

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Resources and Turnover Intentions of Work-Linked Couples in Masculine Occupations

Huffman, A. H., & Olson, K. J. (2017). Gender differences in perceptions of resources and turnover intentions of work-linked couples in masculine occupations. *Stress and Health, 33*(4), 309-321. doi:10.1002/smi.2709

SUMMARY: Dual-military couples have a unique experience balancing their roles as Service members and members of their families. This study considered the experiences of dual-military couples' gender differences, specifically examining women's experience of perceived support by supervisors for their work-life balance. The researchers found evidence that family supportive supervisory behaviors (e.g., emotional support, creative work-family management, role modeling) have a significant impact on Service members' intentions to prematurely separate from the military.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants who perceived higher family supportive supervisory behaviors (e.g., emotional support, creative work-family management, role modeling) from their supervisors had higher job control, less psychological distress, and were more likely to consider continuing their military career (i.e., re-signing).
- Women in dual-military couples reported greater intentions to prematurely separate from the military than men, which was completely explained by their reports of lower family supportive supervisory behaviors, lower job control, and more psychological distress.
- Women reported receiving fewer family supportive behaviors from supervisors compared to men.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Enhance education around how to better create work-life balance and develop coping skills for distress at work or home
- Offer training for military officers and others in supervisory roles that supports developing their family supportive supervisory behaviors
- Provide information to Service members on work-life balance and provide concrete steps that Service members can take to address concerns

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend the development of a mentoring program for women in the military to assist female Service members in balancing work-life demands
- Recommend development of and support for training programs for officers and other supervisors regarding gender discrimination and bias
- Encourage education for professionals who work with military couples regarding the unique experience of work-life stress for dual-military couples, and of women in a masculine occupation

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METHODS

- The researchers worked with an Army research support program to recruit volunteer participants for a large research program examining dual-military marriages.
- Participants completed a written self-report questionnaire that asked questions regarding family supportive supervisory behaviors, job control, psychological distress, and intention to leave one's job.
- Some of the questionnaire items measuring psychological distress were removed from the analysis because they did not appear to measure the variable well.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were Active Duty personnel at several Army posts in the U.S. from 2013 to 2015.
- Participants' ranks were: 44% enlisted Soldiers, 44% non-commissioned officers, and 12% officers. Participants' average time in the military was six years.
- There were 301 participants in this study: 52% male and 48% female; 53% White, 22% Black, 21% Latino, and 5% other races/ethnicities.
- All participants were in dual-military marriages.

LIMITATIONS

- The data were gathered at one time period, not over multiple time points, so causality cannot be established.
- The study did not assess reasons for the difference in perception of family supportive supervisory behaviors based on gender, only that it exists, which limits its applicability.
- This study only investigated the experiences of Service members who were married, but excluded those who were cohabiting, but unmarried, and those who had children, but were unmarried (whether divorced, never married, or cohabiting), which limits generalization of the study results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with a longitudinal design in order to determine causality
- Examine the reasons that gender affected perceived family supportive supervisory behaviors
- Explore whether those who report receiving greater family supportive supervisory behaviors also feel comfortable in seeking out or utilizing the benefits provided (e.g., flex-time)

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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