

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

His and Hers: The Interface of Military Couples' Biological, Psychological, and Relational Health

Trump, L. J., Lamson, A. L., Lewis, M. E., & Muse, A. R. (2015). His and hers: The interface of military couples' biological, psychological, and relational health. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 37(3), 316-328. doi:10.1007/s10591-015-9344-8

SUMMARY: Couples comprised of military husbands and civilian wives completed questionnaires about physical pain, mental health, and relationship functioning at a military medical clinic. In addition, heart rate variability was assessed to measure physiological stress. Wives reported higher levels of depression and distress compared to their husbands. Higher levels of pain and more severe depression were related to lower marital quality.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Husbands who reported higher levels of pain reported lower marital quality.
- Wives reported lower marital quality when their husbands had more severe depression and greater physical pain.
- Wives reported significantly higher levels of depression than their military husbands.
- Wives who reported more severe depression reported lower marital quality.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes for military couples about how they can effectively cope with stress as a couple
- Develop curricula that addresses how depression and pain in one member can impact everyone in the family
- Implement support groups for couples in which one or both members are experiencing pain or depression

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend practitioners consider the health and well-being of both members of military couples in their screenings
- Support interdisciplinary collaborations between medical and behavioral health professionals in serving couples and families
- Continue to support programs that provide holistic care for Service members and their families who are managing depression and relationship problems

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through a military family medicine clinic that primarily provides care for Active Duty and retired Air Force members.
- A subset of data from a larger study examining which factors that influence couple's marital health was utilized for the current study.
- Participants included Active Duty, Reserve, or retired Service members currently married to a civilian partner.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 75 couples.
- The average age of husbands was 36 years (SD = 10.1), while the average age of wives was 35 years (SD = 10.0).
- The majority of husbands (79%) and wives (69%) were White.
- Rank ranged from Airman First Class E-3 to Captain, with most Service members being ranked E-6.

LIMITATIONS

- Data were cross-sectional, and therefore causality cannot be inferred.
- The relatively small sample size may have limited the ability to detect significant associations.
- A convenience sample was recruited, so results may not generalize to all military couples.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine other relevant variables, such as number of deployments, length of time in the military, rank, and length of time married
- Replicate the study with a more diverse sample (e.g., female Service members and their partners, same-gender dyads)
- Employ observational methods to examine communication within military couples

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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