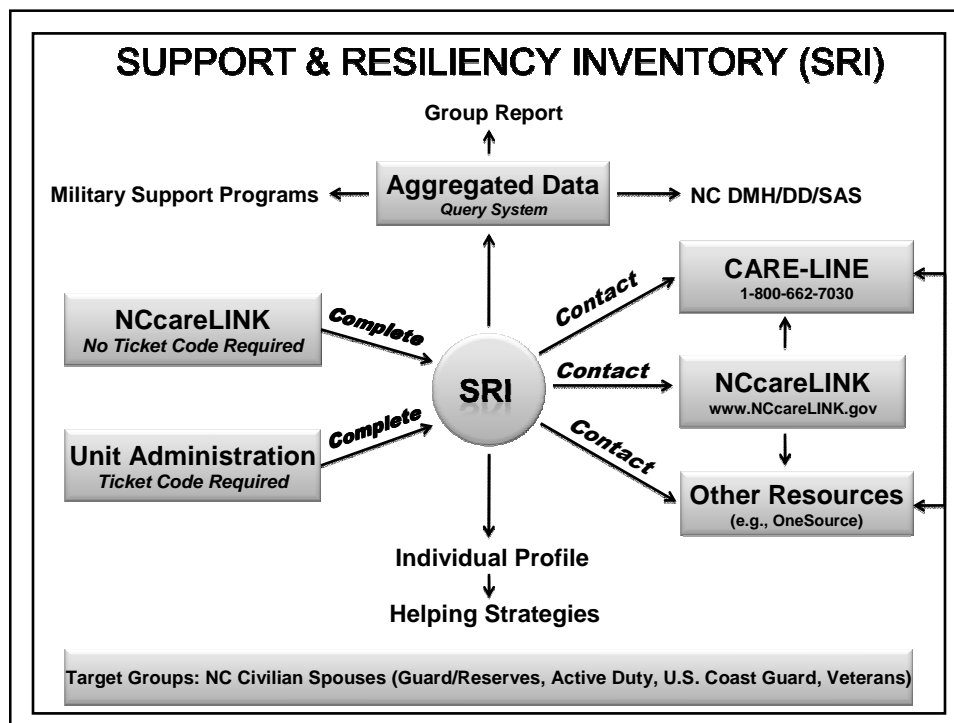
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## What are the key distinctions between the SRI and similar websites?

- The SRI is neither a listing of useful websites nor a self-directed learning tutorial. The SRI provides a targeted informational response to one's personal assessment, then encourages the participant to seek additional information and/or direct help by contacting the principal DoD and/or State (NC) point of contact (OneSource and/or CARE-LINE / NCcareLINK).
- The figure on the next slide attempts to capture the key components of the SRI.

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## What are the intended outcomes for the implementation of the SRI in NC?

- Allows NC spouses to self-assess two key components of their personal readiness that are important factors in *preparing for, engaging with, and readjusting after* the deployment of their Active, NG, or Reserve Component spouse to combat in Afghanistan and/or Iraq. *(Success is partly determined by how well this initiative can penetrate into these populations.)*
- Allows NC military or veteran spouses the opportunity to gain an awareness of the strength of their support network and their personal resiliency—an awareness linked to practical information that they can use to further develop their support network and/or enhance their resiliency. *(Success is partly measured by the frequency of user access to SRI Helpful Strategies.)*

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## What are the intended outcomes for the implementation of the SRI in NC?

- Provides SRI participants knowledge of and a sense of confidence in resources available if they experience a need for these services. *(Success is partly measured by a user survey asking if this assessment experience and the contact information has enhanced their sense of support from DOD and/or state of NC.)*
- Provides SRI users with access to other sources of information to enhance their capacity to effectively cope with the challenges associated with their spouse's military duty and possible deployment to a combat zone. *(Success is partly measured by a user survey that asks about their past, current, and anticipated use of these on-line resources, as well as a count of the SRI participants who actually open one of these listed resources.)*

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## What activities were conducted as part of the SRI's feasibility test?

- Discussions with the Division and relevant stakeholder groups about how such an assessment tool would be used by civilian spouses and to what ends. An important focus of these discussions was also the intended target group for the SRI.
- A one-day meeting with key stakeholders in military and veteran issues was held in Chapel Hill, NC to advise on the development and fielding of the SRI.
- Contacts with family support leaders in the Department of Defense and the Service Components, including the corresponding departments providing family services in the National Guard and the Reserve Components.
- Meetings and conversations with key leaders and advocates in the state of NC who work in support of veterans and servicemembers and their families.

## What major conclusions were drawn from the SRI's feasibility test?

- Based on contacts with senior family program managers in each of the Service Components and a comprehensive search of DoD and Service Component websites, no previous, current, or planned military-sponsored spouse assessment initiatives were identified other than the current assessment developed by Drs. Bowen and Martin being utilized by the U.S. Air Force and the planned adoption of this assessment tool by the U.S. Marine Corps.
- Key stakeholder groups in North Carolina enthusiastically endorsed the development and implementation of the SRI initiative.
- The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will be listed as the sponsoring agency.
- The SRI will include questions that address respondents' participation in faith-based communities as an area of support, as well as demographic questions addressing the respondent's race/ethnicity and exceptional family member status.
- The SRI should be available in both English and Spanish in the context of the relatively high number of Hispanic/Latino servicemembers in the state of North Carolina.

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## What major conclusions were drawn from the SRI's feasibility test?

- NC MH/DD/SAS wants to be able to access and download data resulting from administration of the SRI.
- An online system will be implemented that will make the SRI available as a free-standing online assessment for civilian spouses via NCcareLINK.
- The assessment tool will also be designed for administration to specific groups of civilian spouses via military family readiness practitioners (National Guard, Reserve Components, Active Duty, and Veterans Administration) in the state of North Carolina. This second type of administration will require respondents to have a ticket code for administration of the SRI—all spouses within a specified group use the same ticket code.
- Stakeholder groups recommended that the SRI be available to all civilian spouses of current and former military members living in North Carolina. This includes spouses who are married to members of the National Guard, other Reserve Components, active duty members who may be serving anywhere in the world, and military veterans no longer serving in the Armed Forces.

## What are the next steps in the SRI's development and implementation?

A proposal has been drafted and submitted to the NC DMH/DD/SAS for completing work on and implementing the SRI in the state of NC. Next steps include:

- Initiate contacts with the Department of Defense, family support divisions in each of the service branches (Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps), including the corresponding departments providing family services in the National Guard and the Reserve Components, and Divisions of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services in states with a high number of service members to generate interest in partnering with the state of NC to complete work on the SRI.
- Participate as an NC State Team Member in the upcoming SAMHSA National Behavioral Health Conference and Policy Academy on Returning Veterans and Their Families to share the SRI with other state teams

The DoD "Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program" and the DoD "Joint Family Support Assistance Program" provide significant opportunities for incorporating the SRI as a policy, practice, and evaluation tool.

## For Further Information

Gary L. Bowen, Ph.D., ACSW  
Kenan Distinguished Professor  
School of Social Work  
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
325 Pittsboro Street  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550  
(919) 962-6542  
glbowen@email.unc.edu

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services  
Dr. Michael Lancaster, M.D., Co-Director  
Michael.Lancaster@ncmail.net  
Mr. John Harris, Clinical Policy (Veteran Service Officer)  
John.W.Harris@ncmail.net  
325 N. Salisbury Street, Suite 1111  
3001 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-3001  
(919) 733-7011