



Strengthening Families, Communities, and a Nation – One Marriage at a Time

Military Service and Marriage: A Review of Research

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Introduction

Why is it important to understand the challenges to a healthy marriage that people in the military face? Some compelling reasons come readily to mind. First of all, married military personnel represent a sizable population, and that, in itself, merits attention. Nearly one-half of the nation's military personnel are married, amounting to almost 700,000 individuals. Moreover, these individuals will experience unique challenges to their marriages, such as deployment and combat stress. Perhaps as a result of some of these unique challenges, servicemen and women appear to have one of the highest divorce rates of any group in the nation. Also, when war or conflict strikes the nation, military spouses feel the effects. Many men and women join the military in order to serve their country and its ideals. If military personnel are struggling in their marriages, this situation can impact the ability of the military to perform its duties. But perhaps the most compelling reason simply may be that a healthy marriage contributes to a higher quality of life for an important group in society that serves the public interest, clearly a vital social goal.

What follows is an extensive summary of the research on marriage and military service. Topics covered in these studies include marriage and military retention and career orientation; dual-military marriages; women in the military; deployment; prisoners of war; the effects of combat on marriage; potential relationship problems in military marriages; spousal abuse and aggression; divorce rates; and premarital counseling. The studies reviewed here pertain to military service in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and more recent military conflicts, as well as to general military service. Not surprisingly, a great deal of research about military service and marriage relates to deployment, a timely topic given current military conflicts. An introductory paragraph will summarize the findings for each section. We also note that much of the research is older. Therefore, it may not always apply to military marriages today since the military has changed. There is a growing need for current research on military service and marriage. In addition, the reader should be aware that some of the research findings cited below are from studies done on just one branch of the military, such as the Navy. Military life can be quite different in each branch of the military, so findings related to one branch may be inaccurate in another.

In section 1 of this review, we provide a brief overview — a "nutshell" — of important research findings on military service and marriage. Many readers may want more details than this overview provides, and we provide those details in sections 2-14. While providing more specifics, these sections still don't provide a great deal of detail and context for the research findings.

In section 15, we will take on the task of "connecting the dots," or synthesizing the research findings. We have asked an expert in this field of research to write this synthesis explaining why military service and marriage is an important topic. This synthesis will suggest what we know — at least with reasonable confidence — about military service and marriage; explain what we think is true, but need more research to confirm; explain what we don't know yet and need to study, including areas where the research is inconsistent; and examine what the major issues and challenges are in doing research on military service and marriage. *This section is now being written. We hope it will be available by Fall 2006.* In section 16,



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we raise some questions to think about for marriage educators and others involved in efforts to strengthen marriages in the military.

Section 17 lists some available scholarly articles that summarize the research on military families that may be of special interest to researchers. And section 18 is an extensive bibliography of research related to military service and marriage.

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1. Military Service and Marriage: Important Findings in a Nutshell

What follows is a brief summary of important research findings related to military service and marriage. More detailed findings are available in sections 2-12.

- Portrait of Military Service and Marriage: Studies indicate that nearly one-half of all active-duty military personnel are married, almost 700,000 people. Slightly over one-half of all reserve military personnel are married as well. The higher the individual's rank, the more likely he or she is to be married. This pattern holds for enlisted personnel and officers, and for male and female personnel among active- duty and reserve. Research also shows that military spouses are generally young, especially spouses of enlisted personnel. Among active-duty, more than nine in 10 military spouses are women.
- Dual-Military Marriages: Studies on dual-military marriages conclude that when both spouses are in the military, soldiers are typically younger and have a lower rank than soldiers who marry a civilian. Retention for women in dual-military marriages is lower than it is for men. Couples in which both spouses serve in the military have fewer children than do other couples and their military readiness is just as good, if not better, than that of other married soldiers. Even though military couples have more job-related problems than do other couples, military couples do quality work and typically score above average on job performance.
- Women in the Military: The studies in this review related to women in the military compare their marriage and fertility rates to those of civilian women. Women in the Army marry at a younger age than do civilian women. Rank is related to marital status for women soldiers, for both enlisted personnel and officers. Servicewomen also show higher levels of fertility than do civilian women.
- Deployment: Most of the research on military service and marriage relates to deployment. Five percent of enlisted personnel report leaving the military because of deployment, but nearly one-half say that they are satisfied with the situation. How a couple deals with deployment relates directly to the quality of their relationship before deployment. A couple's initial level of commitment is linked to their marital stability during and after deployment. Spouses at home experience many problems as well. They typically pass through three reaction stages: pre- deployment, survival, and reunion. Spouses of naval, nuclear submarine, and other frequently deployed military personnel face unique challenges, especially strong cycles of depression. Research also shows that the percentage of active-duty men and women engaging in aggression in private life increases with the length of deployment.
- Prisoners of War: Prisoners of War (POWs) face significant challenges because of their unusually long separations from their families. Studies affirm that reintegrating POWs back into the family involves a reexamination and renegotiation of the marriage, family roles, and family structure. Those POWs married for longer periods before their captivity had an easier time with family reintegration than did those in shorter-length marriage. Also, POWs and their spouses who experienced separation difficulties that did not lead to divorce resolved these difficulties successfully by about the fifth year after the POW's



return. However, divorce rates for Vietnam war POWs was twice as high as non-POW veterans.

- Effects of Combat on Marriage: Combat experience is related to subsequent marital problems and a 62 percent increase in the risk of divorce. Combat stress reaction (CSR) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are two psychological problems resulting from severe combat exposure. Many studies in this area address how couples can cope well with CSR and PTSD. Both of these conditions affect soldiers' psychological well-being in ways that have a negative effect on their marriages.
- Relationship Challenges: Military couples face unique relationship challenges. Distressed military couples are more vulnerable than are civilian couples to conflict (or jealousy) regarding relationships with other men and women. Other higher-risk areas include alcohol abuse, lack of emotional expression on the part of the military husband, the demands of military work, and long and frequent separations.
- Spousal Challenges: Military officer's wives play an important role in their career. Comments about a military wife can affect the spouse's opportunities for promotion. Spouses of military personnel also face unique challenges with employment, such as frequent moves and job changes, as well as cultural norms in foreign countries that forbid women from working.
- Spousal Abuse and Aggression: Rates of spousal abuse are higher among military personnel than they are among civilians. Research also suggests that abuse may be more common among enlisted personnel than it is among officers. But this may be because abuse is underreported in higher ranks. More than 90 percent of the victims are women, and child abuse frequently accompanies spousal abuse.
- Divorce Rates: In 2003, the Army had the highest *number* of divorces/separations among the branches of the military, followed by the Navy, Air Force, and last, the Marine Corps. But the Marine Corps had the highest *rate* of divorce/separation. Studies also explore divorce rates from the Civil War to today. According to current news reports, divorce today appears to be increasing for both officers and enlisted personnel, but especially for officers.
- Marriage Programs: The military offers several programs to strengthen marriages. A few are Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF), Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation (CREDO), Army Family Team Building (ARTB), and Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge (P.I.C.K.), known as How to Avoid Marrying a JERK(ette). Evaluation studies of some of these programs are mixed. While some do well, others are unproven. More research is needed. The Building Strong and Ready Families program not only improved couples' relationships, but also helped their work relations. P.I.C.K. helped personnel recognize the importance of family of origin on their relationships and ninety-eight percent said they would use the information they learned.
- Benefits of Premarital Counseling: Results are mixed on the effects of premarital counseling on marital satisfaction for military personnel and their spouses. If couples are satisfied with the premarital counseling, they appear to have higher marital satisfaction than do couples who do not have premarital counseling. But the positive effects of such



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counseling appear to diminish over time. However, those who have premarital counseling are more likely to seek out marriage and family therapy later and they benefit more from it.

Military Service and Marriage: A Detailed Review of Findings

In this review, we emphasize research published since the early 1970s, although we occasionally include some important earlier studies. Many of these studies are dated, and the military has changed in important ways since the Vietnam War. The findings of earlier studies cited here may not apply as well to current military life. An introductory paragraph summarizes the findings for each section. Although the findings presented in this review are based on published scientific studies, no single study can be taken as the final word on an issue. Several studies explore new areas, and findings from these studies may have not yet been confirmed by subsequent research. In these instances, the findings reflect what we are beginning to know rather than what we know for sure. Also, many readers will notice that only a few studies in this area directly explore similarities and differences among racial and ethnic groups in the military.

2. A Demographic Portrait

A. Current Portrait of Active-duty Military Service and Marriage

Summary: Nearly one-half of all active-duty military personnel are married. The higher the individual's rank, the more likely he or she is to be married. This pattern holds for enlisted personnel and officers, and for male and female personnel.

