

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Dissemination and Evaluation of Marriage Education in the Army

Stanley, S. M., Allen, E. S., Markman, H. J., Saiz, C. C., Bloomstrom, G., Thomas, R., ... Bailey, A. E. (2005). Dissemination and evaluation of marriage education in the Army. *Family Process*, 44(2), 187-201. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2005.00053.x

SUMMARY: An evaluation of the prevention and relationship enhancement program in two separate samples in which at least one member of the couple was on Active Duty in the U.S. Army was conducted. The intervention was delivered by Army chaplains in a two weekend retreat format. Overall, couples participating in the marriage education program demonstrated improvements in relationship functioning.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Couples reported significant gains in relationship confidence from pre- to post- program.
- The use of time out strategy by couples significantly increased from pre- to post-program, and continued to be used at the one-month follow up.
- Couples also showed improvements from pre- to post- program in their ability to talk about Army issues as a couple.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop online modules that focus on effective relationship building strategies for Service members and their partners
- Disseminate information regarding possible relationship stressors for Service members and the potential benefits of marriage education programs
- Engage young military couples in workshops that focus on developing healthy relationship and communication skills

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of support structures (e.g. counseling, community network) within military branches for Service members and their partners during times of stress (e.g., relocation, deployment)
- Encourage awareness among professionals working with Service members families and communities about the effects of stressful experiences on the well-being of Service members and their relationships
- Support marriage education programs that address the unique challenges military couples face

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited across 11 brigades and targeted recruitment on young, newly enlisted couples who may be more vulnerable to Army-related stressors.
- Participants completed a pre- and post-program measures related to their relationship satisfaction and interaction patterns.
- Data analysis focused on changes from the beginning to the end of the marriage education program in relationship quality by gender and White vs. non-White couples, and longer-term changes in a one-month follow up.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were couples with one member on Active Duty in the U.S. Army, typically the male.
- In study one, 230 couples participated and completed the pre-post survey and 60 couples completed the 1- month follow-up; whereas, in study two, 105 couples participated and completed the pre-post survey, and 47 couples completed the one month follow-up.
- In both studies participants represented diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds which mirrored the makeup of the U.S. Army.

LIMITATIONS

- There was not a representative sample of military couples as a comparison group in either study; which limits what can be said about the effectiveness of this particular program.
- This study only focused on Army couples, which limits the interpretation of findings to other branches.
- Less than half of the participants participated in the one-month follow up, which could bias the findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the association between military families, military stressors, and relationship satisfaction
- Engage in process-oriented and longitudinal studies that help determine the factors that contribute to marital quality and stability over time in military marriages
- Investigate in depth dual-military couples and the degree to which they are at increased risk for lower marital quality and greater instability

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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