

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Social Support and Life Stress as Related to the Psychological Distress of Single Enlisted Navy Mothers

Tucker, M. M., & Kelley, M. L. (2009). Social support and life stress as related to the psychological distress of single enlisted Navy mothers. *Military Psychology, 21*(2), S82-S97. doi:10.1080/08995600903249198

SUMMARY: An examination of how work, family, friend, and community support were related to psychological distress (i.e., symptoms of depression, anxiety, and maternal guilt) among Active Duty U.S. Navy single mothers was conducted. Participants completed an online survey which assessed their social support, life events stress, depression, anxiety and maternal guilt. Overall there were relationships between several of Active Duty mothers' social supports and their depressive, anxiety symptoms, and maternal guilt.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Support from family members was not associated with Active Duty single mothers' psychological adjustment nor did community support significantly predict psychological distress.
- Higher levels of support from friends and fewer negative life events stressors predicted fewer depressive symptoms among participants.
- Higher social support in the workplace and fewer negative life events stressors predicted both fewer symptoms of anxiety and lower levels of maternal guilt.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer pre and post- deployment support groups for deployed mothers, their families, and friends
- Provide workshops for single Active Duty mothers that focus on building strong relationships with their children
- Disseminate information regarding possible symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety Active Duty mothers' may face

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for programs that address deployed mothers unique needs (e.g., childcare, healthcare)
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families (e.g., child caregivers, mental health, and education professionals) on the possible effects of mothers' deployment on their mental health and well-being
- Support the provision of tools and resources that assist Active Duty mothers in accessing quality childcare and maintaining their health

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

- Participants were recruited via announcements placed in local newspapers, through organizations via the Internet, and word of mouth.
- Participants were asked to complete an anonymous online self-report questionnaire which addressed social support, positive and negative life stressors, and psychological distress.
- Analysis looked at the relationships between Active Duty U.S. Navy mothers' depression, anxiety, and maternal guilt and identified work, family, friend, and community supports.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 50 single enlisted U.S. Navy mothers with their minor children.
- Forty participants identified as either single, never married, divorced, or separated and had a mean age of 24 years old.
- Forty-seven participants identified as White, one as Hispanic; and two as other.

LIMITATIONS

- A sample size of 50 and the use of a convenience sample bring a degree of uncertainty into the results.
- Single predominantly White U.S. Navy mothers who chose to participate in an online survey may represent a certain subset of single U.S. Navy mothers, which limits generalizability.
- Data were collected all at one time, with the negative (i.e., psychological distress) questions undermining the positive (i.e., social supports) questions.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the relationship between social supports, Active Duty mothers' depression, anxiety, and maternal guilt, and retention in the military
- Examine how deployment affects social support and psychological adjustment of Active Duty mothers
- Investigate the unique experiences of single military women across all military branches

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