

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Siblings of Military Servicemembers: A Qualitative Exploration of Individual and Family Systems Reactions

Rodriguez, A. J., & Margolin, G. (2011). Siblings of military servicemembers: A qualitative exploration of individual and family systems reactions. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 42(4), 316-323. doi:10.1037/a0024527

SUMMARY: Siblings of current or recent Service members were interviewed to explore how having a family member in the military impacts their family. Initial reactions to a decision to enlist involved an increase in family conflict in a number of different family subsystems; however, eventually the family members coalesced with the Service member and rallied in their support.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants whose siblings' military service began after they left for college described forfeiting their growing autonomy as they supported other family members.
- Both the qualitative and quantitative analyses identified both positive and negative reactions to a sibling's enlistment in military service; most did not experience overwhelming distress.
- Seven of the eight participants described how their sibling's enlistment provided an important role model of hard work and self-sacrifice.
- Six participants described feelings of loss or anxiety within their family associated with their sibling's service.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Facilitate age-appropriate activities or discussion groups to support siblings of Service members
- Provided support groups during reintegration events that specifically target siblings to allow them to express their feelings and experiences
- Offer activities in which Service members and their siblings could engage in enjoyable activities together

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support family-based activities in which siblings as well as other family members can participate
- Recommend that services for Service member's spouse/partner and children are expanded to include siblings
- Recommend installations conduct a needs assessment to better understand the needs and experiences of the siblings of Service members stationed therein

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METHODS

- Undergraduate students with siblings who currently or recently served in the United States military were recruited via a psychology research pool and on-campus announcements.
- Participants met with interviewers who collected information on significant life events in the previous five years for the participant, their military sibling, and family.
- Participants were asked to talk for ten minutes about questions: How has your life changed and what is your reaction to having a family member in the military? and What changes have you noticed in the lives of other family members and what are their reactions to having a family member in the military?

PARTICIPANTS

- Eight undergraduates participated (50% female).
- Fifty percent of participants were White, with an average age of 20.96 years (SD = 0.98 years).
- Eighty-eight percent of siblings were male; 38% were in Army, 38% Navy, 13% Marine Corps, 13% National Guard.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was small and homogeneous, limiting the ability to generalize to other groups.
- Only one family member's views were assessed; it may be important to assess all family members' experiences directly.
- No information was collected regarding the siblings' motivations to enlist in the military which may have impacted their families' reactions.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data from more siblings in a wider variety of life circumstances
- Compare young adults who have siblings leave home for other reasons to those leaving for military service
- Examine the experiences of younger siblings (e.g., those in elementary school or junior high) in relation to the Service member's enlistment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>