- The number of married military personnel was 693,714 in 2003; 49 percent of active-duty personnel were married (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).
- Rank was correlated with marital status for both enlisted and officer personnel; the higher the rank, the higher the percentage of married individuals. For enlisted personnel in 1995: E1 (26 percent married), E2 (21 percent), E3 (31 percent), E4 (55 percent), E5 (81 percent), E6 (89 percent), E7 (91 percent), E8 (93 percent), E9 (94 percent). For officers in 1995: O1 (40 percent married), O2 (56 percent), O3 (78 percent), O4 (89 percent), O5 (93 percent), O6 (95 percent), O7 (98 percent), O8 (96 percent), O9 (97 percent) (Schumm et al., 1996).
- The relationship between marital status and rank held for female military personnel, as well; the higher the rank, the higher the percentage of married individuals. There was a slight trend from 1982 to 1995 for a higher percentage of women to be married at each rank. For enlisted personnel in 1995: E1 (25 percent married), E2 (24 percent), E3 (35 percent), E4 (53 percent), E5 (66 percent), E6 (71 percent), E7 (71 percent), E8 (66 percent), E9 (47 percent). For officers in 1995: O1 (39 percent married), O2 (52 percent), O3 (60 percent), O4 (69 percent), O5 (70 percent), O6 (59 percent), O7 (33 percent) (Schumm et al., 1996).

B. Current Portrait of Reserve Military Service and Marriage

Summary: Over one-half of Selected Reserve members are married. The higher the individual's rank, the more likely he or she is to be married. This pattern holds for enlisted personnel as well as officers, and for male and female personnel.



- In 2002, the number of married Selected Reserve members who were 18 or older was about 51 percent (453,523 of 882,792). About 41 percent (364,612) were never married, and 7 percent (62,125) were divorced. (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).
- Rank was correlated with marital status for both enlisted and officer personnel. The higher the rank, the higher the percentage of married individuals. This held true in each Reserve Component (Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve). In the total Selected Reserve, for enlisted personnel: E1-E4 (27 percent), E5-E6 (63 percent), E7-E9 (79 percent). In the total Selected Reserve, for officer personnel: O1-O3 (64 percent), O4-O6 (81 percent), O7-O10 (94 percent). (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).
- From 1990 to 2003 the marriage rates in the total Selected Reserve declined slightly from 53 to 51 percent. The rates for each Reserve Component were as follows: Army National Guard (54 to 50 percent), Army Reserve (46 to 47 percent), Navy Reserve (55 to 58 percent), Marine Corps Reserve (29 to 32 percent), Air National Guard (65 to 59 percent), Air Force Reserve (66 to 62 percent), and Coast Guard Reserve (no change). (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).
- Of the 729,655 men in the Selected Reserve, about 54 percent were married. Of the 152,912 women in the Selected Reserve, about 38 percent were married (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).

C. Military Marriage Trends in the 20th Century

Summary: The proportion of married individuals in the military increased during most of the 20th century for both enlisted personnel and officers. But in the 1990s, this trend appeared to reverse itself somewhat.

- Since the early 1950s, the proportion of enlisted personnel who were married at any one time has climbed from approximately 30 percent of the armed forces to nearly 60 percent in the 1990s, while the proportion of married officers has fluctuated between 70 and 90 percent (Schumm et al., 1996).
- In 1952, the proportion of married soldiers in the Army was 30 percent for enlisted personnel and 79 percent for officers. By 1995, 63 percent of enlisted personnel and 78 percent of officers were married. The rise in the percentage of married personnel during the 1970s probably reflects the end of the Vietnam War and the need to recruit and retain more married personnel as part of the all-volunteer Army (Schumm et al., 1996).
- Between 1990 and 2003, the percentage of married individuals in the military decreased. In 2003, 69 percent of active-duty officers were married, compared with 74 percent who were married in 1990. In 2003, 49 percent of enlisted personnel were married, compared with 53 percent who were married in 1990 (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).

D. Military Marriage Trends for Vietnam and Vietnam-Era Veterans Compared With Non-Veterans

(Note: *Vietnam-Era Veterans* refers to soldiers who served in the military during the Vietnam War, but did not serve in Vietnam itself.)



Summary: This section summarizes a study by Laufer et al. (1985), which found that Vietnam veterans were much more likely to marry at every age than were their counterparts in other wars.

- Vietnam-era veterans (81 percent) were more likely than were non-veterans (70 percent) to have married, and Vietnam veterans were the most likely (84 percent) to marry.
- All three groups had an equal proportion of men entering marriage through age 21. By this age, 21 to 24 percent of the men in each group had entered their first marriage. Most men entered the service between the ages of 18 and 21.
- Beginning at age 22, Vietnam veterans consistently married more than did their non-veteran counterparts (ratio of 67:56 by age 25).
- Vietnam-era veterans entered marriages more frequently between the ages of 25 and 28. At age 24, one-half of both Vietnam-era veterans and non-veterans had been married. By age 28, 73 percent of Vietnam-era veterans had married, compared with 65 percent of non-veterans.
- Ten percent of both Vietnam and Vietnam-era veterans were married before they entered the military; about 30 percent were married during enlistment; and 30 percent were married within the first two years after their release from service. A larger proportion of veterans was supporting families within two years of their discharge (about 70 percent of the men in these groups who would ever marry).

E. Spouses of Military Personnel

Summary: Military spouses are generally young, especially spouses of enlisted personnel. More than nine in 10 military spouses are women.

- In 2003, one-half of spouses of military personnel were 30 years old or younger; 70 percent of the spouses were under the age of 36. Almost three-quarters of the more than 150,000 spouses of military personnel married to active-duty *officers* were 31 years old or older. In contrast, only 44 percent of the more than 500,000 spouses married to active-duty *enlisted* personnel were less than 31 years of age. (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).
- In 2003, approximately 93 percent of the spouses of active-duty military personnel were female (Army=93 percent; Navy=94 percent; Marine Corps=98 percent; Air Force=91 percent) (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).

F. Military versus Civilian Marriage

Summary: Servicemen and women tend to enlist and marry young. The Army provides important benefits to married soldiers. Race does not affect marriage rates in the military. The marriage prospects for black females in the military are improved compared to those for black civilian women. Black service members are also three to four times more likely than black civilians to marry.

- Servicemen and women tend to enlist and marry young. Just one percent of the civilian population under 20 is married, compared to nearly 14 percent of military members in the same age group (Fiore, 2005).



- The Army provides valuable benefits to its married personnel. The best housing goes to families, leaving single soldiers to share barracks. Wages are higher for active-duty soldiers with dependents, and higher still for those sent overseas, where the pay is tax-free. Hazardous-duty and family-separation supplements can amount to several hundred dollars a month (Fiore, 2005).
- Unlike in the civilian world, race did not affect marriage rates in the military. Blacks and whites who served in the military were, on the whole, significantly more likely to marry than their similar civilian counterparts, and little different from one another in the likelihood of marriage (Lundquist, 2004).
- Black men outnumber black women by a ratio of four to one in the enlisted military and all military men, by definition, are employed. Thus, the marriage prospects for black women in the military are improved compared to civilian black women (Lundquist, 2004).
- Black enlisted members showed a consistently higher likelihood of marrying than civilians. Each year, black service members were three to four times more likely than black civilians to marry (Lundquist, 2004).
- The following are possible reasons for why race does not affect marriage rates:
 - Non-segregated housing.
 - Equal access to social and economic resources.
 - The importance of rank overriding class and race (Lundquist, 2004).

3. Marriage and Military Retention, Career Orientation, and Job Performance

Summary: Compared with singles, married male military personnel are more likely to remain in the military. Also, married military personnel generally receive higher performance ratings than do their single counterparts.

- Married personnel had higher career motivation than did single soldiers (Ryan and Bevilacqua, 1964).
- Married soldiers were more likely to remain on active duty than were soldiers who were single (Raiha, 1986).
- Marriage increased retention rates for males, perhaps especially if they were happily married, but it might have decreased retention for females (Schumm, et al., 1996).
- When marriage occurred after a single person enlisted, marriage had a positive effect on retention intentions for males. The evidence was mixed for females, however. For males, becoming a parent after enlistment also had a positive effect on retention intentions (in addition to the marriage effect). Becoming a parent had a negative effect on retention intentions for officers if they had entered the military when they were single, but it had a positive effect for males if they had entered the service already married. Parenthood had a negative effect on retention intention for females (Rakoff & Doherty, 1989).
- Married soldiers expected to serve longer than did single soldiers (1.3 years longer, on average). Married soldiers also tended to have a higher commitment to the Army (Burnam et al., 1992).
- Happily married soldiers had better ratings from supervisors than did single soldiers (Orthner et al., 1992), and soldiers who were happily married also were promoted faster (Raiha, 1986). Similarly, married soldiers had fewer job-related problems over the past four decades (Burnam et al., 1992), and had fewer problems with alcohol and drugs (Raiha, 1986).



- Married soldiers reported higher job satisfaction than did their single counterparts (Raiha, 1986).

4. Dual-Career Military Marriages

A. Basic Demographic Information

Summary: This section draws on findings for the year 2003 from the Military Family Resource Center (2004). Dual-military marriages (i.e., both spouses are in the military) represent a small yet important percentage of military marriages. The proportion of female military personnel in dual-military marriages is higher than that of males.

