Military Families: Looking to the Future

20 MAY 2019
Disclosures

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this research are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Navy, Department of Defense, nor the U.S. Government.

Funding: No monetary compensation was received for this project.

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Learning Objectives

- Identify various definitions of a “military family”
- Describe a recent rapid review of the literature on military families
- Describe recent research on special needs families
- Discuss the value of military families to the operational mission
Background

- Military personnel are almost all part of a family system
- Out of 1.3 million U.S. active duty service members, 54.3% are married and 41.2% have at least one child\(^1\)
- Including National Guard and Reservists, there are 2.1 million U.S. service members who are associated with more than 2.7 million family members
- Our all-volunteer force is a “military of families,”\(^2\) and these families will only continue to grow over time

\(^1\) Source: U.S. Department of Defense
\(^2\) Source: U.S. Department of Defense
U.S. Family Changes Over Time

- **1940**: majority of households (90%) were husband-wife family households, typically with working husband, at-home wife, and 1 or more children; <10% were dual-earner families

- **1967**: interracial marriage became legal in all U.S. states

- **1974**: women no longer faced mandatory separation from military service for pregnancy

- **1989**: women constituted 45% of employed persons

- **2015**: gay marriage became legal in all U.S. states

- **2016**: married-couple family households were less common than in the past (73%), and in 50% of those families both spouses were working
Importance of Historical Context

- The military is a microcosm of our larger society
- Changes within the military reflect the shifts in U.S. public consciousness
- Military families of the past had a clear division of labor:
  - One partner working outside the home
  - One partner working inside the home
- Military families today are more fluid, reflecting U.S. cultural shifts over time
Military Challenges of Blending Work and Family

- Military duty is first, everything else is second
  - Military partner cannot always be transparent about work duties
  - Partner may feel a decrease in self-worth; the military career of one takes precedence over that of the other

- Overall lack of personal choice for military families
  - Military families cannot always plan in advance
  - Military families move locations frequently; they are told where they can live and work

- Day-to-day family functioning can be difficult
  - Child care is difficult to find for military personnel working unusual hours
  - Civilian spouses can have a harder time finding work due to frequent moves
  - Being married to a military member (as a civilian) can feel like a job in and of itself
Challenges for the Stability and Health of the Military Family

- Difficult to raise children as a military family\textsuperscript{13}
  - Children are often far from grandparents, aunts, uncles
  - Children must, therefore, depend more on their parents who sometimes leave
  - Children may show difficulty adjusting to the demands of deployment

- “After multiple deployments, intense training cycles, and an uncertain outlook on the future, divorce became common among both the officer and noncommissioned officer ranks in the units in which I served”\textsuperscript{14}

- “The military gives us tangible feedback on our performance; we get awards, promotions, recognition, and evaluation reports. Family life is much different. We don’t get ‘Father of the Year’ trophies, marriage evaluation reports, or challenge coins from our in-laws. As a result, sometimes climbing the professional pyramid seems more appealing than nurturing the homestead”\textsuperscript{14}
Literature Search

- **Sponsored by the TriService Nursing Research Program, Military Family Interest Group**

- **Inclusion Criteria**
  - US military sample
  - Topic, or sample, pertinent to military families
  - Original research studies

- **Exclusion Criteria**
  - Veteran samples
  - Secondary research studies (e.g. literature reviews)
  - Non-research articles (e.g. editorials, case reports)

- **The Winnowing**
  - From 2,502 abstracts
    - 1,212 had a US military sample
      - 888 pertained to military families
        - 595 were primary research
12 Main Topics

• **Deployment**
  - E.g. preparation, separation, reintegration

• **Adult Couple/Partner Relationships**
  - E.g. marital satisfaction, communication, intimate partner violence

• **Mental Health and Care**
  - E.g. depression, social support, other resilience factors

• **Maternal/Child & Newborn < 1 year**
  - E.g. infant mortality, breastfeeding

• **Healthcare Systems**
  - E.g. access, patient satisfaction, delivery of care

• **School**
  - E.g. bullying, school climate, school-family communication
12 Main Topics (cont.)

