



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Warfare and Welfare: Military Service, Combat, and Marital Dissolution

Ruger, W., Wilson, S.E., Waddoups, S.L. (2002). Warfare and welfare: Military service, combat, and marital dissolution. *Armed Forces & Security*, 29, 85-107.



Data from the National Survey of Families and Households (a random national sample) was used to examine the risk of marital dissolution in married males (both Veterans and non-Veterans) in a 10-year span in the 1980's and 1990's. Self-reported combat exposure among the Veterans significantly raised the probability of marital dissolution during this timeframe.

Key Findings:

- Controlling for socio-demographic variables, combat significantly raised the probability of marital dissolution among the Veterans. Specifically, those who reported combat exposure were 1.62 times more likely to have their marriage end by Wave 2 compared to those without combat exposure.
- World War II Veterans who married in 1946-1953 had a lower rate of marriage dissolution (9%) at Wave 2 compared to non-Veterans married in the same period (12%).
- Veterans who married in the periods following the Korean War (1954-1959) or the Vietnam era (1974-1980) had significantly higher rates of marriage dissolution (19% and 42% respectively) at Wave 2 compared to non-Veterans (13% and 32% respectively).
- After controlling for other variables, Korean War Veterans had a 26% higher risk of marital dissolution compared to their non-Veteran counterparts. Further, Korean War veterans were twice as likely to get divorced compared to World War II Veterans.
- Marrying later in the century, being younger at time of marriage, having less education, being Black or another minority, being previously married, having a child at time of marriage, and marriage in the teen years were all associated with higher risk for marital dissolution.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could provide classes for families and Service members about strategies for effectively managing the stress of military service.
- Programs could offer a range of relationship-enrichment activities (e.g., retreats, workshops, social activities).

Implications for Policies:

- Policy could recommend continued support of re-integration programs, particularly those that strengthen intimate relationships and families.
- Policy could recommend continued funding for services for couples (e.g., supportive activities, psychotherapy) for Service members, especially those exposed to combat.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could examine the causal mechanisms of why Veterans exposed to combat were more likely to have their marriages end.
- Additional studies could measure combat exposure more precisely and account for type, length, and intensity of combat.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- Data was derived from the National Survey of Families and Households (a national random sample of adults in the United States); however, military personnel living on base were excluded from analyses. Wave 1 was conducted in 1987-1988, and Wave 2 in 1992-1994.
- Married males at Wave 1 were included; non-Veterans were compared to those who served in the U.S. Military during the World War II, Korean War, or Vietnam eras.
- Marriage duration, demographic information and military variables were collected.
- Survival analysis was used to understand the impact of covariates on the odds of marital dissolution.

Participants:

- Data from 2,899 married males was examined.
- 14% were married in 1935-1945 (47% Veterans), 14% in 1946-1953 (71% Veterans), 8% in 1954-1959 (64% Veterans), 35% in 1960-1973 (49% Veterans), and 19% in 1974-1980 (25% Veterans).
- No other demographic or military data was presented.

Limitations:

- Combat exposure was measured by a single yes/no item which does not provide very detailed information.
- Marital dissolution is not a complete indicator of health of a marriage and does not include other potential social costs of military service or combat exposure.
- All instruments were self-report and may be biased.

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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 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	★ ★ ★