

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Divorce, Race, and Military Service: More Than Equal Pay and Equal Opportunity

Teachman, J. D.; Tedrow, L. (2008). Divorce, race, and military service: More than equal pay and equal opportunity. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 1030-1044. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00544.x

**SUMMARY:** An examination of the risk of divorce among enlisted Active Duty military Service members by race and socioeconomic level was conducted. This study utilized data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY-79). Overall findings indicate that military service reduces the likelihood of marriage dissolution among Blacks serving in the Army.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- For White Active Duty military Service members findings do not demonstrate an effect of military service on the risk of marital dissolution.
- There is no evidence that the risk of divorce varies according the branch of military in which a man served.
- Black men serving in the Army are 46% less likely to end their marriages than Black men with no experience in the military.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop online modules that focus on relationship building and communication for Service members and their partners
- Focus on the military family unit by providing activities that support the relationship between parents as well as between parent and child
- Provide pre- and post-deployment relationship education workshops for military couples

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote reintegration programs that include attention to the healthiness of a Service members' marriage
- 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
- Recommend collaboration between DoD programs and local community organizations to support programs for Service members and their families that address positive relationships

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## METHODS

- Participants were interviewed a maximum of 21 times over a period spanning 25 years (interviews were annual through 1994, biennial thereafter).
- Factors such as whether a man is currently serving on Active or Reserve Duty, is currently a veteran of Active Duty service, or is currently a veteran of reserve-duty service are accounted for as well as race, military branch and income.
- Data analysis controlled for a number of factors related to the risk of divorce such as education level and number of children. Overall the analysis looked at participants' likelihood of divorce by race and military branch.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Men who served as enlisted members (both Active Duty and Reserve) of the military primarily during the late 1970s and the 1980s (a few men served into the 1990s).
- Men who married for the first time between the years 1979 and 2004 were included in the study.
- The study does not provide the number of participants or any other descriptive data.

## LIMITATIONS

- The data set only included Active Duty and Reserve military men; therefore, results are not generalizable to women serving in the military.
- Data analyzed were collected over a fifteen year time period time starting in 1979 from Active Duty and Reserve military men, which may be less applicable to today's current military context.
- While monitoring of the data of those who exited or entered the military occurred in the analysis of the data, this population may have been different than those who remained in the military or civilian population and as such affected the outcomes of the study.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the association between military families' stress (e.g., financial, relocation, deployment) and divorce rate
- 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 dual-military couples and the degree to which they are at increased risk for lower marital quality and divorce

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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