



Supporting  
Military Families  
Through Research  
and Outreach

# PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

## Promoting the Adaptation of Military Families: An Empirical Test of a Community Practice Model



Bowen, G. L., Mancini, J. A., Martin, J. A., Ware, W. B., & Nelson, J. P. (2003). *Family Relations*, 52(1), 33-44.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3700158>



*Using a sample of Air Force Service members and spouses, this study examined how unit support (support from peers and immediate leaders), informal community support (clubs, relationships with work associates, neighbors, and friends), and a sense of community (the degree to which members feel positively attached to the Air Force/military as an organization) were associated with family adaptation (managing conflict, facing challenges).*

### Key Findings:

- Both higher unit support and more informal community support predicted a higher sense of community.
- Greater informal community support, a greater sense of community, and not having children predicted better family adaptation.
- Unit support indirectly predicted family adaptation: higher unit support predicted higher sense of community, and higher sense of community, in turn, predicted greater family adaptation.
- Unit support also predicted Informal Community Support which strengthened the Sense of Community and modestly enhanced family adaptation.

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs could incorporate information in their curricula to educate Service members and their families about the factors that influence family adaptation.
- Service providers should also involve the informal community in program delivery and outreach.
- Drawing on informal social/community support networks to advertise programs and recruit participants might help improve participants' sense of informal community support.

### Implications for Policies:

- Increasing unit support, particularly by educating and encouraging supervisors to be supportive, can increase sense of community, and improve family adaptation.
- Ensure that existing and new policies help to foster a strong sense of community for Service members and their families.
- The military and community services/programs should strive to work in partnership and/or coordinate to provide a higher sense of community and support.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Given the different experiences of military families since 2001, future research should examine these variables using data from current military families, including variables like branch, marital stability and family functioning.
- Additional research should examine how unit support, informal community support, and a sense of community impact family functioning during deployment and reintegration.
- Future research should study whether programs or interventions can improve spouses' sense of community and military family adaptation.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit <http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu>



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## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Survey data for this study were collected in 1999 from Air Force Service members and their spouses on installations around the world. A subset, of 20,569 servicemen with families on base was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling.

### Participants:

- A subsample was selected from the data ( $n = 20,569$ , reduced to 17,161 because of missing data) which featured Service members who were primarily male (83%), enlisted (67%) Air Force members who were married.
- No racial or ethnic identity measures were obtained.

### Limitations:

- This study was limited to only Service members in the Air Force; it may be that the model works differently or does not apply at all in other branches
- The measure of sense of community was constructed from four variables that may not have been ideal to assess this construct. For example, "satisfaction with the Air Force/military way of life," and "the Air Force/military as a good place to raise children," may be indicators of satisfaction with the military, rather than a sense of community.
- The amount of missing data (16.6%) may have biased the findings.

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	★★★☆☆
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★★

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