

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Marriage Education in the Army: Results of a Randomized Clinical Trial

Allen, E. S., Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Markman, H. J., & Loew, B. A. (2011). Marriage education in the Army: Results of a randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 10(4), 309-326. doi:10.1080/15332691.2011.613309

**SUMMARY:** Pre-test and post-test survey data from two different installations were used to examine the long-term effectiveness of the Prevention and Relationship Education (PREP) program on Army couples relationship quality (i.e., marital satisfaction, communication skills, confidence, positive bonding, forgiveness, dedication, satisfaction with sacrifices made, and negative communication) and divorce over a two-year period. Results indicate that couples who engaged in PREP experienced some improvements in marital quality, although these effects were not maintained long-term. Rates of divorce differed by installations among those who completed PREP and the control groups.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Across both sites, couples who completed the program were less likely to divorce (8%) compared to control couples (12%); however, site differences were observed, such that 8% of program couples and 15% of control couples at site one divorced, and 6% of program couples and 4% of control couples divorced at site two.
- Ethnic minority couples who completed the program were less likely to be divorced at two-year follow-up than ethnic minority couples assigned to the control group.
- Couples who completed the program showed improvements in communication skills post-intervention compared to controls, but these gains were not maintained over time.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer interventions for military couples using the Prevention and Relationship Education program, or components of the program to enhance relationship quality
- Provide support groups for military spouses throughout the deployment cycle
- Disseminate information regarding the resources and services available to Service members and their families post-deployment to help couples and families successfully reintegrate

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that help military couples improve and maintain strong marriages throughout the deployment cycle
- Continue to support research efforts that evaluate the effectiveness of programs working with military couples
- Encourage the collaboration of DoD and community-based programs that offer support to military couples and families throughout the deployment cycle

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## METHODS

- Participants included Active Duty Army couples who were randomly assigned to the program treatment group or a control group at two installations.
- Site one had high operational tempo and program groups were led by unit chaplains for couples within the same unit; site two program groups were led by family life chaplains and couples were not from the same unit.
- Data were collected prior to the program, two weeks following the completion of the program, and every six months post-treatment for two years.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 476 couples; 249 couples from site one and 184 couples from site two.
- The majority of husbands were White (69%) and had an average age of 28.5 years (SD = 5.9).
- Most wives were White (71%) with an average age of 27.7 years (SD = 6.2).
- Site one had younger, lower rank, and more frequently deployed military personnel.

## LIMITATIONS

- The samples at the two sites differed in important ways that could influence results; site 1 was populated by younger, lower rank, and more frequently deployed soldiers and their families while site 2 had soldiers who had been married longer and were not facing imminent deployment.
- The use of self-report data only could introduce bias.
- Couples who participated in the intervention may differ from nonparticipants in ways that were not measured but affected the outcome variables (e.g., couples that volunteered may be functioning better than those that did not volunteer).

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with couples in other branches of the military
- Include multiple time points beyond pre- and post-test assessments when assessing the effectiveness of PREP
- Examine the demographic characteristics of couples that may influence the effectiveness of PREP and similar interventions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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