



Veteran Status, Extramarital Sex, and Divorce: Findings from the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey

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Although there is a perception that extramarital sex (infidelity) is more common among military and Veteran populations, there is little empirical research to support this claim. Further, there are many studies of the marital stressors within military couples, there is little research specifically regarding infidelity. In this study the researchers examine the relation between being a Veteran, infidelity, and divorce.

Key Findings:

- Infidelity was higher among Veterans (32%) compared to civilians (17%). Among ever-married participants, odds for reporting infidelity were 49% higher among Veterans than civilians. This association was found even after controlling for several demographic characteristics such as race, religion, measures of household composition growing up, and socioeconomic status.
- After adjusting for control variables, the odds of ever divorcing were 45% higher among Veterans compared to civilians.
- Compared to non-infidelity civilians, odds of divorce were 2.28 times higher among Veterans who had been unfaithful. Notably, odds of divorce were 2.80 times higher among unfaithful civilians.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could be designed to educate military couples about both relationship enhancing and relationship eroding behaviors (including infidelity).
- Programs could be developed to support couples in the wake of infidelity; programs could help couples rebuild trust, which may result in a decrease in the divorce rate among military couples.

Implications for Policies:

- Programs could support the development and evaluation of relationship building programs, especially in light of the elevated rates of infidelity and divorce among Veterans in this study.
- Policy makers may recommend a systematic review of issues of divorce and infidelity among Veterans, exploring contributing factors to these differences and reviewing available potentially useful programs.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Additional research on differences (and similarities) between patterns of infidelity among male and female Veterans might be helpful in gaining understanding of gender differences.
- Future research may examine the military's "infidelity culture" and may consider efforts to address factors that may increase the rates of infidelity in the military.



Background Information

Methodology:

- Data for this study came from the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs), a randomly selected sample of U.S. households including a supplementary over sample of Blacks and Hispanics (N = 273).
- This study was a quantitative quasi-experiment examining Veterans vs. non-veterans and participants reporting infidelity vs. no infidelity. Primary analysis consisted of logistic regression for binary outcomes.

Participants:

- Participants included 3,121 adults aged 18-59, of whom 2,308 had ever been married.
- 17% of the sample was Veterans and 54% were female. The race/ethnicity of the sample was as follows: 78% White, 10% African American, 9% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American.

Limitations:

- This study relies on self-reported infidelity and may underestimate the actual rates among both Veteran and non-veteran populations.
- Infidelity is often associated with active-duty service and it is unknown if the extramarital affair(s) occurred before, during, or after deployment.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent <i>Minor Limitations</i> (★★★)	Appropriate <i>Few Limitations</i> (★★★)	Limited <i>Several Limitations</i> (★★★)	Questionable <i>Many/Severe Limitations</i> (★★★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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	★ ★ ★