

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Factors that Differentiate Distressed and Nondistressed Marriages in Army Soldiers

Anderson, J. R., Johnson, M. D., Goff, B. N., Cline, L. E., Lyon, S. E., & Gurs, H. (2011). Factors that differentiate distressed and nondistressed marriages in Army soldiers. *Marriage & Family Review*, 47(7), 459-473.
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SUMMARY: An examination of Army Soldiers survey data were analyzed to determine the factors that differentiate distressed from non-distressed relationships. Furthermore, the study investigated whether Soldiers in dual-military marriages differed in their relationship satisfaction when compared with Soldiers in traditional military marriages. Overall, results show that most Soldiers had relationship satisfaction scores that categorized them as non-distressed.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Soldiers in dual-military marriages had relationship satisfaction scores similar to those of Soldiers in militarycivilian marriages.
- Soldiers who held a lower rank, had families that did not accompany them to their current duty station, were dating or engaged as opposed to married, or were currently in newer marriages relationships were more likely to be in distressed relationships.
- A Soldiers number of deployments, gender, race and ethnic minority status, whether he or she lived on- or off-post, and whether they had children or not were not associated with relationship distress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop online modules that focus on relationship building and communication for Service members and their partners
- Create programming that provides relationship support to younger, lower ranked Soldiers in newer marriages and relationships
- Offer relationship education programs through an internet-based format so as to reach a broad range of Service members and their partners

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of structured workshops for Service members and their partners to provide support during times of stress (e.g., relocation, deployment)
- Encourage awareness among professionals working with Service members families and communities about the effects of stressful experiences on the well-being of Service members and their relationships
- Recommend collaboration between DoD programs and local community organizations to support programs for Service members and their families that address positive relationships

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through e-mail notifications and invitations to participate in the study from the Post Command group and post leaders.
- Data were collected via a web-based survey that included questions about the relocation factors that were identified in a prior study as well as relationship satisfaction.
- Data analysis was conducted to determine the strength of the association between variables such as rank, relationship length and family relocation status, deployment, race, and their level of marriage distress.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 697 Soldiers that were currently in a relationship and completed the questions related to relationship satisfaction participated.
- Most Soldiers were male (87%) with a mean age of 31.35 years. The Soldiers had been married for an average of 7.79 years, with most (74%) having been married for 10 years or less.
- Most participants self-identified as White (67%), with 15% Black, 9% Latino, and 10% other.

LIMITATIONS

- Participants were recruited from one Army post; therefore, findings may not be representative of the broader Army.
- There were no data collected on combat exposure or perceived stress related to deployment; therefore, it was difficult to understand what association there may be between deployment and relational distress.
- Data were not collected in relation to marital processes (e.g., communication, conflict resolution, and spousal support); therefore, little was known about the relationships skills couples utilized effectively.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the association between military families relocation status and relationship distress
- Engage in process-oriented and longitudinal studies that help determine the factors that contribute to marital quality and stability over time in military marriages
- Investigate dual-military couples and the degree to which they are at increased risk for lower marital quality and greater instability

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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