The Effects of Stress of Job Functioning of Military Men and Women


**SUMMARY:** Male and female Service members may be impacted by stressors differently, particularly given the predominately male composition of the military. Associations between self-reported job functioning, stressors, coping, and depression and substance use symptoms were examined among a large sample of Active Duty Service members. Stressors seem to impact male and female Service members’ job functioning differently, particularly depending upon type of stressor (e.g., work, family, health).

**KEY FINDINGS:**

- Service members were more likely to report the highest levels of stress related to work (39%) than related to family (22%), with more women having high family stress (29%) than men (22%).
- Service members who reported the highest levels of work-related stress were at increased risk for lowered work functioning; risk was 28% higher for women and 15% higher for men.
- Service members who reported the highest levels of health-related stress and depression symptoms were all at approximately a 30% increased risk of decreased job functioning.
- Men, but not women, who reported the highest levels of family stress, negative coping, heavy drinking, and illicit drug use were at increased risk for lowered job functioning.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:**

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to teach Service members techniques to balance work, family life, and other responsibilities and activities
- Provide classes to help Service members prepare for and prevent stressors, particularly by planning ahead for deployment (e.g., preparing childcare, finances, legal documents)
- Disseminate information to military families in existing military programs about effective coping strategies and stress management

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:**

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development courses for military leaders to educate them about stressors Service members and their families face and how gender may impact those stressors
- Encourage adequate time off and scheduling flexibility when possible for Service members to address family concerns when they arise
- Promote the use of community mental health services among Service members and their families, especially when stressors are impacting job functioning
METHODS

- Data from the 1995 Department of Defense (DoD) Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Military Personnel, based on a random sample of all Active Duty military members, was used.
- The sample was stratified by military branch, pay grade, and gender; there was a 70% response rate, with females, officers, and Air Force members being most likely to respond to the survey.
- Relationships between self-reported job functioning, stressors (e.g., work, family, financial, health), coping, and depression and substance use symptoms were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 16,193 Active Duty Service members, who were primarily male (82%), married (66%), enlisted (77%), and less than 35 years of age (60%).
- Service members identified as White (69%), Black (16%), Latino (8%), or another race (7%).
- Participants represented the Army (22%), Navy (26%), Marines (24%), and Air Force (27%).

LIMITATIONS

- Certain populations (e.g., women, officers, Air Force members) were more likely to complete the study surveys, which may have biased results.
- The coping style measurement was overly simplistic and categorized avoidance coping as negative and problem-focused coping as positive, potentially reducing validity of the measure.
- Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, no causal conclusions can be drawn about the relationships between gender, stressors, and job functioning.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine explanations for gender differences in the impact of stress on job functioning, including differences in responsibilities and roles, appraisal, reporting, and exposure to stressors
- Compare whether military policies or practices differ in flexibility and time off to attend to family concerns between male and female Service members
- Explore how use of a range of different coping styles may impact the relationship between stress and job functioning among Service members

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

- Design: Appropriate Research Plan and Sample
- Methods: Limited Measurement and Analysis
- Limitations: Several

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit: https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works

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