

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Meaningfulness of Service and Marital Satisfaction in Army Couples

Bergmann, J. S., Renshaw, K. D., Allen, E. S., Markman, H. J., & Stanley, S. M. (2014). Meaningfulness of service and marital satisfaction in Army couples. *Journal of Family Psychology, 28*(5), 701-706. doi:10.1037/fam0000013

**SUMMARY:** Questionnaires of married couples (U.S. Army husband and civilian wife) investigated reported meaningfulness of service in relation to Army couples' marital satisfaction while accounting for Service members' posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. For spouses, perceived meaningfulness of service is linked with overall higher marital satisfaction, even when accounting for Service members' PTSD symptoms.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Service member PTSD symptom severity was associated with lower marital satisfaction for both Service members and spouses.
- For spouses, perceived meaningfulness of service is linked with overall higher marital satisfaction, even when accounting for Service members' PTSD. This finding was independent of Service members' reported meaningfulness of service.
- For Service members, higher meaningfulness of service was only associated with increased marital satisfaction if their spouse also perceived higher meaningfulness.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to military couples that encourage them to discuss their perceptions of the value, importance, honor, and the meaning they attribute to their military service
- Provide pre- and post-deployment workshops to military couples that focus on strengthening and maintaining strong relationships throughout the deployment cycle
- Dispense information regarding the impact deployment has on marital satisfaction and the importance of a shared meaning of service

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs aimed at enhancing family readiness
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs to offer continued support to military families throughout the deployment cycle
- Recommend education for service providers regarding post-deployment PTSD symptomology and its impact on marital functioning and satisfaction

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## METHODS

- The sample consisted of a subset of couples who completed a larger study that included a two-day marriage education workshop on two different Army installations.
- Couples had to be married, have at least one Active Duty partner, speak and read English, and not have previously participated in a similar couple's workshop.
- Participants were recruited via poster, brochures, media stories, and referrals from military chaplains.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 606 married couples comprised of an Active Duty U.S. Army husband and a civilian wife.
- Sixty-two percent of the Service members reported a deployment in the previous year, with an average duration of 11.29 months (SD = 3.61).
- Most Service members were White (70%), noncommission officers (49%) or junior enlisted (38%), and had an average age of 28.66 years (SD = 5.94 years).

## LIMITATIONS

- The study was cross-sectional and causality cannot be inferred from these results.
- All measures were self-reported and may be biased.
- These results may not generalize beyond male Army and female civilian couples.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to explore whether partners in more satisfying relationships are more likely to place higher value on their spouses' military service
- Explore the meaningfulness of service in the context of broader values
- Explore how meaningfulness of service and marital satisfaction influence rates of separation and divorce among military couples

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>