

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Decreasing Divorce in Army Couples: Results From a Randomized Controlled Trial Using PREP for Strong Bonds

Stanley, S. M., Allen, E. S., Markman, H. J., Rhoades, G. K., & Prentice, D. L. (2010). Decreasing divorce in Army couples: Results from a randomized controlled trial using PREP for Strong Bonds. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 9(2), 149-160. doi:10.1080/15332691003694901

SUMMARY: Teaching couples principles and skills for healthy relationships may improve marriage stability, particularly among couples enduring high levels of stress (e.g., military couples). Rates of divorce among married Army couples were compared between couples who were assigned to receive the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) for Strong Bonds or to a no treatment control group. Couples who receive the PREP intervention were significantly less likely to be divorced than couples in the control group one year post-intervention.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Military couples who participated in PREP for Strong Bonds were significantly less likely to have filed for divorce than military couples in the no treatment control group at one year post-intervention.
- The percentage of military couples who had filed for divorce at one year post-intervention were 2% in the PREP intervention group and 6% in the control group.
- In the analyses, deployment was not significantly associated with couples' likelihood of divorce.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education for military couples that utilizes a range of teaching techniques (e.g., didactic lessons, video demonstrations, group skills exercises, couple practice time, suggestions for practice outside of meeting times)
- Offer workshops to teach military couples principles and skills, including cognitive-behavioral strategies, for healthy relationships
- Disseminate information regarding marital risk and protective factors among military couples

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend initiatives that offer couple education programs, such as PREP, to all military couples before and after a deployment
- Promote the development of military-specific relationship materials and curricula for couple education programs (e.g., materials regarding deployment, frequent moves, PTSD)
- Encourage DoD collaboration with community religious groups and other programs that provide premarital classes to offer military-specific relationship information relevant to military couples

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Married couples with at least one Active Duty Army spouse were recruited via brochures, media stories, posters, and chaplain referrals from Fort Campbell in Kentucky.
- Couples completed questionnaires regarding their marriages, military-related variables, and family and personal well-being at baseline (pre-intervention), post-intervention, six-month follow-up, and one-year follow-up.
- Couples were randomly assigned to either the PREP for Strong Bonds intervention or no treatment control group; PREP included a one-day training and weekend-long retreat teaching skills and principles of healthy relationships.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 476 military couples, with 98% Active Duty Army husbands and 9% Active Duty or Reserves military wives. The rest of the participants were civilians.
- At baseline, husbands had a mean age of 27.6 years and wives had a mean age of 26.9 years.
- The majority of participants were White (male= 70%, Female= 71%).

LIMITATIONS

- Large numbers of contacted couples (57%) were excluded due to ineligibility, scheduling difficulties, inability to contact, and limited space in intervention groups, possibly biasing results.
- Despite random assignment, men in the intervention group reported lower marital satisfaction, less confidence in their marriage, and more negative couple interactions than men in the control group, which could bias results.
- Groups were compared based on whether couples had filed for divorce, but marital problems or separations were not measured, which may have influenced rates of intervention success.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study with a more representative sample (e.g., other military branches)
- Explore the relative efficacy of the PREP intervention by comparing it with other evidence-based marriage programs
- Examine the different components of PREP to understand which features are most strongly associated with positive outcomes

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