

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

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

Allen, E. S., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., Loew, B., & Markman, H. J. (2012). The effects of marriage education for Army couples with a history of infidelity. *Journal of Family Psychology, 26*(1), 26. doi:10.1037/a0026741

**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



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