

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Air Force

Addressing Relationship Health Needs in Primary Care: Adapting the Marriage Checkup for Use in Medical Settings with Military Couples

Cordova, J. V., Cigrang, J. A., Gray, T. D., Najera, E., Havrilenko, M., Pinkley, C., ... Redd, K. (2017). Addressing relationship health needs in primary care: Adapting the marriage checkup for use in medical settings with military couples. *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, 24, 259-269. doi:10.1007/s10880-017-9517-8

SUMMARY: Healthy marital functioning and satisfaction can be hard to maintain for married couples with a partner in the military. This study assessed relationship strengths, identified relationship health concerns, and provided feedback for how couples can improve their relationship health by using the Marriage Checkup intervention which was designed to be similar to other existing health checkups. The one-month follow-up data showed significant improvements in marital health post Marriage Checkup.

KEY FINDINGS:

- After treatment, participating couples improved in their overall marital relationship health based on measures of relationship satisfaction and intimacy.
- The Marriage Checkup demonstrated a willingness from participants to engage in this study and received a high participant satisfaction rating, suggesting that once couples began the intervention, they were very likely to complete it.
- Comparisons involving gender were not significant in that men and women presented similar levels of distress and responded similarly to treatment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Engage Service members and their spouse in classes that aid couples in marital health strategies
- Educate married couples on the potential outcomes associated with having a marriage checkup and how this can be similar in importance to having an annual physical checkup
- Offer support groups for couples who struggle to maintain a healthy marriage

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage military couples to work on improving and maintaining a healthy marriage
- Recommend education for service providers about the unique circumstances that military couples face such as deployment and how this affects marital health
- Continue to support programs for military couples that provide strategies for maintaining and improving marital health

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METHODS

- Participants in this study include 30 heterosexual married couples. These couples completed a baseline questionnaire concerning demographics and relationship health.
- Participants were scheduled for three 30-minute appointments. The first appointment assessed relationship strengths, the second identified relationship health concerns, and the third appointment provided feedback. Participants completed questionnaires following the last appointment.
- Change in marital satisfaction was measured by examining the questionnaires taken by participants both before and after the Marriage Checkups.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were restricted to couples that were currently married where at least one partner was Active Duty Air Force. The sample of participants included 30 heterosexual married couples.
- The mean age of the participants was 35.4 years and the average relationship length was 11.1 years
- Participants were highly educated with an average of 17.2 years of education, and 76% of participants held an officer rank from pay grade O-2 through O-6.
- Of the participants, 17% were Latino, 59% were White, 14% were Black, 11% were Asian, 5% were Multiracial, and 12% declined to report their ethnicity.

LIMITATIONS

- The small design of this study does not offer the desired data that a larger scale study design would provide.
- The generalizability of the results of this study is limited to participants from ranks of Air Force officers and should be applied with caution to Service members of other service branches.
- This study does not mention using a screening process for participants which makes it unclear whether the couples have gone through an intervention like this before.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Expand the generalizability of the results by more actively recruiting participants from within the enlisted ranks
- Gather data on a broader array of physical and mental health outcome measures to expand determine how well this intervention can have an impact on the diverse conditions often seen in primary care settings
- Include a comparison group to better understand the causal effect of this intervention from other influences such as biases in self-selection

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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