

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Marines

## iRelate: A Comprehensive Approach Empowering Young Marines to Succeed at Intimate Relationships

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**SUMMARY:** Marines tend to marry younger than civilians, and there is some evidence that they are underprepared for the demands of marriage, as indicated by the high divorce rates among young Marines. iRelate is a three-stage intimate relationship education program for young Marines in various stages of partnering: dating, engagement, and early marriage. Initial evaluation results indicate that iRelate has a high level of acceptability for young Marines, and may help them enter marriage with a more realistic understanding of its challenges.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Many young Marines have an overly idealistic perception of the demands of marriage: nearly a third report that they are equipped for marriage because they are a Marine, and 8% expect that marriage will be effortless and make them happy all the time.
- Young Marines who are divorcing recognize their pre-marital idealism as a problem: 40% report that they were too young to get married, and nearly half (47%) say they should have taken more time to get to know their spouse before getting married.
- Marines reported they were both more prepared for marriage and more confident about their ability to handle potential difficult times in marriage after receiving the iRelate training.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to young Service members about both the rewards and challenges of marriage
- Ensure young Service members have opportunities to seek personal development across all stages of relationship initiation and dissolution: pre-coupling, pre-marital, marital enrichment, and in divorce
- Train professionals to recognize Service members who have overly optimistic perceptions of marriage and refer them to appropriate support or programming

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to invest in relationship skill-building programs for Service members and their partners
- Use public awareness campaigns to educate Service members about the complexities of military marriages early in their service
- Recommend integrating basic intimate relationship skill building into existing service-delivery systems for young recruits

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## METHODS

- Three successive studies were conducted: a needs assessment and brief evaluations of the first two phases of the iRelate program.
- Participants for all studies were recruited by Navy chaplains at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station Yuma. All data were collected anonymously through online surveys.
- Statistical analyses were used to conduct pre- and post-comparisons of the data.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The needs assessment included 105 engaged and 70 divorcing Marines, about a quarter of whom were female, while the two evaluation studies included 211 Marines and 57 engaged Marines, respectively.
- All participants were E5 rank and below.
- No other demographic data was collected.

## LIMITATIONS

- The data for all three studies were collected anonymously from the same Marine bases, so it is unclear whether the participants in the three studies might have been measured in more than one study.
- No demographic data was collected which limits the authors' ability to appropriately describe the sample and limits the generalizability of the sample.
- No control group was utilized, therefore, it is unknown to what degree pre-post perceptions would have changed if no intervention had been provided.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the first and second stages of the program with larger samples that do not utilize the same participants as the third stage
- Evaluate the efficacy of programs to increase the strength of Service members' significant relationships
- Explore whether the program is effective for Marines who have been married longer and for Service members in other branches of the military

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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