

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Gender and The Military Profession: Early Career Influences, Attitudes, and Intentions

Smith, D. G., & Rosenstein, J. E. (2016). Gender and the military profession: Early career influences, attitudes, and intentions. *Armed Forces & Society*, 43(2), 260-279. doi:10.1177/0095327x15626722

SUMMARY: Societal gender roles and norms may negatively influence female Service members' persistence in military career advancement, thus impacting retention of female Service members in the military. This study examined work and family expectations among 267 U.S. Naval Academy students. Results indicated that career intentions and influences were different for male and female students.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Naval students who anticipated serving longer in the military tended to have parents who previously served. In this group, students were more likely to be female and were influenced by female family members.
- Naval students who anticipated marrying someone in the military perceived greater levels of work-family conflict in the future and also forecast spending more time serving in the military.
- Naval students who indicated they would wait to have children until a older age (M=29 years) anticipated staying in the military longer than students who intended to have their children when they are younger.
- Longer military service was anticipated when male students had positive male peer role models, while positive female peer role models negatively influenced years of intended military service.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military families to enhance problem solving skills, such as addressing issues related to work and family conflict
- Disseminate information to Service members and their families regarding how Service members can maintain and achieve their future work-family expectations and goals
- Offer support groups to help build connections among student Service members and military personnel in their intended career path

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that address ways for military families to balance work and family life
- Continue to advocate for women serving in the military to promote women's professional advancement and retention
- Encourage training on eliminating biases in societal gender roles among military service providers and military families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from an introductory leadership course at the U.S. Naval Academy and received extra credit for participating in the study.
- Naval students completed online surveys assessing military career intentions, years of intended service, influence of role models, plans for future family planning, work-family conflict expectations, and societal gender roles.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to examine factors that may be related to intentions of military career and duration of service among U.S. Naval Academy students.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 169 male and 98 female first-year undergraduate students who were attending the U.S. Naval Academy.
- A majority of the Naval students were White (68%) and had a mean age of 19 years (SD=1.07). Further information regarding race/ethnicity was not provided.
- Of the 239 students, 9% had prior military service, 36% had parents who served in the military, and many anticipated serving in the military for approximately 13 years.

LIMITATIONS

- The findings may not generalize to all Service members as the convenience sample was collected from an undergraduate class of Naval students.
- Data were collected during the students' first year, thus it may be difficult to determine how the students will follow through with anticipated future plans.
- The study findings may be bias due to the researchers' roles at the U.S. Naval Academy.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess military students' duration of service intentions over time (e.g., examine intentions at one, five, and ten years)
- Examine the relationship between future military career intentions and gender attitudes over a longer period of time
- Collect data from a random sample of Service members to examine how work-family conflict may be related to societal gender roles

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