



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Family Adaptation of Single Parents in the United States Army: An Empirical Analysis of Work Stressors and Adaptive Resources

Bowen, G.L., Orthner, D.K., & Zimmerman, L.I. (1993). Family adaptation of single parents in the United States Army: An empirical analysis of work stressors and adaptive resources. *Family Relations*, 42, 293-304.



94 single fathers and 144 single mothers who were Active Duty U.S. Army Soldiers participated in a survey examining the contributions of work stressors, family and community resources, and Army support resources to family adaptation. For both single mothers and fathers, resource variables (e.g., unit support, informal community support) were more powerful predictors of adaptation to the demands of being an Army family than work stressors.

Key Findings:

- In comparison to single mothers, single fathers were older, had served more years in the Army, had more education, and were in higher pay grades.
- A lower proportion of single fathers had young children than did single mothers.
- Single mothers were more likely to serve in non-combat units, have only one child in the house, and identify as non-Hispanic/Black in comparison to single fathers.
- For both single mothers and fathers, resource variables (e.g., unit support, informal community support) were more powerful predictors of adaptation to the demands of being an Army family than work stressors.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could offer classes to help single parent families offering skill training on stress management, use of helpful community resources, and self-care.
- Family programs could partner with child care programs to increase the availability, enhance access, and minimize associated costs of child care for single parents.
- Commanders and unit supervisors could be trained to recognize the potential for role strain and overload among single parents in their unit.

Implications for Policies:

- Military policies concerning family support during deployments, emergency financial assistance, and child care could be reviewed for how well they support single parents.
- Commanders could be afforded the opportunity to extend flexibility to single parents (e.g., flex-time in work schedules).

Avenues for Future Research:

- Additional research could replicate this study in a more recent cohort of U.S. Army Soldiers and with personnel in other branches of the military.
- Future research could examine the influence of additional stressors and resources on adaptation of single parents.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- A stratified probability sample of Active Duty officers and enlisted personnel (E2-O6) in the U.S. Army were invited to participate in the 1989 Army Soldier and Family Survey; only data from single-parent Soldiers were included in these analyses.
- Surveys were administered at each installation in groups and contained measures of family adaptation to Army life, work stressors, family and community resources, and Army support resources.
- Means and standard deviations were calculated and t-tests compared single mothers and fathers.
- Separate regression analyses for mothers and fathers predicted family adaptation using demographic, military and other measured variables.

Participants:

- 94 single fathers and 144 single mothers who were Active Duty U.S. Army Soldiers.
- Mean age=29.9 years, 51% non-Hispanic White, 42% Black non-Hispanic, 50% had received at least some post-secondary education, 42% had high school diploma.
- 41% divorced, 35% legally separated.
- 50% had one child, 36% had two children
- 44% had rank of E2-E4; mean years in service =7.9, 63% were serving in the continental U.S., 42% in a noncombat role, 27% combat support service, 21% combat.

Limitations:

- The sample was relatively small and consisted only of U.S. Army Soldiers; it is unknown how these findings might generalize.
- All measures are self-report.
- The data is cross-sectional and causal attributions are not appropriate.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent <i>Minor Limitations</i> (★★★★)	Appropriate <i>Few Limitations</i> (★★★)	Limited <i>Several Limitations</i> (★★)	Questionable <i>Many/Severe Limitations</i> (★)	★★★★★
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★★★