

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Ethnic Variations in the Connection Between Work-Induced Family Separation and Turnover Intent

Behnke, A. O., MacDermid, S. M., Anderson, J. C., & Weiss, H. M. (2010). Ethnic variations in the connection between work-induced family separation and turnover intent. *Journal of Family Issues*, 31(5), 626-655. doi:10.1177/0192513x09349034

SUMMARY: Family separations can cause strain in military families and may influence Service members' decision to re-enlist or leave the military. A large 1999 Active Duty survey was used to examine the associations between family separations, demographic information, resources, and Service members' intent to leave the military. Service members who had experienced longer family separations had higher intent to leave the military, and this relationship was stronger for minority Service members or those who were dissatisfied with their resources.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The longer family separations that Service members had experienced during the prior 12 months, the greater their intent to leave military service.
- Service members' satisfaction with resources available for themselves and their family partially accounted for the relationship between family separation and intent to leave the military so that greater dissatisfaction with resources was associated with greater intent to leave the military.
- Examining racial/ethnic differences, the relationship between family separation and intent to leave the military was almost twice as strong for participants in minority groups as for White participants.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide multiple supports and services for children of Service members during separations due to duty (e.g., daycare, play groups, support groups, opportunities for sports, art, or other activity participation)
- Inform military parents about different ways to keep in touch with their families during separations (e.g., calls, letters, sharing pictures, video chats)
- Educate Service members about the benefits of long-term military service to improve retention

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend shorter work assignments or deployments for Service members in order to reduce family separation length
- Encourage the training of professionals working with military families about potential difficulties associated with long-term family separation
- Continue to provide support structures for families of deployed Service members (e.g., Family Readiness Groups) and to develop new supports and services

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METHODS

- All Active Duty Service members were eligible to complete the voluntary 1999 Active Duty Survey, which the data were drawn from; only married Service members with children were included in analysis.
- Service members completed questions regarding demographic information, family separation, resources (e.g., material, social, family, work), and intent to leave the military.
- Associations between family separation, intent to leave the military, and satisfaction with resources were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 14,791 Active Duty Service members who were married and had children.
- Participants were 12.5% female and had an average age of 34.7 years.
- Service members were 73% White, 13% Black, 8% Latino, and 6% Asian American.

LIMITATIONS

- Data were published more than 10 years after collection and during peacetime, so they may be out-dated or inconsistent with the experiences of current Service members.
- Participants were all married Service members with children and results may not generalize to Service members with other family types or structures.
- Only one item was used to measure social resources, which may not give an accurate measurement of the construct.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the associations between demographic characteristics, family separation, and resources during wartime and in a more current sample
- Investigate factors that may influence whether Service members actually leave the military, rather than their intent or consideration of leaving the military
- Compare Service members' reasons for leaving or considering leaving the military between those with different types of families (e.g., married, partnered, with children, without children)

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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