

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Family Fairness and Cohesion in Marital Dyads: Mediating Processes Between Work–Family Conflict and Couple Psychological Distress

Huffman, A. H., Matthews, R. A., & Irving, L. H. (2017). Family fairness and cohesion in marital dyads: Mediating processes between work–family conflict and couple psychological distress. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 90(1), 95-116. doi:10.1111/joop.12165

SUMMARY: Conflict at work may be negatively contributing to Soldier and spouses' family cohesion, thus affecting perceptions of fairness in household labor and couples' mental health. This study examined both Soldier and spouses' perceptions of work-to-family conflict (i.e., work demands interfering with family life) and how it affected psychological distress. Overall, findings revealed that work-to-family conflict lead to spillover from the military career to the family as well as distress among spouses.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Soldier and spouses' work-to-family conflict (i.e., work demands interfering with family life) was negatively related to fairness in household labor (i.e., more conflict, less fairness), and perceived fairness was related to family cohesion (i.e., less fairness, less cohesion).
- Work-to-family conflict was negatively related to Soldiers' psychological distress through fairness in household labor, whereas spouses' psychological distress was negatively related to conflict through family cohesion.
- Family cohesion was negatively related to spouses' psychological distress, but not related to psychological distress for Soldiers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop research-based curricula for military couples that help them resolve conflicts related to work and family
- Engage military couples in workshops to help discuss their perceptions of household fairness in hopes to build family cohesion
- Offer support groups for military couples in effort to learn about available supportive services to handle increased household and work responsibilities

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that offer family-supportive resources to reduce psychological stress created by work-to-family conflict
- Recommend education for community providers serving military families about the effects of psychological distress on the entire family system
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can promote positive family cohesion in Service members, their partners, and children

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- The sample was recruited from five U.S. military installations where Soldiers completed paper surveys and spouses completed online surveys.
- Soldier and spouses' perceptions of work-to-family conflict were examined to determine the relationship among conflict and perceptions of household labor fairness, family cohesion, and psychological distress.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to examine if Soldier and spouses' perceptions of work-to-family conflict were related to fairness in household labor, family cohesion, and psychological distress.

PARTICIPANTS

- Across this sample of Active Duty Army Soldiers and their spouses (N=78 couples, 156 participants) the average age was 31 years old.
- A majority of the participants were White (75%), followed by Latino (12%), and African American (5%). Additional race/ethnicity information was not provided.
- Most of Soldiers were male (90%) and had female spouses (90%) and had experienced at least one deployment (80%) in their military careers.

LIMITATIONS

- Only perceptions of family cohesion from the Soldier and spouse were included, thus limiting perceptions from other family members (i.e., children).
- This study lacked specificity on what resources were affecting family cohesion, thus it is uncertain what other factors may have contributed to couples' psychological distress.
- Data were collected at one time point, therefore there is no evidence of the long-term effects of work-to-family conflict on family cohesion, psychological distress, and fairness in household labor.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the effects of work-to-family conflict on all members of the military family (e.g., military children, Service members' parents)
- Conduct qualitative interviews to examine military families' perceptions of household labor, family cohesion, and work-to-family conflict
- Assess the long-term effects of work-to-family conflict on psychological distress and family cohesion among military families

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