

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

The Significance of Military Contexts and Culture for Understanding Family Well-Being: Parent Life Satisfaction and Adolescent Outcomes

DeGraff, A. N., O'Neal, C. W., & Mancini, J. A. (2016). The significance of military contexts and culture for understanding family well-being: Parent life satisfaction and adolescent outcomes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(10), 3022-3033. doi:10.1007/s10826-016-0471-0

SUMMARY: Military culture and support may influence military families well-being. By having 236 military families with at least one adolescent complete surveys about formal and informal support they received from the military, researchers examined the relationships among perceived support, life satisfaction, and adolescent outcomes. Results highlighted the importance of military support on military family well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Soldiers' perceived level of military support was positively associated with their overall life satisfaction.
- Military spouses' own life satisfaction was only marginally associated with their perceived level of military family support, but it was highly associated with their satisfaction with military life and the Service members' life satisfaction.
- Parental (especially the civilian parents') life satisfaction was positively related to adolescents' well-being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Distribute informational booklets about formal and informal support that is available for military families
- Offer workshops that aim to increase military spouses' satisfaction with military life
- Identify families that are experiencing lower levels of life satisfaction and offer them targeted formal and informal support

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide formal systems of support (e.g., classes and programs that address the needs of military families) through organizations, agencies, and unit leaders
- Encourage the development of programs that promote informal support and social networking within the military community
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families focusing on considering the role of military spouses' military life satisfaction in military family well-being

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through signs and fliers at the youth centers and military community stores.
- Family members completed surveys in separate rooms concurrently, and the measures included support from unit leaders and fellow Soldiers, military spouses' satisfaction with military life, overall life satisfaction of all family members, and internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression) and self-efficacy (i.e., confidence of one's abilities) of adolescents.
- Data were analyzed to examine the relationships among perceived military support, life satisfaction, and adolescent outcomes.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 236 families, and each family included one Active Duty Soldier, one military spouse, and at least one adolescent between 11 and 18 years old.
- Most Soldiers and military spouses were between 31 and 40 years old (68%), and most of the Soldiers were male (86%); the majority of the adolescents were between 11 and 14 years old, and 49% of them were male.
- The race/ethnicity of the participants were not indicated in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- Data (e.g., adolescents' academic performance) were self-reported, therefore they may not accurately reflect participants' real situation and may be biased by participants' own perspectives.
- Only heterosexual couples with one Soldier and one military spouse were included in the study, so the results may be difficult to generalize to other family structures (e.g., homosexual, single parent).
- The cross-sectional design of the study did not allow examining the causal relationships among study variables.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect both subjective and objective data so that the results are more comprehensive
- Include a variety of family structures to increase the generalizability of the study
- Investigate the causal relationships among military family support, life satisfaction, and adolescent outcomes by conducting a longitudinal study

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