- **Parenting – “Positive & Negative Aspects”**
  - E.g. discipline, fostering & adoption, abuse/maltreatment
- **Health Behaviors – “Things Family Members Do”**
  - E.g. sexual behaviors, alcohol & drug use
- **Health Promotion – “What Medical Does to Keep Families Well”**
  - E.g. anticipatory guidance, screenings, well child visits
- **Special Health Care Needs**
  - E.g. Exceptional Family Member Program, case management
- **Pediatric Physical Health**
  - E.g. sick child, rates of ENT procedures
- **Adult Physical Health**
  - E.g. rates of disease, new surgical or medical techniques
## Research With U.S. Military Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Topic</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Care</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult (Partner) Relationships</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Behaviors</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Issues</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care System</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal/Child and Newborn</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Promotion</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Health Care Needs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

• Mental Health was the topic of most published research in the past 3.5 years
  – Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness manifest by the age of 14
  – 40% of U.S. adolescents meet criteria for a diagnosed mental disorder, and if unidentified and untreated, consequences may include:
    • School failure
    • Employment instability
    • Substance abuse
    • Increased risk of developing additional mental disorders.

• Adult Partner Relationships were the 2\textsuperscript{nd} topic of most published research in the past 3.5 years
Discussion (cont.)

• Deployment was the 3rd topic of most published research in the past 3.5 years

• Research suggests:
  – Deployments are not associated with negative consequences for families in the short-term
  – However, “the negative psychological sequelae of war may have downstream consequences for service members” and their families
  – Thus it is important to adopt a long view in research on this topic
Discussion:
Possible Gaps?

• **Parenting – “Positive & Negative Aspects”**
  – E.g. discipline, fostering & adoption, abuse/maltreatment
  – $N = 145$, but this topic covers many diverse areas

• **Maternal/Child & Newborn < 1 year**
  – E.g. infant mortality, breastfeeding
  – $N = 27$

• **Special Health Care Needs**
  – E.g. Exceptional Family Member Program, case management
  – $N = 4$
Future Directions

- The TSNRP Family Interest Group (FIG) has created a repository of research articles on military families for our military research scientist colleagues to share.
  - http://triservicenursing.org/database/family/
- In this way we can foster more partnerships and collaborations, and we can work on issues of common concern and interest, and fill in the gaps in research on military families.
Recent Studies of interest

• Case Management Services for Military Families (CaMos)

• Active Duty Personnel Parenting Children with Special Needs (PaCeS): An Epidemiological Study
CaMos Purpose

- To explore the perspectives of Military Health System case managers on factors which can help or hinder the care they provide to military families.

CaMos Methods

- 54 military case managers from CONUS military treatment facilities (MTFs) of varying service branches, sizes, and locations
- Semi-structured, qualitative telephone interviews
- Qualitative content analysis performed to identify five emergent themes
Pediatric Specialization: “It’s a whole different ballgame.”

- **Recommendations**
  - When possible, case managers should undergo specialized training in order to appropriately care for a specific population
  - MTFs with a pediatric population should have a dedicated pediatric case manager

Heavy Workload: “I’m just always treading water.”

- **Recommendations**
  - Staffing should be based on acuity of patients
  - Since many case managers are contract personnel, future staffing decisions should evaluate how contract lengths may impact workload, patient care, and the stability of military CM offices.
Appropriate Staff: “Teams work really well”

- **Recommendations**
  - Case Management departments could benefit from teams, with more role-specific staffing
    
    “...if I actually had an administrative specialist that was assigned to case management... that would be awesome... it seems stupid, but a lot of those things take up a lot of time.”
    
