

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Prevalence of Marital Transitions in Military Families

Adler-Baeder, F., Pittman, J. F., & Taylor, L. (2006). The prevalence of marital transitions in military families. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 44(2-Jan), 96-106. doi:10.1300/J087v44n01_05

SUMMARY: The prevalence of marital transitions (i.e., divorce and remarriages) in military families is different from the general U.S. population. By analyzing three datasets from the Defense Manpower Data Center, the study examined the demographic profile of military families affected by marital transitions. Results identified some unique characteristics of military families in terms of marital transitions.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Based on dataset 2, 20% of all Service members had experienced divorce.
- Dataset 1 showed that at least one third of all married personnel were in a remarriage either through their own marital history or their spouse's, and approximately 30% had non-residential children.
- Women in military were more likely to divorce than men, and less likely to remarry.
- Service members were younger than the general U.S. population to marry, divorce, and remarry.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide support groups for Service members who have experienced divorce and have non-residential children
- Offer trainings for professionals who work with military families on the unique needs of military spouses and children
- Host workshops that educate military couples on how to communicate with each other and cope with challenges related to military life

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support programs that provide activities for military families that aim to increase family cohesion and resilience
- Recommend collaboration between military and civilian family education programs in order to increase the accessibility of such services to military families
- Encourage training of professionals who work with military families that focus on promoting well-being and marital satisfaction in military families

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METHODS

- Three datasets obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center were utilized in the study.
- The first dataset was collected in 1992 and included matched couples; the other two datasets were both collected in 1999 and included Service members (dataset 2) and military spouses (dataset 3).
- Marital history and numbers of residential and non-residential children of the participants were identified from the datasets.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 18,370 military couples (dataset 1); 30,384 Service members (10,813 single and 19,571 married; dataset 2); and 18,043 military spouses (dataset 3).
- The average ages of the Service members in datasets 1 and 2 were 35.03 years (SD = 7.18, 80% male) and 33.84 years (SD = 7.37, 86% male), respectively; the average age of spouses in dataset 3 was unknown.
- The majority of participants were White, followed by Black and Latino.
- Five service branches were represented, Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard.

LIMITATIONS

- Data were collected at two distinct time points (1992 vs. 1999); things could have been changed during the seven years, therefore it is hard to make comparisons between datasets.
- Although demographic information was collected, the authors did not examine what types of Service members were more likely to have marital transitions.
- Although the study aimed to compare military marital transitions with the general U.S. population, no data on the latter were presented or cited.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the risk factors (e.g., level of income, age, education) for Service members to divorce
- Study the reasons that female Service members were more likely to divorce than their male counterparts
- Conduct longitudinal studies with Service members and their families before and after deployment to explore the relationship between deployment and marital transition

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