

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Effect of Short-Term Separation on the Behavioral Health of Military Wives

Oblea Jr., P. N., Badger, T. A., & Hopkins-Chadwick, D. L. (2016). Effect of short-term separation on the behavioral health of military wives. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 54(6), 45-51.
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SUMMARY: Military spouses are separated from one another for a variety of reasons, including deployment and residential training. This study investigated the effect of short-term separations on military wives' well-being as well as the ways in which other factors are associated with well-being. Findings suggest no effect of separation for training on wives' well-being; yet other constructs were associated with wives' well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- There was no observed effect of separation for training on wives' well-being.
- Wives who experienced high levels of stress tended to have higher levels of depression, while high levels of resilience and relationship satisfaction were associated with lower levels of depression.
- Decreased social support for wives was associated with higher levels of depression prior to separation but there was no association between these two constructs during separation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for spouses of Service members so that they can form connections with one another and increase their levels of social support
- Develop classes that assist military couples to learn healthy communication habits so that they are able to form a solid foundation that will persist during separations
- Provide workshops about stress relief and stress management to Service members and their partners

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to promote programs that support Service members' families during separations
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families regarding the need for social support before separations
- Encourage investigation of strategies for enhancing resilience in military families

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METHODS

- Wives of male U.S. Army officers whose husbands were participating in a 12-week training program were invited to participate. There was a 42% response rate.
- Participants completed surveys prior to separation and two weeks prior to their husbands' return with questions about demographics, communication during spousal separation, social support, stress, relationship satisfaction, and depression.
- Data were analyzed to determine the effect of separation on well-being and whether social support and communication mitigated that effect.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 32 female spouses of male U.S. Army officers with an average age of 34 years old and had been married ten years on average.
- Most (75%) of the participants were White and 56% did not work outside the home.
- None of the wives were currently pregnant or taking antidepressants to treat depression.

LIMITATIONS

- All participants were wives of Army officers; these results may not extend to spouses of enlisted Service members or other branches.
- The participants had been married on average ten years. The experience of separation may be different for couples who have been married for a shorter period of time.
- Researchers excluded women who were currently pregnant or who were taking antidepressants. Inclusion of these women may have allowed for different or more nuanced findings.
- The participants were separated because of trainings so results may not be able to be generalized to other separations, such as deployment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the experience of separation for spouses of enlisted Service members
- Investigate the different outcomes of separation for younger or newly married military couples
- Include women who are pregnant or who have diagnosed depression in the study to determine how their experiences may differ from those of other women

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