

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

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

Bray, R. M., Camlin, C. S., Fairbank, J. A., Dunteman, G. H., & Wheelless, S. C. (2001). The effects of stress of job functioning of military men and women. *Armed Forces & Society*, 27(3), 397-417. doi:10.1177/0095327X0102700304

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

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



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



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