- Nearly 7 percent of married active-duty military personnel were in dual-military marriages. Those in dual-military marriages represent 12 percent of the Air Force, 5 percent of the Army, 5 percent of the Navy, and 4 percent of the Marine Corps.
- More than one-quarter of female Marine Corps personnel (26 percent) and female Air Force members (29 percent) were married to another member of the military.
- Slightly more than one-half of married female personnel in the Marine Corps and Air Force were in dual-military marriages.

B. General Trends

Summary: Soldiers in dual-military marriages are typically younger and have a lower rank. Their marital quality is similar to that of soldiers with civilian spouses. Retention for women in dual-military marriages is lower than it is for men. Couples in which both spouses serve in the military have fewer children than do other couples and their military readiness is just as good, if not better, than that of other married soldiers.

- Fourteen percent of spouses in dual-military marriages (i.e., a soldier married to another soldier) previously were single parents on active duty. These marriages tended to involve soldiers of younger ages and lower ranking than did marriages to civilians (Bowen et al., 1992).
- Dual-military couples and soldiers with civilian wives did not differ significantly in marital satisfaction, marital communication, or risk of marital separation. Dual-military couples were slightly better off on those marital outcomes than were female soldiers with civilian husbands (Bowen et al, 1992).
- The retention rate of dual-military wives appeared to be slightly lower than that of male soldiers married to civilian spouses, as well as that of dual-military husbands (Devine et al., 1992).
- Military wives appeared to be less likely to reenlist than were military husbands. Specifically, 55 percent of men planned to stay in the military until retirement, compared with only 26 percent of women. Women were more likely to leave military service when they had completed seven to 10 years of military service. After 10 years, the retention rates were equal for military wives and husbands (Raiha, 1986).



- If forced to serve apart, 37 percent of dual-military married personnel said that they would be likely to leave the Navy (Farkas et al., 1982).
- Dual-military couples tended to have fewer children than did other married couples (Research Triangle Institute, 1990).
- While dual-military parents appeared to have a slightly higher tendency to miss no-notice unit alerts and deployments, their military readiness appeared to be as good or better than that of other military personnel (Devine et al., 1992).

C. Family Challenges

Summary: Dual-military marriages struggle with specific marital and family challenges. Couples in such marriage also have more job-related problems than do other couples.

- Considerable stress exists in Air Force dual-military marriages. Only one-half of the husbands felt comfortable with the level of companionship and sexual intimacy in their marriages. Likewise, one-half of dual-military couples in the Air Force had reservations about wives remaining on active duty (Orthner & Bowen, 1992).
- Female soldiers appeared to have relatively low parental satisfaction, lower than any group except single-parent male soldiers (Bowen et al., 1992; Devine et al., 1992). Wives also were less satisfied with marriage than husbands but more satisfied with time available for family (Schumm et al, 1998). These women also reported higher levels of work stress (Devine et al., 1992). There was no difference on parental satisfaction between the men and women. These couples did appear to be less satisfied with family time than with either their parental or marital relationships (Schumm et al, 1998).
- Dual-military couples expressed more job-related problems than did other couples. In terms of coping with work responsibilities, dual-military couples ranked evenly with other family types. These couples were late to work more often, were more likely to miss alerts, and took more time off for emergencies than did single soldiers. However, parenting — rather than marriage — appeared to be the primary reason for these differences. Dual-military couples also used mental health facilities more than did other couples (Burnam et al., 1992).
- Dual-military married soldiers were less likely than were other married soldiers to have made wills and assigned powers of attorney. Their arrangements for care of dependents during short- or long-term deployments were only slightly less satisfactory than the arrangements of other married couples (Pliske, 1988).

D. Positive Outcomes

Summary: Dual-military couples report being very satisfied with their military lives, have the most supportive spouses, and report more work predictability than do other spouses. These couples do quality work and typically score above average on job performance.

- Dual-military couples reported the highest fit between the Army and their family life of any family type and reported the least financial hardship of any type, especially among officers (Bowen et al., 1992). Dual-military couples were generally satisfied with their military life (Williams, 1978).



- Compared with spouses in other family arrangements, dual-military soldiers had the most supportive spouses in terms of supporting their partners' military work and careers (Bowen et al., 1992; Farkas et al., 1982).
- Female soldiers in dual-military marriages reported less work unpredictability than did other spouses (Devine et al., 1992).
- Supervisors strongly recommended retaining soldiers in dual-military marriages. Forty-three percent of dual-military married personnel received the highest performance ratings, compared with 33 percent of other married soldiers. This was the case despite the greater likelihood of being late for training events (Teplitzky et al., 1988). The Skill Test scores of dual-military married soldiers were among the highest (Pliske, 1988).
- Dual-military married soldiers with children were slightly more likely than other soldiers to have difficulty meeting short notice alerts or deployments, but often performed better than average on other measures of readiness (Devine et al., 1992).
- Enlisted individuals in dual-military marriages were promoted faster than were other married soldiers. Male soldiers in dual-military marriages were less likely to exceed weight standards and the quality and amount of their work were the best of any group (Raiha, 1986).

5. Women in the Military

A. Marriage and Women in the Military

Summary: Servicewomen are more likely than are servicemen never to have been married. Women in the Army marry at a younger age than do civilian women. Single servicewomen are more than twice as likely to marry as are single civilian women. Rank is related to marital status for women soldiers, for both enlisted personnel and officers.

- Women military personnel were more likely than were male military personnel never to have been married. Most soldiers in general married after enlistment (Morrison et al., 1989).
- Women in the Army married at an earlier age than did civilians. For female soldiers, about 50 percent married by age 22, compared with about 40 percent of civilian women. Past the age of 25, slightly fewer female soldiers had ever married than had their civilian counterparts (about 78 percent versus 84 percent at age 34) (Morrison et al., 1989).
- In the early 1980s, single servicewomen were two to three times more likely to marry than were single civilian women (Lundquist et al, 2005).
- The large majority of married military women were married to military men (86 percent) (Lundquist et al., 2005).
- Rank was related to marital status for female enlisted personnel and officers. From 1982 to 1995, the proportion of women married at each rank increased. In 1995, the following percentages of enlisted women were married: E1 (25 percent), E2 (24 percent), E3 (35 percent), E4 (53 percent), E5 (66 percent), E6 (71 percent), E7 (71 percent), E8 (66 percent), E9 (47 percent). The following percentages of officers in 1995 were married: O1 (39 percent), O2 (52 percent), O3 (60 percent), O4 (69 percent), O5 (70 percent), O6 (59 percent), O7 (33 percent) (Schumm et al., 1996).



- There are two possible reasons for the lower percentages of high-ranking women who were married. First, past the age of 25 — the age of most senior noncommissioned officers — female soldiers were less likely to be married than were their civilian counterparts. Second, formerly married Army women were less likely than were their male counterparts to remarry (Morrison et al., 1989).

B. Fertility Issues Among Women in the Military

Summary: Servicewomen show higher levels of fertility than do civilian women. Both single and married military women are more likely to give birth than are their single and married civilian counterparts. Since military women marry at younger ages than do civilian women, servicewomen are more likely to have a baby. Military women also are more likely to get abortions. These findings are from a study that compared the fertility and marriage rates of civilian and military women from 1979 to 1984 using the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (Lundquist et al., 2005).

- Women in the military had higher levels of fertility than did civilian women, especially those women new to the service.
- Military women who gave birth were more likely to leave the armed forces. Pregnancies appeared to be slightly more common in the military than were births because many servicewomen left the military following conception, especially if they were unmarried. Higher marital fertility was more strongly associated with women who stayed in the military.
- Throughout the five years of the study, military women's fertility levels were either higher than or equal to those of their civilian counterparts.
- Since military women married at younger ages than did their civilian counterparts, military women were more likely to have a child.
- In 1979, both single and married military women were more likely to give birth than were their single and married civilian counterparts. Never-married enlistees were almost three times as likely to give birth. Married enlistees were almost twice as likely to give birth.

6. Deployment

A. General Information

Summary: Most of the research about military service and marriage relates to deployment. Separation from spouse and family due to deployment is a common experience for military personnel. Five percent of enlisted personnel report leaving the military because of deployment, but nearly one-half say they are satisfied with the situation. Deployment is associated with personal stress and family struggles, especially for families with children.

- Examples of deployment were peacekeeping missions, humanitarian aid missions, and wartime missions (Rohall et al., 1999).
- Ninety percent of all Army personnel were separated from their families at least one night every six months; 58 percent were separated for two or more weeks; and about 37 percent for 30 days or more. At any given time, 8 percent of Army soldiers were separated from their spouses (Coolbaugh & Rosenthal, 1992).



