



Supporting  
Military Families  
Through Research  
and Outreach

# PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

## Effects of Leader Support in the Work Unit on the Relationship between Work Spillover and Family Adaptation

Bowen, G. L. (1998). Effects of leader support in the work unit on the relationship between work spillover and family adaptation. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 19, 25-52. doi: 10.1023/A:1022985107541



Researchers analyzed data from 3,190 married U.S. Army Soldiers to determine whether leader support in the work unit had direct effects on work spillover and family adaptation, or buffering effects between the two. Findings indicate a direct impact of leader support on work spillover. Higher levels of support were associated with less perceived work spillover. Limited support was found for the buffering effect of leader support on the association between work spillover and family adaptation (only for females).

### Key Findings:

- For both male and female Soldiers, higher levels of leader support were associated with lower levels of perceived work spillover in terms of time and energy interference.
- Leader support was associated with greater family external adaptation (families aligning their relationships with the broader Army system) for male and female Soldiers.
- Leader support was not associated with increased family internal adaptation (functioning and interdependency of the family members as a unit).
- For female Soldiers only, perceptions of high levels of leader support buffered against the negative impact of work spillover on internal adaptation.
- No buffering mechanism was found between work spillover and external adaptation, nor for male Soldiers in either model (internal or external adaptation).

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs could implement classes to bolster family social support for U.S. Army Soldiers.
- Programs could provide spousal training to educate spouses about how best to support their Soldier.
- Programs could offer activities designed to increase unit solidarity.

### Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend that units engage in unit-strengthening programs annually to increase group cohesion and support within the group.
- Policies could recommend military leaders attend regular trainings on key skills in effective leadership.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Future studies could examine additional sources of social support to test for differences in levels of buffering depending on the source of support.
- Future research could seek to identify the mechanisms through which social support influence the association between work spillover and family adaptation.
- Future studies could include analyses that are stratified by unit type to determine whether combat unit (versus other types of units) impacts perceptions of unit leadership.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit [reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu](http://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu)

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## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Existing data were analyzed using the couple subsample of the 1989 Army Soldier and Family Survey. Although 3,345 married Army soldiers completed the survey, warrant officers were excluded due to their small number and highly specialized assignments, resulting in a total of 3,190 participants.
- Three key constructs were examined: family adaptation (broken down into 2 measures: internal adaptation—defined as coping with family demands, marital happiness, marital disagreements, and spousal communication; and external adaptation—defined as spouse Army support, spouse career support, and satisfaction with Army life); work spillover (broken down into energy interference and time interference), and leader support (assessed with unit supervisor family support, unit leadership family support, and leader support for families).
- A series of hierarchical regression equations were run separately for males and females to compare direct versus interactive (buffering) effects of leader support on work spillover and family adaptation. The aims were to determine whether leader support had a direct impact on work spillover or family adaptation, as opposed to providing a buffering effect on the association between work spillover and family adaptation.

### Participants:

- The sample consisted of 3,190 married U.S. Army Soldiers who participated in a 1989 survey.
- Most participants were male (92%), Caucasian (76%), had a post-secondary education or higher (67%), and had children living in their home (71%). Mean age was 31.8 years.
- Respondents had been in the service an average of 9.2 years and in their current unit for almost 2 years (mean = 20.4 months).
- Just under half of respondents were officers (48%), and most were married to a spouse not serving in the military (91%).

### Limitations:

- Although statistically significant, effect sizes were very small in all of the models.
- It is unclear why some subscales of key measures were simply summed, while others were kept separate for analytic purposes.
- Sample items were not provided and it is unclear whether scales had been previously validated or were new.

## 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:	N/A
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
☒ Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★ ★ ★