



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Single Parents in the U.S. Air Force

Bowen, G.L. & Orthner, D.K. (1986). Single parents in the U.S. Air Force. *Family Relations*, 35, 45-52.



100 single Air Force parents participated in a study examining their adjustment to being a single parent and their work, personal, and family demands. Overall, these parents reported successful adjustment to single parenthood while enlisted in the Air Force. They reported low participation in support groups or educational programs.

Key Findings:

- Single Air Force parents reported that the major challenges of parenting alone in the Air Force included: lack of adult support in parenting (22%), difficulty in integrating work and family demands (20%), lack of time to meet all responsibilities (18%), and child rearing and discipline issues (15%).
- 65% of the Airmen reported being satisfied with their jobs, and 60% planned to continue their career in the Air Force.
- 44% of the participants reported having a good relationship with their former spouses/co-parents, and 22% said their relationship was “not good.”
- 29% of the Airmen expressed concern about losing custody of their children.
- 57% of the participants reported being aware of available parent education programs, and 18% reported attending such a program. Although 57% of the men who attended said it was very helpful, none of the women who attended found the program helpful.
- 52% of the parents were aware of single parent support groups, and 20% had participated in such a group. Approximately one-third (31%) of those who had participated found it helpful.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could survey the communities they serve to see what kinds of services single parents might find interesting and beneficial.
- Programs could enlist single parents in the design of programs aimed at this group of parents to ensure that programs are applicable to their needs and helpful.

Implications for Policies:

- Military policies could allocate funding for single parent support groups that address the unique experiences of military parents.
- Policies could recommend that supervisors allow single parents some flexibility in work schedules due to their responsibilities in tending to their children.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could conduct a similar study to examine if the findings have changed since the mid-1980s.
- Additional studies could more fully examine differences between the experiences of single mothers and single fathers.
- Future research could follow young people over a longer period of time to examine how relationships among variables may change as youth enter high school.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- Single Air Force parents on 9 United States, 7 European, and 8 Asian bases were asked to participate in personal interviews. 80% agreed to participate.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted by trained interviewers regarding: family and job characteristics, life and job satisfaction, parent-child relationships, social relationships, and feelings about the Air Force as a place to rear children.
- Descriptive statistics were calculated for different military ranks (junior enlisted = E1-E3, mid-grade enlisted = E4-E6, senior enlisted=E7-E9, junior officer =O1-O3, senior officer = O4-O10), stage in family life cycle (age of youngest child), and gender of the single parent.

Participants:

- 100 Air Force single parents participated (56% male).
- 57% had one child, 34% two, 8% three, 1% four.
- 42% had the youngest child under 6 years old, 39% 6-11 years, 19% 12-18 years.
- Average age = 30.0 years.
- 80% were separated or divorced, 13% never married, and 7% widowed.
- 80% of parents were enlisted, 20% were officers.
- Racial/ethnic composition: 71% White, 24% Black, 5% other.

Limitations:

- No comparative statistical analyses were used precluding the direct comparison of different groups of single parents (e.g., rank, gender, age of child).
- The sample size was small, and these results may not be representative of single Air Force parents as a whole.

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 Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)		
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						★ ★ ★