A Randomized Controlled Trial of Relationship Education in the U.S. Army: 2-Year Outcomes


**SUMMARY:** The effectiveness of an evidence-based, couple relationship education (CRE) program was evaluated at two Army bases. The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program with an additional focus on coping with deployments and reunions was used. A randomized controlled trial with two years of follow-up that examined marital quality and stability was conducted.

**KEY FINDINGS:**
- There was no evidence of long term effects on couples' relationship quality.
- Couples assigned to the higher risk site were significantly less likely than controls to be divorced at the 2-year follow-up.
- For ethnic minority couples, 3.8% of the intervention group divorced compared to 15.7% of the control group.
- Couples who reported greater economic strain tended to show greater benefit from the intervention.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:**
Programs could:
- Offer couples' relationship programs that focus on coping with military family stressors, such as deployments and relocation
- Promote, across military branches, the benefits of relationship programs that focus on military family stressors and coping strategies
- Develop training for military professionals to facilitate relationship workshops

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:**
Policies could:
- Encourage awareness among military professionals on the importance of relationship education programs for military couples
- Extend and support policies that include military couples and their families
- Continue support for programs that focus on prevention of military family stressors and development of coping strategies

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.

[www.reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu](http://www.reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu)
METHODS
- Couples were recruited at two Army bases via brochures, media stories, posters, and referrals from the u.c. Chaplains.
- Each participant separately completed baseline questionnaires as well as multiple assessments over the 2 year study.
- Analyses were based on data collected at pre-and post-intervention and four follow-up assessments; the fourth being 2 years after the post-assessment.

PARTICIPANTS
- A Randomized Controlled Clinical Trial of the Strength At Home Men's Program for Partner Violence in Military Veterans
- About three-quarters of the couples were White, around 10% were Latino/Latina, 10% Black, 2% Native American, and 2% Asian-American, and 5% endorsed mixed race/ethnicity.
- Couples had been married an average of 4.93 years, and 74% reported at least one child living with them at least part-time.

LIMITATIONS
- This sample did not include couples who were or had been in poverty, so no claims can be made about CRE and its effectiveness with this population.
- Generalizability was limited due to the inclusion of only one military branch and two Army bases.
- Couples participating in the study at Site 1 received the training in a different manner to participants at Site 2 which could affect the outcomes of the program from Site 1 to Site 2.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Future research could:
- Future research may benefit from including objectively coded data of couples interactions, as observational methods have shown the largest impacts from CRE in meta-analyses
- Additional research could engage in longer term follow-ups with the same group of couples
- Future research could look at the effectiveness of the intervention on couples who experience unique military stressors, such as relocation or separation

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS
- Design: Appropriate
- Methods: Appropriate
- Limitations: Few

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