- More than one-half (55 percent) of all soldiers in combat units spent a month or more away from home during a six-month period. Soldiers at earlier stages in their careers (junior enlisted and company grade officers) were somewhat more likely to have been separated recently from their families than were late-career soldiers (noncommissioned officers and field grade officers) (Wood et al., 1995).
- Five percent of enlisted personnel reported leaving the Army because of family separation. Less than one-half (45 percent) were satisfied with family separations (Wood et al., 1995).
- Most spouses predicted they would have no problem or only a slight problem coping if their military spouses were to go away on assignment, such as deployment. The percentage who predicted that they would have no problem or a slight problem coping if the soldier were deployed decreased as deployment length increased:
 - Less than 1 month (95 percent).
 - 1-2 months (87 percent).
 - 3-6 months (64 percent).
 - 7 to 12 months (43 percent).
 - More than a year (30 percent).
 - Overseas, undetermined length (24 percent) (Survey of Army Families, 2001).
- Military separations created stress even beyond the fact of departure because of factors such as the loss of emotional support, disconnected relationships, increased caretaking and household responsibilities, and the readjustment of roles upon reunion (Kelley, 1994). Examples of new roles and responsibilities that the spouses assumed at home included making mechanical repairs, dealing with the finances, cooking, caring for children alone, and housekeeping (Blount et al., 1992; Bey et al., 1974; Wood et al., 1995). The more disruptions to routine family life, the greater the personal distress (Medway, 1995).
- There were three stages in military deployment: *pre-deployment*, *survival*, and *reunion*. Families that adapted well had a higher likelihood of passing through these stages without severe dysfunction. These families established stability during the *survival* period. But that stability was disrupted during the *reunion* period as family roles were redefined again (Blount et al., 1992).
- During separation, family members faced many emotional and social problems, such as increased anxiety, depression, and family conflict. Spouses often experienced loneliness, depression, anxiety, anger, and physical illness (Blount et al., 1992; Bey et al., 1974; Wood et al., 1995). Deployed personnel often felt guilty for leaving their families and might have had similar reactions to separation as did their spouses (e.g., depression, anxiety, and loneliness) (Blount et al., 1992).
- The following were at risk for poorer adjustment throughout deployment: 1) families with poor pre-deployment attitudes, family conflicts, dysfunctional relationships, and poor communication; and 2) young, lower-pay grade, first-time-away-from-home, and foreign-born spouses (Blount et al., 1992).
- The association between disruption and distress was particularly strong in families with children. Spouses struggled more dealing with their children's separation reactions than just dealing with their own feelings (Medway, 1995).



B. Effects of Deployment on Marital Quality/Satisfaction

Summary: How a couple deals with deployment relates directly to the relationship quality before separation. A couple's initial level of commitment is linked to their marital stability during and after deployment.

- The strength of a couple's marriage during deployment depended primarily on how strong it was before deployment. During periods of separation, nearly all soldiers experienced some decrease in marital satisfaction. However, if soldiers felt good about their marriage prior to deployment, then couples were much more likely to stay together (Schumm et al., 2000). Also, after reunion, couples with marital problems before deployment more commonly distanced themselves later. A couple with high marital satisfaction before deployment had a much higher chance of adjusting well to the separation (Rosen et al., 1995).
- Marital satisfaction typically decreased right before and after a soldier was deployed, but remained constant during deployment. Eighteen months after the soldier returned home, marital satisfaction generally returned to levels similar to where it was before deployment. Marital quality, however, remained unchanged from mid-deployment to 18 months after deployment (Schumm et al., 2000).
- Couples who were married before deployment were more likely to stay together throughout the study than were couples who were engaged or only dating. Initial commitment levels were associated with greater relationship stability. Generally, marital instability was a result of prior conditions rather than any effect of deployment itself (Schumm et al., 2000).
- The following factors were associated with couples growing apart after reunion: spouses trusted each other less; the soldier felt excluded from the family; the soldier resented the spouse's new friends; the soldier needed time alone; and spouses disagreed about changes in authority over the children (Rosen et al., 1995).
- The following were associated with couples growing closer together after reunion: the soldier was pleased with the spouse's handling of finances and household and family affairs; and the soldier did more household chores (Rosen et al., 1995; Wood et al., 1995).
- One researcher described a *returning veteran's syndrome* as a veteran's depression and irritation when his wife placed demands on him. As a result, a wife commonly felt let down by her husband's withdrawal. She usually felt abandoned and demanded increased contact with her husband, who as a result, retreated further (Bey et al., 1974).

C. General Effects of Deployment on Wives at Home

Summary: Spouses at home experience many problems during deployment. There are common patterns of reactions during the *pre-deployment*, *survival*, and *reunion* periods. Some factors put spouses at higher risk for difficulties during these periods.

- When wives learned that their husbands were being deployed, they typically reacted in the following ways (Bey et al., 1974):
 - Feeling varying degrees of numbness, shock, and disbelief when first told.



- Feeling emotionally unprepared even though they had known deployment was inevitable.
- Wondering why deployment happened to their spouses.
- Feeling envy and irritation toward those who had not received orders and anger toward the Army for sending their husbands away.
- Wives faced a number of the following challenges during the *pre-deployment* period:
 - Distancing themselves emotionally from their husbands. Manic-like periods of hyperactivity and increased tension were accompanied by a feeling of superficial euphoria, despair, inertia, and hopelessness (Bey et al., 1974).
 - Increasing anger and arguments (Wood et al., 1995).
 - Turning to their parents, which could be either helpful or stressful (Bey et al., 1974).
- During the *survival* period, spouses at home often suffered from the following symptoms of depression: guilt, sleep disturbances, boredom, helplessness, fatigue, headaches, low self-esteem, poor concentration, slowed activity, loneliness, appetite changes, increased sexual tensions, crying, anxiety, weight changes, menstrual changes, thoughts of suicide, hopelessness, sadness, and fear for their spouses' safety (Bey et al., 1974; Blount et al., 1992; Kelley, 1994; Wood et al., 1995).
- During the *survival* period, the following were typical challenges faced by spouses at home (Bey et al., 1974):
 - Sadness about losing their spouses and apprehensive about their safety.
 - Guilt if they were happy about something without their spouses at home, such as finding a new home that they liked.
 - Feeling awkward and out of place with both single and married friends and feeling that they could not have male friends.
 - Unable to talk comfortably with anyone while their husbands were away.
 - If they engaged in extramarital affairs, feeling increased guilt and fear that something bad might happen to their husbands.
 - Confronting strongly held views that the war was futile and unnecessary, making it hard to justify their husbands' involvement in it.
 - Changing household routines, roles, and responsibilities and childrearing practices (Wood et al., 1995).
- Right before *reunion*, wives often struggled with the following (Bey et al., 1974; Wood et al., 1995):
 - Anticipated relief from the demands and loneliness that they had experienced.
 - Increased tension and concern over how their husbands had changed and how they would react to changes at home.
 - Purposeless activity, apprehension, and difficulty concentrating.
- Upon *reunion*, the couples often struggled with the following issues:
 - Trying and failing to pick up where they left off (Bey et al., 1974).
 - Husbands idealizing their return (Bey et al., 1974).
 - Husbands exhibiting depressive symptoms and irritation with any demands placed on them (Bey et al., 1974).
 - Wives feeling let down by their husband's withdrawal and depression (Bey et al., 1974).



- Husbands struggling to share their deployment experiences, which impaired communication and resulted in many wives feeling emotionally distant (Bey et al., 1974).
- Wives feeling irritated at relinquishing the independent roles that they had assumed during their husbands' absences (Bey et al., 1974; Blount et al., 1992; Beckman et al., 1979).
- Several months passing before they adjusted to living together again (Bey et al., 1974).
- Experiencing children's anger, resentment, and behavioral problems (Wood et al., 1995).
- In describing the *reunion* phase, many couples said that the first days were characterized by physical closeness. They initially did everything together. After the novelty wore off, their differences emerged. By the second month, a few wives felt that life with their husbands was boring. These wives lost a great deal of autonomy when their husbands returned. Most wives, however, had adjusted well within two months (Wood et al., 1995).
- During the *reunion* phase, most husbands were more considerate, thoughtful, and sensitive than normal, and expressed pride in their wives' abilities to manage so well in their absence (Wood et al., 1995).
- Deployment was significantly more difficult for the following wives:
 - Those married to younger, less educated, lower-ranked, and drafted men (Bey et al., 1974; MacIntosh, 1968; Pittman et al, 2004).
 - Those less securely attached to their husbands, especially for women who had no children (Medway, 1995).
 - Those in isolated families without significant social or emotional support (Blount et al., 1992).
 - Those anticipating separation from their families (Kelley et al., 1994).
 - Those who were not satisfied with support services. Those satisfied with the services coped better with deployment in the short term (Pittman et al, 2004).
 - Those married to junior enlisted men. For example, in 1987, 23 percent of wives of junior enlisted men expressed difficulty getting along without their spouses, compared with 11 percent of noncommissioned officers and 5 percent of commissioned officers. (The Army provides family support services and programs, but wives of junior enlisted men were the least likely to know about these opportunities) (Wood et al., 1995).

D. Chronic Depression Among Navy Wives at Home

Summary: Spouses of naval, nuclear submarine, and other frequently deployed military personnel face unique challenges, especially strong cycles of depression.

