



Psychosocial and Life Stress Characteristics of Navy Families: Family Environment Scale and Life Experiences Scale Findings

Eastman, E., Archer, R. P. & Ball, J. D. (1990). Psychosocial and life stress characteristics of Navy families: Family Environment Scale and Life Experiences Scale findings. *Military Psychology*, 2, 113-127.



785 Navy Sailors and their wives completed surveys including the family environment scale and life experience scale to examine the impact of command assignment and place in the deployment cycle on life stress and family environment. Family environment scale scores were comparable to non-distressed civilian family norms, and these scores were not impacted by place in the deployment cycle.

Key Findings:

- Navy families' family environment scores were similar to those of normal civilian families.
- Navy family functioning is relatively independent of point in the deployment cycle or command assignment.
- Some family environment scales were related to demographic factors. Younger age was related to higher scores on cohesion and expressiveness and lower scores on control. Caucasians showed higher scores on expressiveness. Larger family sizes were related to lower cohesiveness and expressiveness and higher conflict and control scores.
- Navy families assigned to shore duty reported significantly lower levels of overall stress than families at other deployment stages.
- Navy couples reporting greater life stress also reported lower levels of cohesiveness, expressiveness, and organization, but higher levels of conflict and control.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs designed to improve specific family functioning concerns, particularly family cohesion, expressiveness and organization, could be beneficial.
- Programs could consider using the family environment scale as a screening tool to detect those families whose functional characteristics may be associated with high stress. Program staff could use this information to provide appropriate referrals to meet families' particular needs and to draw upon their strengths.

Implications for Policies:

- Continued support for programs that target the predeployment and reunion periods for Sailors and their families could be maintained.
- Policies that recommend training on the components of healthy family environments may benefit the wellbeing of military families.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Additional studies could examine these patterns during deployment.
- Future studies could replicate or expand this research to include newer forces and current U.S. military conflicts and deployments.
- The relationship between deployment related stress and utilization of health and mental health services could be explored.



Background Information

Methodology:

- Navy personnel were recruited for a larger study from Navy Air Wing, Surface Fleet, and Shore Duty Commands in Norfolk, VA, and from the Submarine Fleet in Virginia, South Carolina, and Connecticut in 1986.
- Only married male Sailors with children living in their homes were selected for this study. They answered survey items from the family environment scale (FES) and life experiences scale (LES) and additional demographic questions.
- Sailors were assigned to 1 of 4 groups: assigned to ship/not deployed, predeployment (facing a major deployment within 90 days), reunion (returned from a major deployment within the previous 90 days), or shore duty.
- MANOVAs examined the effect of demographic variables on means values of husband and wives' responses to the family environment and life experiences scales.
- Couples were classified as high stress (51%) or low stress and a MANCOVA was conducted to examine the impact of life stress on family environment scale scores.

Participants:

- 785 married male Sailors and their wives participated.
- Average Sailor's age=30.9 (SD=6.1), average wife's age=30.2 (SD=6.2).
- Average length of marriage=8.1 years (SD=5.7), average number of children=2.0 (SD=1.0).
- Sailor characteristics: 81% Caucasian, 88% enlisted, 36% Submarine Fleet, 30% Navy Air Wing, 23% Surface Fleet, 40% assigned to ship/not deployed, 26% predeployment, 18% shore duty, 17% reunion.

Limitations:

- There was little discussion of the relationship between husbands' and wives' data.
- All measures were self-report and may be biased.
- The data were cross-sectional and no causal claims can be made.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					