



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Conflict in Maritally Distressed Military Couples

Griffin, W.A., Morgan, A.R. (1988). Conflict in maritally distressed military couples. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 16, 14-22.



30 Army and 30 civilian couples who were seeking marital counseling completed questionnaires at the intake session to examine the risks for specific marital problems in military couples. Military wives were more likely to be physically abused than their civilian counterparts. Military wives were more likely to report that their husbands drink less, work late less, and express more emotion than civilian husbands.

Key Findings:

- Overall, military and civilian couples were quite similar.
- Military wives, more often than civilian wives, reported a desire to be hit less.
- Civilian husbands, more often than military husbands, reported wanting their wives to have more friends.
- Military wives wanted their husbands to drink less, work late less, help with the household more, spend more time with their children, and express emotions more clearly.
- Civilian wives wanted their husbands to spend more time with the children and help more with the household.

Implications for Programs:

- Family programs could provide information on referrals for family violence, both military-related options and community-based services.
- Programs could offer informal social events for military wives to gather and support one another.
- Programs could offer programs to strengthen marriages and help couples manage conflict.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend ongoing screening of domestic violence in military families.
- Policies could recommend restrictions on Service members' work schedules, limiting both the number of consecutive hours worked and the total number of hours per week.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could attempt to replicate these findings with military couples comprised of a military wife and civilian husband or gay couples to see if these findings generalize.
- Additional studies could follow couples longitudinally to assess how these measures predict later divorce or other marital outcomes.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- Military personnel seeking marital therapy at Fort Benning, Georgia, were recruited to participate. All couples who were approached agreed to participate.
- Civilian couples were recruited from two marital counseling clinics, and their participation rate was not specified.
- Couples completed three measures of marital distress and adjustment before therapy. Civilian couples were selected to match the level of distress in the military couples.
- A multivariate analysis of variance compared civilian and military couples on differences in marital adjustment. A repeated measures analyses of variance compared civilian and military couples, as well as men and women.





Participants:

- 30 military and 30 civilian heterosexual couples participated.
- Average length of marriage = 5.60 years (range = 1-17 years)
- For 82% of males and 75% of females, this was their first marriage.
- Average education level: males=14.25 years, females= 12.83 years.
- Racial/ethnic composition: 85% of males and 70% of females were White.

Limitations:

- All couples were seeking marital counseling; results may not apply to non-distressed couples.
- Only Army couples participated in the study; it is known if they may differ from couples from other military branches.
- All data are correlational, and causal conclusions are not appropriate.
- The sample is small which may limit the ability to generalize the results to the larger population of military couples.
- All measures are self-report instead of preferred clinical interview or ratings from outside observers.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications						
Overall Quality Rating						