
“Either civilian or military psychologist or other experienced and educated professional--in our area, there is at least a one-month waiting period to get real, professional help and family members can’t seek help from military clinics at all.” - Navy spouse

Spouse Relationship and Well-Being

Previous research on marital satisfaction within military couples has drawn inconsistent results, but marital dissatisfaction appears to increase with the number and length of deployments.⁷⁹ Yet, despite increasing demands on military families in recent years, rates of marital dissolution appear to be similar to the general population. The DoD’s 2011 Demographic report shows that although “all service branches have seen an increase in divorces compared to 2000, the Army has had the greatest increase in percentage of divorces (+1.5%), followed by the Navy (+1.3%).”⁸⁰

Eighty-six percent of respondents in this year’s survey reported being “very happy” or “happy” in their relationship. The remaining 14% reported being either “unhappy” or “very unhappy.” Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported working out arguments with “little” or “no difficulty” whereas roughly one third (32%) of respondents reported having “some” or “great difficulty” in working out arguments. These numbers support the need for the DoD to continue offering classes and services aimed at improving communication and focusing on healthy relationship behaviors, regardless of where the family is in

Satisfaction With Spousal Relationship

- **86%** reported being very happy or happy
- **14%** reported being unhappy or very unhappy

Working Out Arguments

- **68%** report working out arguments with little or no difficulty
- **32%** report working out arguments with great or some difficulty

the deployment cycle. Currently, marriage retreats, classes, and services are primarily provided by the Chaplain Corps (e.g., Strong Bonds), but several additional family-focused programs have been initiated in recent years to help promote resilience among families. For example, Families Overcoming Stress (FOCUS) is an evidence-based program, administered and developed through University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and offered at multiple military installations for both Marine and Navy families. The program is designed to support and increase resilience and communication within military families.⁸¹

“If married, spouses and service person need couples counseling after the deployment. Spouse need to be aware of all the trauma the service person has been through to understand the changes of service person’s spirit and mind. You need to provide counseling for the children as well. More retreats for the families so they can work on issues as a family, learn to be supportive and understanding of service person’s actions / issues. Dealing with anger management issues from within the whole family. Looking for signs of substance abuse, how to deal with it and get help for everyone. War affects the whole family.” - Army spouse

Service Utilization for Marriage Counseling

There is some evidence that a strong marital relationship has an impact on a service member’s decision to seek treatment. Service members appear more likely to seek treatment for posttraumatic stress if they are satisfied within their marital relationship.⁸² Thus, there may be hidden benefits for encouraging couples to seek treatment and involving family members in service members’ treatment.

Seventy-four percent of respondents reported never having sought marital counseling services. Of those who had sought marital counseling, slightly more respondents reported using a civilian provider (15%) as compared to 11% who reported using a military provider. Satisfaction levels with both military and civilian providers were roughly equivalent, but cannot be directly compared due the variation in the number of respondents in both categories. Across both civilian and military providers, respondents’ satisfaction with services was high with almost 73% and 71% reporting being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their civilian or military provider (respectively), and 27% reported being either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” for both military and civilian providers.

“There were plenty of resources, but if there was ever a chance it could get back to the company, I wouldn’t consider it. I think that most military families have the same mindset. Personal issues are made public through gossip and word of mouth. No one wants their family to be in that position.” - Army spouse

“Counseling will not fix problems regarding the fact that my husband is never home even when he is not deployed.” - Army spouse

When respondents were asked about which military resources they used for marital counseling, Military OneSource was cited most often (24%), followed by service-specific Military Support Centers such as Fleet and Family Services or Army Community Services (21%) and chaplains (18%). Military hospitals and clinics were used by 11% of respondents, military treatment facilities (MTF) by 10%, and the Family Assistance Program (FAP) by 6%.

When respondents were asked to cite reasons for not seeking services for marital counseling, the majority (75%) stated that they “did not feel it was necessary.” Among both spouses and service members, “spouse refusal/resistance” and “concerns about confidentiality” were the additional top reasons for not seeking marital counseling services and were each cited by 7% of respondents. These reasons are consistent with other research as top barriers to mental health treatment within the military population.⁹²

Communication During Deployment

The quality of communication during deployment has been associated with improved family functioning.⁸³ The frequency of communication has also been examined and there is some indication that the frequency of communication may help improve the at-home spouse’s general well-being.⁸⁴ For example, a recent study conducted by the REACH program at the University of Arizona found that e-mail was the most frequently used form of communication used by active duty spouses and had the strongest association with general well-being of the at-home spouse.⁸⁵ The majority of spouses in this survey report being able to communicate frequently with their spouses during deployments, with 25% reporting that they communicated with their service members daily. Forty percent were in touch with their service members a couple of times a week, and 14% reported communication once a week. Two-percent reported communicating less than once per month.

Military Family Separations for Reasons Other Than Deployment

In addition to deployments, military families experience routine separations throughout the lifecycle of military careers (e.g., training, workups, detachments, unaccompanied tours of duty). In fact, in this survey, deployments accounted for roughly half of the time families spent apart. The other half was related to training, workups, detachments, and other support-oriented activities.

“As a military spouse getting a master’s degree in a specialized field one of my biggest concerns is the inability to stay in one location for more than three years. Even fields that are easily transferable, such as teachers, still have to start from the bottom up every move. I have seen so many spouses quit working due to sheer frustration with the job hunt every six months to three years. The reduced earning power is drastic. We have benefited from our military service, but we will not choose to pursue this lifestyle after his time is up.” - Navy spouse

Additionally, while the majority of respondents indicated that they had not chosen to live separately, or “geo-bach,” some respondents had chosen to live apart from their spouses for a variety of reasons. The top reason given for “geo-baching” was spouse employment, reported by 17% of respondents. Family support (11%), child (12%) or spouse education (10%), and the inability to sell a home (9%) were other top reasons for living separately. Respondents could offer an open-ended response to this question and provide their own reason for living separately. These responses fell into the following categories: (1) financial/cost of living (2) legal issues that include separation, impending divorce, or custody issues (3) medical care for a family member (4) short or unaccompanied duty tours (5) issues related to status as a domestic partner (e.g., partner could not move with service member due to unrecognized or non-marital status), and (6) issues with citizenship or visas.

Reported Service Branch Support for Military Lifestyle Issues

Respondents were asked to rate their service branch’s sensitivity to a variety of key family-related issues including: (1) maintaining contact during deployment (2) awareness of support services (3) preparing families for deployment (4) spouse career and (5) cutting orders around school schedules. The single highest response to this question was related to command sensitivity to spouse employment issues. Fifty-four percent reported that their