- *Submariners' wives syndrome* is the depression-like condition that occurs shortly before or after husbands in the Navy return from sea. Symptoms include severe dysphoria (i.e., feeling very unhappy), uncontrollable weeping, irritability, sleep disturbances, and loss of appetite. Therapists believe this condition is a guilty response to the unacceptable rage at being deserted and to the frustrated longings to be cared for adequately (Isay, 1968).



- Research has identified the following five stages of wives' depression that cycle with each deployment to sea (Beckman et al., 1979):
 - Wives starting to withdraw from their husbands weeks before their departure.
 - Wives often arguing with their husbands over little things that have no bearing on their leaving and losing patience with their children.
 - Wives stating that they feel an added burden of responsibility for the children and the home during their husbands' absence.
 - Wives losing their tempers easily and being angry at and resentful of the Navy.
 - Wives feeling depressed, and crying or sleeping much of the time.
- Wives whose husbands were deployed regularly faced unique challenges (Bermudes, 1973):
 - Repetitive periods of grief.
 - Pressure to be "good military wives," to sacrifice for the good of their husbands' careers.
 - Depression that was extremely responsive to the presence or absence of their husbands.
 - Fear that their husbands would not love them when their husbands returned, nor approve of how they managed things; fear that they may not love their husbands as much.
 - Making do often without any support or recognition from the Navy.
 - Feelings of loss comparable to the death of a spouse.

E. Deployment and Spousal Aggression

Summary: One study examines deployment in the military and its relationship to moderate and severe spousal aggression. The study finds that the percentage of active-duty Army men and women engaging in aggression increases with the length of deployment (McCarroll et al., 2000). (In this study, moderate aggression refers to throwing something, pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, and kicking, biting or hitting with a fist. Severe aggression refers to beating up, choking, threatening with a knife or gun, and using a knife or firing a gun.)

- The proportion of study respondents deployed for less than three months who were *moderately* aggressive was about 1 percent higher than for those who had not been deployed; for those deployed three to six months, about 2 percent higher; for those deployed six to 12 months, about 5 percent higher. The probability of *severe* aggression increased for each length of deployment: 15.8 percent (< three months), 26.4 percent (three to six-months), and 34.9 percent (six to 12 months).
- Rates of *severe* aggression toward a spouse increased with the length of deployment: 3.7 percent for non-deployed personnel, 4.1 percent for deployed personnel up to six months, and 5 percent for deployments from six to 12 months. This study included deployed and non-deployed, active-duty, married, U.S. Army personnel. (Ninety-five percent were men.)
- The rates of *moderate* husband-to-wife aggression for the Army and for civilians were similar (about 10 percent). But for severe aggression, the Army rate of husband-to-wife aggression was higher than was the civilian rate (2.5 percent,



compared with .7 percent). The rates of wife-to-husband aggression were higher. For *moderate* aggression, the Army rate was 13.5 percent, compared with the civilian rate of 10.8 percent. For *severe* aggression, the Army rate was 2.9 percent, compared with the civilian rate of .7 percent.

F. Coping With Deployment

Summary: Deployment affects couples differently. Some cope better than others do. But certain personal skills, organizational and social supports, and perceptions improve couples' abilities to cope successfully during the separation.

- The following groups of military personnel reported better family adjustment to deployment (Rohall et al., 1999):
 - High-ranking, enlisted soldiers, compared with junior enlisted soldiers.
 - Soldiers with more personal resources, as measured by rank.
 - Soldiers who perceived more support from their leaders.
 - Soldiers who were satisfied with the resources to communicate home.
- Sudden and longer deployments tended to cause more problems, as did wartime (as compared with peacetime) deployments. The first few deployments were disruptive to families, but after those most wives began to cope better (Decker, 1978). However, past some threshold of continuing deployments, family adjustment declined again (Decker, 1978; Hunter, 1982).
- However, in a 2001 survey of Army military spouses, 60-80 percent of spouses reported that they do not have a problem or have only a slight problem with the following aspects of Army life (Survey of Army Families, 2001):
 - Coping with day-to-day stresses and problems (81%).
 - "Getting along" when the soldier is away (76%).
 - Separations from their own family (63%).
 - Opportunities to achieve personal goals (57%).
- Research has identified various factors that enhance or diminish coping with deployment:
 - Wives' main supports during separation were (in order): children, families, jobs (keeping busy), and optimism (Wood et al., 1995).
 - Religion/church, support group activities, and having a social support network enhanced coping (Lavee et al., 1985; Rosen & Moghadam, 1990; Segal & Harris, 1993; Wood et al., 1995).
 - Marital stability, adequate financial resources, and experience in the Army enhanced coping (Wood et al., 1995).
 - Communicating frequently, such as writing several times a week, seemed to draw couples closer together (Frankel et al., 1993). (Note: for more detailed research on this point, see the next section.)
 - Greater family cohesion enhanced coping (Frankel et al., 1993).
 - Wives developing a new sense of independence and learning new skills to take care of all aspects of family life enhanced coping (Durand, 1992; Segal & Segal 1993; Wood et al., 1995).
 - Illness or health problems were associated with low adjustment (Wood et al., 1995).
- Support groups for spouses were most helpful for those in need. That is, when separation was highly disruptive for spouses, their ratings of support group



effectiveness were associated with lower personal distress (Medway, 1995). Smaller support groups were better able to provide personal support, allow expression of feelings, and deal with mental health issues (Blount et al, 1992).

- Wives who coped well with extended separations were more likely than were those who did not to support their husbands' Army careers, which directly affects soldier retention (Wood et al., 1995).

G. Communication and Deployment

Summary: One study examines extensively communication tools and deployment, specifically, what communication tools are used, who uses the various types, how using these tools affects soldiers, and what the overall benefits of using them is for spouses and the military (Bell et al., 1999).

- Deployed soldiers' stress was predicted by difficulties communicating with family.
- Nearly 74 percent of spouses reported having trouble communicating with their deployed spouses, with 46 percent reporting that this situation was stressful and 34 percent reporting that it was extremely stressful.
- Telephone communication helped couples develop and maintain a shared sense of the mission (which was a benefit to the armed services and retention). Such communication appeared to help boost morale, reduce isolation, resolve family problems before they got out of hand, and relieve boredom.
- Units that came home later had access to more means of communication, probably because of infrastructure expansion. Units deployed later relied more on e-mail.
- A significant minority of deployed soldiers reported negative experiences associated with telephone calls, such as being demoralized by hearing bad news over which they have no control. Other problems were the economic cost of the calls and the distractions from duties that they caused.
- Spouses did not need several ways to communicate but at least one reliable and available method from the start of deployment. Telephone and e-mail use had a favorable impact on reaching one's spouse quickly.

7. Prisoners of War (POWs)

A. Reintegrating POWs Into Their Families After Release

Summary: Prisoners of War and their families endure tremendous grief and loss during their extended separation. Research on this topic shows that certain factors help with the reintegration process and illuminates common challenges faced by these families.

- The process of family reintegration for returned POWs was unique. The prolonged separations, averaging five years, produced changes in family systems, wives' personalities and expectations for marriage, and family life styles. Thus, reintegrating POWs back into the family involved a reexamination and renegotiation of the marriage, family roles, and family structure (McCubbin et al., 1974).
- Separation difficulties that did not lead to divorce were resolved successfully by the fifth year after the POW's return home. Seventy percent of marriages of



POWs survived. Of those that did not survive, about one-half (52 percent) of couples separated in the first year following repatriation (Nice et al., 1981).

- When POWs were married for longer periods of time before their captivity, family reintegration was more easily achieved. Higher marital quality before captivity also was associated with better reintegration (McCubbin et al., 1974).

B. Vietnam POWs

Summary: Vietnam POWs faced significant challenges because of the unusually long separation from their families. (Seventy percent of Vietnam POWs were held in captivity from four to nine years [Ballard, 1973]). Family reintegration difficulties were especially prevalent among this group, and divorce rates for POWs were twice as high as non-POW veterans.

- Background predictors of divorce for Vietnam POWs after returning home from captivity were: number of children (more children was associated with less risk for divorce); length of captivity (shorter captivity was associated with less risk for divorce); and religious affiliation (Catholics had less risk for divorce) (Nice et al., 1981).
- The divorce rate for POWs was nearly twice that of non-POWs. After 1974, the divorce rate of both groups was consistent with the national average: 2-5 percent. (Cohan et al, 2005).
- Following the initial divorce, the odds of remarriage for POWs and non-POWs were similar (62 and 66 percent, respectively). The length of time from divorce to re-marriage was also similar (POWs 2.9 years; non-POWs, 1.8 years). However, the odds of a POW's re-marriage ending in divorce were twice as high as the non-POW's re-marriage ending in divorce (29 versus 13 percent) (Cohan et al, 2005).
- The following factors were associated with a decreased chance of divorce once they returned home:
 - Older age (7 percent decrease in risk per year of age).
 - Longer marriages (risk of divorce decreased by about 10 percent with each year married before capture).
 - Wives who were more satisfied with their marriages (on a seven point scale, the risk of divorce lowered by about 30 percent for each higher point).
 - Wives who were not stressed about finances.(Cohan et al, 2005).

