

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Military Spouses Stationed Overseas: Role of Social Connectedness on Health and Well-Being

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SUMMARY: Survey data from Army spouses stationed in Europe were used to examine the relationship between social connectedness and spouse well-being (i.e., psychological distress, marital satisfaction, physical health symptoms). The relationship between social connectedness of spouses and their attitude towards their military spouses' career intention (e.g., definitely stay in until retirement, definitely leave upon completion of current obligation) was also explored. Spouses reported high levels of social connectedness which positively influenced their well-being. However, social connectedness had no influence on spouses attitude towards their military spouses' career intention.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Seventy-eight percent of spouses preferred their Service member remain in the military, although social connectedness was not associated with military career preferences.
- Spouses who reported more social connectedness reported higher levels of marital satisfaction.
- Spouses who were more socially connected reported less psychological distress and physical health symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue to offer classes that orientate military families stationed overseas to the culture in which they live
- Continue to educate military families about the resources and services available to them while stationed overseas
- Disseminate information to Service members and their families regarding how to make meaningful connections with people from different cultures

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the education of community and family readiness group leaders regarding the importance of social connectedness for the psychological and physical well-being of Service members and their families
- Continue to support programs and services that assist military families as they adjust to living overseas
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs to help military families make meaningful connections in their communities

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METHODS

- Data from a larger study examining the effects of change on military communities overseas were utilized for this study.
- Participants from Army communities in Germany and Italy completed paper-and-pencil surveys between January and October 2014.
- Participants were recruited via radio and television advertisements, Family Readiness Groups, community councils, and advertisements sent home with Soldiers.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 115 participants completed the study; 79 were from German communities and 36 were from Italian communities.
- The majority of participants were female (97.4%) and between the ages of 30-39 years (40%).
- No data regarding race/ethnicity were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Spouses in the current sample reported low levels of distress; however, without comparison data, it is unknown whether distress levels of the current sample are representative of other Army spouses.
- Only spouses of Army Service members were included in the study, limiting the generalizability of results to other branches of the military.
- Data were cross-sectional, therefore causality cannot be determined.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Continue to examine how social connectedness influences military families' well-being
- Explore optimal methods for promoting social connectedness among military families stationed overseas
- Replicate this study utilizing a larger and heterogeneous sample

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