

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

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

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Loew, B. A., Allen, E. S., Carter, S., Osborne, L. J., ... Markman, H. J. (2014). A randomized controlled trial of relationship education in the U.S. Army: 2-year outcomes. *Family Relations*, 63(4), 482-495. doi:10.1111/fare.12083

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

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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



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