8. Effects of Combat on Marriage

A. General Findings

Summary: Combat experience is related to subsequent marital problems and a 62 percent increase in the risk of divorce. Combat is associated with subsequent antisocial behavior, which influences marital problems directly. Pre-military antisocial behavior has both direct and indirect effects on marital problems.



- Veterans who saw combat duty increased their risk of separation or divorce by 62 percent and they were at a higher risk than were non-veterans following every war (Pavalko et al., 1990; Ruger et al., 2002).
- Following World War II and the Korean War, only 43 percent of men with traumatic combat memories were still married to their prewar spouses, compared with about 80 percent of men without these memories (Elder et al., 1988).
- High levels of combat experience were associated with subsequent marital problems (Elder et al., 1988; Gimbel et al., 1994).
- Adult antisocial behavior (being arrested, making money outside the law, ever having property repossessed, getting into a fight, and using a weapon in a fight) was the primary way combat subsequently affected marriage. That is, combat experience was associated with more antisocial behavior, and antisocial behavior directly influenced the degree of marital difficulties (Gimbel et al., 1994).
- The negative effects of combat on marriage were greater for men with a history of pre- military antisocial behavior (as noted above) (Gimbel et al., 1994).

B. Effects of Combat on Marriage for Vietnam Veterans

Summary: One study examines the effects of combat exposure in Vietnam on marriage (Laufer et al., 1985). Vietnam veterans with higher levels of combat exposure subsequently had higher rates of divorce, but this effect was twice as large for veterans who were exposed to combat after 1967. When the marriages of these veterans ended in divorce, they were at greater risk for a range of problems.

- Vietnam veterans with higher levels of combat exposure subsequently had higher rates of divorce. For Vietnam veterans with low combat exposure, only 11 percent divorced or separated, compared with 18 percent of those with moderate combat exposure, and 32 percent of those with high combat exposure. But Vietnam veterans with low combat exposure had a divorce rate (11 percent) lower than that of Vietnam-era veterans (those in the military but who did not serve in Vietnam itself, 27 percent), or non-veterans (24 percent). The divorce rate among Vietnam veterans with high combat exposure was slightly higher than were rates for Vietnam-era veterans and non-veterans.
- Vietnam veterans reported slightly higher levels of marital satisfaction than did their non- veteran counterparts.
- Combat exposure contributed significantly to higher divorce rates, but this effect was twice as large for veterans who were exposed to combat after 1967 (as noted above). The group with the highest divorce rate was made up of Vietnam veterans exposed to heavy combat after 1967 (49 percent divorced). Veterans who saw abusive violence (defined as experiencing the "dirty side of war," such as the torture of prisoners, the physical mistreatment of civilians, death or maiming by booby trap, mutilation of bodies, and the use of napalm, white phosphorus, or cluster bombs on villages) after 1967 also had a high divorce rate (49 percent). Since support for the war shifted dramatically after 1967, the authors interpreted these findings to mean that social context — the society's view of the war — was important in determining how well veterans dealt with their combat experiences once they returned home.



- Vietnam veterans who had marital difficulties resulting in divorce or separation had more hyperarousal symptoms (e.g., explosive outbursts, extreme vigilance, panic) and heavier alcohol consumption.

C. Symptoms of Combat Stress Reaction (CSR) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Summary: Combat stress reaction (CSR) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are two psychological problems resulting from severe combat exposure. Both affect soldiers' psychological well-being in ways that have a negative effect on their interpersonal relationships, such as marriage.

- Soldiers exposed to severe combat may develop combat stress reaction (CSR) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or both.
- Combat stress reaction (CSR) is a psychiatric breakdown on the battlefield marked by psychomotor retardation, psychological withdrawal, startle reactions, nausea, and vomiting. Soldiers with CSR often return home with a deep feeling of vulnerability, shame, and distrust, which has a profound impact on their interpersonal relationships. CSR is an acute reaction and can be treated quickly (Solomon et al., 1992a).
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) victims, in contrast, usually suffer for a long time and resist treatment. They feel detached; do not enjoy old hobbies; are edgy, withdrawn, and preoccupied with themselves and their memories; and suffer from depression and frequent anger problems. They also lack self-esteem and struggle with trusting others (Shehan, 1987; Solomon et al., 1992).
- As many as 17 percent of soldiers coming out of war struggle with some form of PTSD (Worland, 2005).

D. Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Combat Stress Reaction (CSR) on Spouses

Summary: The research on how PTSD and CSR (see a definition in the preceding section) affect couples explores several issues. The issues for PTSD include secondary traumatization; how PTSD inhibits communication between spouses; and challenges for the wives of victims. The issues for CSR include struggles with more conflict and less intimacy, expressiveness, and cohesion.

- One study examined the psychological problems experienced by the wives of veterans with PTSD (Solomon et al., 1992). These wives frequently experienced chronic distress, feeling overwhelmed, helpless, hopeless, depressed, anxious, lonely, hurt, rejected, and angry. They sometimes became obsessive and compulsive, paranoid, and hostile. They sometimes experienced increased illness and body aches. They felt socially isolated with a lack of good social support outside the family. They were often caught in a "compassion trap" in which they sacrificed their personal needs to support their detached husbands and other family members.
- Some wives of veterans struggling with PTSD experienced "secondary traumatization" in which they begin to experience some of the same problems that their troubled husbands experienced (Dekel et al., 2005).



- Several studies examined the personal and family challenges faced frequently by wives of husbands with PTSD, such as the following:
 - Taking full responsibility for household maintenance, parenting, and finances (Solomon et al., 1992).
 - Dealing with emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse. Fifty percent of women who attended therapy groups reported partner abuse (Solomon et al, 1992).
 - Maintaining a separate identity from their husbands who were very dependent on them. Many wives reported feeling that they have changed from companions to caregivers. Many wives reported that working outside the home provided them a needed outlet (Dekel et al., 2005).
 - Contending with husbands' rages, excessive drinking, and job losses. Many wives became bitter and hostile (Shehan, 1987).
- PTSD inhibited marital communication in several ways. It increased veterans' defensive communication and decreased their self-disclosure; it caused veterans to distance themselves from their wives with nonverbal communication, such as avoiding eye contact and hesitating to touch their wives (Shehan, 1987).
- CSR increased conflict and decreased marital cohesion, especially immediately after the military spouse returned home. It also decreased expressiveness and marital intimacy. Couples also reported less marital consensus, or the ability to agree on issues, following the serviceman's return home. However, changes in marital relations appear to be mostly temporary. Six years after the war, each of the above concerns returned to pre-war levels (Solomon et al, 1992).
- Combat veterans who had low levels of spousal support were four times more likely to struggle with symptoms of PTSD than were those with higher levels of this support. Those who made the most progress in working through the violent legacy of the Vietnam war have talked considerably about their experiences with supportive others, especially a spouse or intimate friend (Egendorf et al., 1981; Shehan, 1987). Veterans often reported they could not have made it through the past decade without their wives or girlfriends (Shehan, 1987).
- One scholar provided guidelines for wives to help their veteran husbands deal with PTSD (Shehan, 1987).
 - Wives should be trained to provide sympathetic and empathetic responses that will enable their husbands to share painful war-related thoughts and feelings.
 - Wives should encourage their husbands to attend support groups.
 - Wives should be as flexible as possible in their role expectations for their husbands.

9. Relationship Challenges in Military Marriages

Summary: Although distressed civilian and military couples have similar marital problems, the latter are more vulnerable to conflict regarding relationships with other men or women. Other higher-risk areas for military couples are alcohol abuse, lack of emotional expression on the part of the military husband, the demands of military work, and long and frequent separations.

- Distressed military couples have marital problems that are similar to the problems of distressed civilian couples (Griffen et al., 1998).



- Military couples had more conflict over wives' relationships with men and women outside of the marriage. Twenty-seven percent of civilian males reported that they wanted their wives to increase their number of relationships with other men and women. But only 3 percent of military husbands wanted this to happen; almost all requested that their wives have less outside contact with men and women (Griffen et al., 1998).
- Alcohol abuse, lack of emotional expression on the part of military husbands, and the demands of military work were potentially high-risk areas for military couples. Compared with civilian wives, wives of military personnel expressed more desire for their husbands to drink less, to work late less, and to express their emotions more openly. Both civilian and military wives wanted their husbands to help more with household chores and to spend more time with their children (Griffen et al., 1998).
- Wives of military personnel were at greater risk of physical aggression from their husbands. Twenty-three percent of military wives said they wanted less hitting in their marriages, compared with 3 percent of civilian females (Schumm et al., 2000).
- Military couples also had to deal with much longer separations than did most civilian couples. For example, 40 percent of men stationed at a submarine base (serving on a Polaris submarine) generally spent three months on sea patrol and three months on shore duty. Another 15 percent were on conventional submarines and often were away from home for seven to nine months of the year (Isay, 1968).

