

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Military Community Integration and Its Effect on Well-Being and Retention

Burrell, L., Durand, D. B., & Fortado, J. (2003). Military community integration and its effect on well-being and retention. *Armed Forces & Society*, 30(1), 24-Jul. doi:10.1177/0095327X0303000101

SUMMARY: Using data from Active Duty and Reserve component Soldiers' spouses, the authors examined the relationship between military community integration, spousal well-being, and spouse preference for his/her Soldier to remain in the Army. Overall, integration in the military community was low. No relationships emerged between military community integration and numerous indices of well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Community integration was low for both Active Duty and Reserve component spouses; Reserve component spouses reported lower community integration than Active Duty spouses.
- There was no association between community integration and several measures of well-being.
- Military community integration did slightly influence spouse's desire for the Soldier to remain in the Army.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military families about the health benefits of feeling connected and supported by their military or civilian communities
- Engage military families in community activities (e.g., picnics, dances, parenting groups) aimed at enhancing military community integration
- Publish information regarding programs and service offered to Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard families to increase service utilization

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that offer on-base recreational facilities (e.g., gymnasiums, parks) that allow military families opportunities to interact with each other
- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community-based programs that support military families to increase families' connection to military and community services
- Recommend education to unit commanders regarding the services available to military families so that they can make appropriate recommendations when necessary

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METHODS

- Army units who participated in a larger study about Soldiers' community integration were asked to send contact information of spouses for the current study.
- Questionnaires were mailed to spouses of Active Duty, Reserve, and Guard Soldiers stationed in the continental United States.
- The current study compared Active Duty spouses to Reserve/Guard spouses.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 131 spouses of Active Duty Soldiers, 398 spouses of Army National Guard Soldiers, and 174 spouses of Army Reservists.
- The majority of participants were White (89%).
- The mean age of spouses is not reported; however, Active Duty spouses tended to be younger than Reserve/Guard spouses.

LIMITATIONS

- Participants were from the Army only; therefore, results may not be generalizable to other service branches.
- Utilizing a sample of spouses with a non-deployed Service member may bias the results, as service utilization is typically higher during deployment.
- Reliance on a single self-report measure at a single time point makes it difficult to draw firm conclusion.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize a more representative sample of Active Duty and Reserve Service members and their spouses from all branches of service
- Explore other sources of support military spouses utilize besides the military community
- Examine the effectiveness of military community integration efforts particularly for Reserve and Guard families

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