The Effects of Marriage Education for Army Couples with a History of Infidelity


**SUMMARY:** This study analyzed the impact of a marriage education intervention called Prevention and Relationship Education Program (PREP) compared to a control group on a sample of 662 Active Duty Army couples. Although all couples showed increases in marital satisfaction and communication skills, specific results indicated that couples with a history of infidelity were most impacted by the PREP intervention as they had the greatest increases in marital satisfaction and communication skills.

**KEY FINDINGS:**
- The PREP intervention was most effective for couples with a history of infidelity, such that those couples had the greatest increase in marital satisfaction and communication skills overall.
- After exposure to the PREP intervention, there was no significant difference between communication skills between couples without infidelity and couples with a history of infidelity.
- At baseline, couples with a history of infidelity were more likely to have lower communication skills and marital satisfaction than couples without.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:**
Programs could:
- Educate military couples to enhance positive communication skills such as addressing issues directly and taking the other’s perspective
- Offer peer support groups for military couples who seek marriage education and conflict resolution
- Promote couple retreats that increase positive experiences to strengthen their relationship

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:**
Policies could:
- Endorse professional development courses for community providers to educate them about unique factors that contribute to marital strain for military couples
- Continue to support programs that address challenges faced by deployed spouses and their partners
- Recommend integrating marriage education into existing service delivery systems for military families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through various media outlets, such as brochures and posters, as well as recommendations from chaplains.
- Couples were randomly assigned to two groups: PREP intervention adapted for military use or control group.
- Measures collected data at three time points, pre-, post-intervention and one year follow up, regarding infidelity, marital satisfaction, and communication skills within the intimate partnership.

PARTICIPANTS

- In total, 662 married Army couples participated in a study, of which, 343 assigned to the PREP intervention, while 319 were placed in the control intervention.
- Average age ranged from 27.7 years for females (SD = 6.2) to 28.5 years for males (SD = 5.9) and comprised of both Active Duty Soldiers (male = 97%; female = 8%) and civilian spouses (male = 3%; female = 92%).
- Couples were comprised of the following race/ethnicity backgrounds: White (male = 69%; female = 71%); Latino (male = 12%; female = 11%); Black (male = 11%; female = 10%); Other/Nondisclosed (n = 8%).

LIMITATIONS

- Reports showed that couples who received the PREP intervention who had a history of infidelity started with a much lower level of satisfaction than other couples, which could have influenced results.
- Since the participants were self-selected, their rates of infidelity may be inflated compared to the general Army population.
- Other untested variables, such as the problems associated with infidelity (i.e., when it occurred, intensity of event) could have influenced outcomes and were not controlled in the analyses.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the influence of long-term marital education on marital satisfaction and communication skills
- Analyze other branches of the military to see if results are generalizable to each population
- Explore variables associated with infidelity on marital satisfaction and communication skills

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design

- Appropriate Research Plan and Sample

Methods

- Appropriate Measurement and Analysis

Limitations

- Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works