10. Challenges for Military Wives

Summary: Officers' wives are expected to volunteer and support their husbands. If they do not, their husbands' careers and opportunities for promotion may be affected. About one-half of spouses are working, but their job usually is secondary to their military spouse's job. Constant relocation can put demands on a non-military spouse's career.

- An officers' wife is expected to volunteer and lead Family Readiness Groups for her husband's units. If she doesn't, people speculate she is not willing to support her husband. Her support and enthusiasm reflect on her officer husband. Also, comments about an officer's wife can affect his career and opportunities for promotion (Harrell, 2002).
- In the late 1980s, the Department of Defense issued a statement that officer's spouses have the right to pursue their own interests and employment (Harrell, 2002).
- About one-half (48 percent) of spouses are working (31 percent work full time, 17 percent work part time) and about one-tenth (11 percent) are looking for work. During the last 12 months, two-thirds (67 percent) worked for pay, earning an average income of \$15,161 (Army Survey, 2001).
- The spouse has to adjust his or her employment to the military spouse's work. If he or she has a career, it is frequently interrupted by relocation (Egan, 2002).
- Employers are reluctant to hire qualified military spouses for challenging work, knowing that they must be replaced when the family relocates (Knox et al, 1995). Also, wives may be refused employment because of cultural norms against women working (Williams, 2000).

11. Spousal Abuse and Aggression in the Military



Summary: Abuse may be more common among enlisted personnel in the military. According to a study in 1982, more than 90 percent of the victims are women. Child abuse frequently accompanies spousal abuse. Thirteen percent of military wives reported moderate violence; 4 percent reported severe violence. Rates of spousal abuse may be higher among military personnel than they are among civilians. One study reports on a worldwide program in the Marine Corps to reduce tolerance for domestic abuse by integrating basic Marine Corps values into a prevention program.

- One study provided an in-depth look at spousal abuse in the military, although the study is somewhat dated and the situation could be different now (Wastleski et al., 1982). According to this study, spousal abuse was found more among enlisted ranks (especially E4-6) than among officers, but abuse may be underreported in higher ranks. Ninety-three percent of victims were female, and they typically had more education than did their abusive spouses. Nearly 40 percent of both abusers and victims reported that there was abuse in their parents' relationships. In 43 percent of cases, children witnessed the abuse. Child abuse also occurred in about one-third of the instances in which spousal abuse occurred. Forty-two percent of abusers consumed alcohol within three hours of the abusive incident. Physical abuse commonly included pushing, shoving, grabbing, slapping, and hitting with a clenched fist, although strangling or choking and hitting with an object also occurred. One-half of victims sought medical treatment. Ninety-seven percent of victims said that prior abuse had occurred.
- A more recent study used a nationally representative sample to compare rates of moderate and severe spousal abuse and aggression between military couples and civilian couples (controlling for factors such as age and race) (Heyman et al., 1999). This study found that rates of moderate and severe violence were higher in the military than in civilian life.
 - Thirteen percent of military wives reported moderate violence; 4 percent reported severe violence. Among civilian wives, 10 percent reported moderate violence; 2 percent reported severe violence.
 - Eleven percent of military husbands reported moderate violence; about 4 percent reported severe violence. Among civilian husbands, about 3 percent reported moderate violence; slightly less than 1 percent reported severe violence.
- One study reported on a worldwide program in the Marine Corps to reduce tolerance for domestic abuse. This study reported that the U.S. Marine Corps has the highest rate of spousal abuse in the military, possibly because marines are generally younger than those serving in other branches of the military and have less education. Marines also have the highest marriage rate. The Marine Corps, in conjunction with the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, developed a coordinated community response program to diminish abuse (Kanuha et al., 2002). Research has not evaluated the effectiveness of the program, however. The intervention stressed the following three points:
 - During boot camp, the Marine Corps teaches its recruits three core values: honor, courage, and commitment.
 - The program argued that confronting spousal abuse was connected to mission readiness. For example, if a Marine abused his wife, he was likely to disrespect others and pose a threat to his fellow Marines in a life-threatening situation.
 - The program taught that Marines who abused their spouses were more likely to be hostile toward women and, consequently, were at higher risk to disrespect female commanding officers.



12. Divorce Rates in the Military

A. Current Divorce Rates

Summary: In 2003, Army personnel had the highest number of divorces/separations followed by the Navy, Air Force, and last, Marine Corps. But the Marine Corps had the highest rate of divorces/separations (Military Family Resource Center, 2004).

Service Branch Number of Divorces/ Separations in 2003 Percent of Divorces/
Separations in the Military Divorce/Separation Rate in 2003 Army 69,152 37 percent 14
per 100 personnel Navy 51,044 27 percent 14 per 100 personnel Air Force 36,252 20
percent 10 per 100 personnel Marine Corps 29,626 16 percent 17 per 100 personnel
Total 186,074 100 percent

B. Pre-World War II Divorce Trends

Summary: Following the Civil War and World War I, divorce rates spiked for a short period.

- Each postwar period has been marked by a short-term increase in the divorce rate. After the Civil War, the rate increased from 1.2 per 1,000 marriages in 1860 to 1.8 in 1866. After World War I, it rose from 5.5 per 1,000 marriages in 1917 to 7.7 in 1920 (Jacobsen, 1959).

C. World War II and Divorce

Summary: The limited research on this topic contains some contradictions. However, it appears that those who served in the military during World War II lowered their risk of divorce or separation by 41 percent, compared with those who did not serve. The length of military service did not increase the likelihood of divorce, but the divorce rate was higher for those who entered the military at older ages.

- Those who married after they came home from the war had a much lower divorce rate than did those who did not serve in the military. Military service lowered the risk of divorce or separation by 41 percent (Ruger et al., 2002).
- In one study with a non-representative sample of California men who were followed over a long period of time, divorce rates increased from 1940 to 1946, then quickly declined in 1947 (Pavalko et al., 1990).
- In the same study, men who served in the military were more likely than were the non- veterans to have divorced by 1955. But marriages formed between 1942 and 1945 were actually less likely to end in divorce than were marriages formed before 1940 (Pavalko et al., 1990). Marriages that began during the war that remained intact for at least five years were no more likely to dissolve than were marriages of similar duration begun in the early 1930s (Jacobsen, 1959).
- In the same study, entering the military at a later age (30+) and serving overseas heightened the risk of divorce (perhaps by disrupting family ties and careers). Both factors were especially characteristic of servicemen during World War II. The typical American recruit in World War II entered the military at the age of 28,



about nine years older than the average age at entry for soldiers during the Vietnam War (Pavalko et al., 1990).

- In the same study, length of military service did not increase the chances of divorce (Pavalko et al., 1990).

D. Vietnam War and Divorce

Summary: One study examines marriage and divorce among Vietnam War veterans, Vietnam-era veterans (who served in the military during the war but not in Vietnam), and non-veterans (civilians) (Call et al., 1996). Marriage rates are relatively similar across these groups. Men who were married when they entered military service had somewhat higher divorce rates, compared with civilians, but those who married after military service had lower divorce rates.

- By 1978, slightly more Vietnam combat veterans (87 percent) had married than Vietnam-era veterans (83 percent) or non-veterans (79 percent).
- In this sample, 28 percent of non-veterans divorced. Of Vietnam and Vietnam-era veterans who were married before military service, 34 percent were divorced. Of those who married during military service, 28 percent were divorced. Marrying after military service reduced the odds of divorce considerably, however. Of those who married after military service, only 21 percent were divorced.

E. Recent Military Service and Divorce

Summary: The following findings come from news reports rather than scientific journals. But because of the timeliness of this information, we present it here. Divorce appears to be increasing for both officers and enlisted servicemen, but especially for officers.

- About 45 percent of 178,000 active-duty Marines are married. Slightly more than one-half the Army's total force of 494,300 is married (Rogers, 2005).
- Divorce rates are increasing in the military, especially among reservists and female service members (Dear Jane letters increasing in military, 2005).
- Between 2001 and 2004, divorces among active-duty Army officers and enlisted personnel nearly doubled, from 5,658 to 10,477, even though total troop strength remained stable (War swells U.S. Army divorce rate, 2005).
- The divorce trend for officers appears to be the most dramatic. In 2004, the divorce rate for Army officers was up 78 percent from 2003, when the Iraq War began, and up more than three-and-a-half times from 2000, just before the Afghanistan military operation (Zoroya, 2005). In 2004, the divorce rate for enlisted personnel was up 28 percent from 2003, and 53 percent from 2000.
- Almost two-thirds of the marriages of junior enlisted personnel end in divorce (Rogers, 2005).

13. Marriage Education Programs for Military Personnel and their Spouses

Summary: There are a number of programs designed for military couples to strengthen their relationships. These programs may be available at various military bases. Many military chaplains are trained to provide these kinds of programs. Evaluation studies of these programs are mixed



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and more research is needed. Some programs appear to be effective in helping individuals and couples while some remain unproven. Below are some available programs.

- Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) (Bloomstrom, 2002; Jensen, 2005).
- Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation (CREDO) (SmartMarriages, 2005).
- Partner Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge (P.I.C.K.) (Futris et al, 2005; Fiore, 2005; Donnelly, 2005).
- Building Strong and Ready Families (Worland, 2005; Bloomstrom, 2002).
- Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) (Survey of Army Families, 2001).
- Army Family Team Building (McFadyen et al, 2005).

A. Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF)

Summary: This marriage program, an adaptation of the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, not only helped improve couple relationships, but also helped improve work-based relationships. Couples felt more confident they would not divorce and enjoyed better communication. Men and women, different races, and high- and low-income couples are affected similarly.<BR

- After taking BSRF, 69 percent of respondents said the program improved their relationship with their spouse or significant other. Forty-nine percent said it improved their work-based relationships (Bloomstrom, 2002).
- After taking BSRF, individuals felt more confident they would not divorce. Couple communication also improved. Overall, they were more confident and satisfied with their relationships after taking the program (Stanley et al., 2005).
- One month later, the following modest improvements were still maintained: relationship satisfaction, ability to talk about Army issues, and use of healthy communication strategies, such as less withdrawal from difficult conversations (Stanley et al., 2005).
- In a second study that tested the same concerns, the results were similar. Couples had more confidence in and felt better about their relationships after taking BSRF. However, in this study, confidence grew more in women than in men. Otherwise, in both studies, the results did not differ for men or women or couples with two white spouse compared with couples where at least one spouse was not white. Also, the results appeared to be the same for lower- as well as higher-income couples (Stanley et al., 2005).

B. Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge (P.I.C.K.)

Summary: This premarital program helped military personnel recognize the importance of family-of-origin factors on their relationships. They also realized that love alone is not enough to make a marriage work. Ninety-eight percent said they would use the information they learned.

- The study of the P.I.C.K. program found that young, single, military personnel who participated in the program (Futris et al, 2005):
 - May have become more critical in evaluating their past relationships.



- Placed greater importance on each of the five areas that are critical to get to know about one's partner.
- Reported fewer constraining beliefs (e.g., that love alone is a valid enough reason to marry, that cohabitation can strengthen one's future marriage, that opposites compliment, and that choosing a mate should be easy and a matter of chance).
- Had a stronger understanding of the value of taking one's time during courtship to get to know their partner and assessing whether the relationship is ready for marriage.
- Were more likely to recognize the influence of family-of-origin issues on their relationships.
- Were more likely to recognize that changes in a relationship should be worked on before marriage.
- Felt more knowledgeable about developing a healthy relationship.
- 98 percent of the program participants said they planned to use the information they learned.

C. A Program Evaluation during Deployment

Summary: Whites were the only group whose satisfaction with services during deployment affected how strongly they felt a sense of unit culture (general atmosphere or culture of responsive concern). Spouses who were satisfied with services had more positive impressions of the unit and its leadership. People were less satisfied with services based on long-range interventions and wider missions.

- For whites, how satisfied they were with services during deployment affected how strongly they felt a sense of unit culture. This relationship was stronger among whites than any other group (Pittman et al, 2004).
- Families who coped better during separation and had more positive perceptions of unit culture had a higher quality of family life after the reunion (Pittman et al, 2004).
- Spouses who were satisfied with services had more positive impressions of the unit and its leadership. The more satisfied couples were with support services, the better the deployment-period coping. Satisfaction with the services helped coping in the short term, but did not have a sustained influence on the quality of family life beyond deployment (Pittman et al, 2004).
- Community-based services with wider missions and longer-range interventions were used by fewer people, and they were, on average, less satisfied with them (Pittman et al, 2004).

D. Family Readiness Groups (FRG)

Summary: About half of the spouses did not know how well Family Readiness Groups helped their families.

- Slightly over one-half (54 percent) of the spouses did not know how well the FRG had helped unit families and less than one-fifth (15 percent) said the FRG was good in helping unit families.
- Reasons given for not participating in the FRG included:



- Never having heard about the FRG at this location (33 percent).
- Lack of time (22 percent).
- A desire to keep personal and military life separate (22 percent) (Survey of Army Families, 2001).

E. Army Family Team Building (AFTB)

Summary: Spouses who were young with fewer years of experience in the Army were more likely to consider AFTB helpful. Those who took the course learned what rewards the military offers families. After the program, they were more satisfied with the military.

- Younger spouses with fewer years of experience with the Army were more likely to consider Army Family Team Building (AFTB) helpful (McFayden et al., 2005).
- Participants who took an AFTB course said they learned about what rewards the military offers families. They also were more satisfied with the military. These increases were maintained over time (McFayden et al., 2005).

14. Effects of Premarital Counseling on Marital Satisfaction and Seeking Marital Therapy

Summary: Results are mixed on the effects of premarital counseling on marital satisfaction for military personnel and their spouses. If couples are satisfied with the premarital counseling, they appear to have higher marital satisfaction, compared with those who do not have premarital counseling. But the positive effects appear to diminish over time. However, couples who have premarital counseling are more likely to seek out marriage and family therapy later and benefit more from it.

- Marital satisfaction generally improved for husbands and wives who had premarital counseling (if couples agreed that they both had experienced marital counseling) (Schumm et al., 1998). Yet, two years later, researchers found that having premarital counseling was not associated with subsequent marital satisfaction (Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000).
- Joint premarital counseling was more effective than was no counseling at all, even if individuals were relatively unsatisfied with the counseling. If individuals were very satisfied with their joint premarital counseling, then premarital counseling was much more effective than was no counseling. Premarital counseling was less effective when it involved only one spouse (or only one spouse remembered participating in premarital counseling) (Schumm et al., 1998).
- Even if the direct effects of premarital counseling were minimal, it produced other benefits. Couples who had premarital counseling were more likely to seek out marriage and family therapy services later, and seek it out in a more timely manner. Twenty-four percent of those who had premarital counseling used therapy, compared with 8 percent of those who did not. These results were even stronger for enlisted personnel (29 percent for those with premarital counseling versus 8 percent for those who did not) than for officers (14 percent versus 7 percent) (Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000).
- If couples reported that their marriages were in trouble, then those who had had premarital counseling were almost twice as likely to seek marriage and family therapy, compared with those who had not had premarital counseling (30 percent vs. 16 percent).



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This difference was even more dramatic for couples who actually had talked about getting a divorce. Forty-eight percent of couples who had premarital counseling sought out marriage and family therapy, compared with only 20 percent of couples who did not have premarital counseling (Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000).

- In addition, couples who had premarital counseling appeared to benefit more from therapy when they sought it out. Satisfaction with therapy (both for the soldiers and for their civilian spouses) was higher for those who had received premarital counseling (Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000).

15. Applying the Research: Questions for Marriage Educators

Comment: From this review, we think it is clear that individuals and couples in the military face significant challenges to sustaining healthy marriages. There is an important role for marriage educators to play in serving military personnel and their spouses, and marriage educators are beginning to take on this role. This review suggests, however, that the services provided and curricula developed will need to deal with many issues that are unique to this group. For instance, certainly issues related to the effects of combat stress and long separations require attention. Premarital education may be a useful tool in helping military couples prepare for what lies ahead. So marriage educators will need to keep abreast of research on military service and marriage. And they will need to be creative in developing and implementing curricula. Below is a brief list of questions to help marriage educators think more about serving this population more effectively.

- What are some of the reasons that marriage educators should be interested in helping military couples?
- The better prepared a spouse is for deployment, the easier the transition. What kinds of interventions could help couples prepare for and cope with a long-term separation?
- Social supports, psychotherapy, and educational programs are beneficial to the spouse who is left behind by deployment. What types of programs could marriage educators develop for military spouses during these times of separation?
- Many victims and perpetrators of spousal abuse in the military (and civilian life) have a history of abuse in their own families. How can your program teach these couples to overcome this destructive pattern?
- Couples who are separated for long periods of time with little contact are more likely to be involved in spousal abuse than are those with more frequent contact. What activities can your program promote to help couples stay connected during a long absence?
- When military couples' established family roles change after a reunion, the likelihood of divorce increases. After reunion from a deployment, how can your program help couples adjust to these role changes and grow together, not apart?
- Women in the military have higher fertility and marriage rates (and earlier marriages) than do civilian women. How can marriage educators create programs tailored to meet these special needs?
- Dual-military couples are an asset to the armed forces. What are their special needs? How can you design programs that address their concerns?
- Research suggests that the more support soldiers feel that they are receiving from their leaders, the better soldiers cope with deployment. How can your program involve leaders in supporting troops and their families during separation?
- The research suggests that the happier the spouse of a military member is, the higher the retention rate. Since most military spouses are female (nine in 10), what programs might best suit wives' needs, whether medical, emotional, or child- or career-oriented?



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- Since only one-half of the husbands in dual-military marriages feel comfortable with their level of companionship and sexual intimacy, what kind of marriage enhancement program could help these couples gain greater satisfaction?

16. Further Scholarly Summaries of Research on Military Service and Marriage

Over the years, scholars have summarized, synthesized, and critiqued the research on military service and marriage and family life. The references below are good sources for further information.

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