    (Participant 40)
  
  - Multidisciplinary teams would allow for specialized services to optimize patient care and mitigate heavy workloads.
Recommendations

- Need standardized policies on verbal hand-offs for all case-managed patients when there is a case manager on both ends
- Case managers need an updated DoD-wide contact list that is frequently updated

Patient Handoffs: “Each duty station handles transfers differently”

The Role of Case Management: “An open continuum”

Recommendations

- Provide clarity about the specific roles and responsibilities of case managers within MTFs
- Encourage command-wide education about CM services
  - Education needs to be continuous due to the dynamic nature of the military
PaCeS Background

• Up to 23% of children in the military healthcare system have special healthcare needs.\textsuperscript{17}
• Children with special needs require “health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally.”\textsuperscript{18}
• Raising children with special health care needs may be more difficult, costly, time-consuming, and stressful than raising children without special needs
PaCeS Purpose

• To examine the career trajectories of AD personnel who do and do not parent children with special health care needs
  – A special needs child is defined as a child with complex medical needs

• To compare selected professional outcomes (e.g., early attrition, re-enlistment) between groups:
  – Active duty parents caring for a child with Special Needs (SN)
  – Active duty parents caring for a child WithOut Special Needs (WOSN)
  – Active duty personnel with No Children (NC)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>232,336</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,262,097</td>
<td>84.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>194,897</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enlisted</td>
<td>1,299,536</td>
<td>87.0</td>
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<td>Branch of Service</td>
<td>Marines</td>
<td>241,027</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>362,505</td>
<td>24.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>276,020</td>
<td>18.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>614,523</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Status</td>
<td>Children with special needs (SN)</td>
<td>25,999</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children without special needs (WOSN)</td>
<td>223,592</td>
<td>15.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No children (NC)</td>
<td>1,244,842</td>
<td>83.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>937,525</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>325,010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td>547,289</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>858,793</td>
<td>57.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>86,607</td>
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</table>
### Demographics by Parental Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No Children (N, %)</th>
<th>WOSN (N, %)</th>
<th>SN (N, %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (N, %)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>200,478 (16.1)</td>
<td>28,772 (12.9)</td>
<td>3,086 (11.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,044,364 (83.9)</td>
<td>194,820 (87.1)</td>
<td>22,913 (88.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank (N, %)</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>145,231 (11.7)</td>
<td>32,975 (14.8)</td>
<td>3,618 (13.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enlisted</td>
<td>1,092,388 (87.8)</td>
<td>188,889 (84.5)</td>
<td>22,133 (85.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch of Service (N, %)</td>
<td>Marines</td>
<td>199,738 (16.0)</td>
<td>31,274 (14.0)</td>
<td>3,316 (12.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>304,505 (24.5)</td>
<td>49,322 (22.0)</td>
<td>5,690 (21.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>217,800 (17.5)</td>
<td>51,913 (23.2)</td>
<td>6,075 (23.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>522,621 (42.0)</td>
<td>91,066 (40.7)</td>
<td>10,917 (42.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (N, %)</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>193,578 (15.6)</td>
<td>33,559 (15.0)</td>
<td>4761 (18.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>779,302 (62.6)</td>
<td>142,100 (63.6)</td>
<td>16,123 (62.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>271,962 (21.8)</td>
<td>47,933 (21.4)</td>
<td>5,115 (19.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status (N, %)</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>837,094 (67.2)</td>
<td>63,173 (28.3)</td>
<td>7,194 (27.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>374,845 (30.1)</td>
<td>154,838 (69.3)</td>
<td>18,047 (69.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Div/Sep</td>
<td>32,172 (2.6)</td>
<td>5,494 (2.5)</td>
<td>746 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## First Discharge Type by Parental Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SN</th>
<th>WOSN</th>
<th>No Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd highest Discharge Code</strong></td>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>Transfer/Officer/Re-enlist</td>
<td>Admin - Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N, %)</td>
<td>1,820 (36.4)</td>
<td>11,617 (9.8)</td>
<td>82,874 (10.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd highest Discharge Code</strong></td>
<td>Transfer/Officer/Re-enlist</td>
<td>Admin - Other</td>
<td>Misconduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge Code</td>
<td>1,577 (14.9)</td>
<td>11,582 (9.7)</td>
<td>66,968 (8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4th highest Discharge Code</strong></td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>Retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge Code</td>
<td>994 (9.4)</td>
<td>11,462 (9.6)</td>
<td>48,627 (5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5th highest Discharge Code</strong></td>
<td>Admin - Other</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Transfer/Officer/Re-enlist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge Code</td>
<td>936 (8.9)</td>
<td>7,143 (6.0)</td>
<td>44,374 (5.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6th highest Discharge Code</strong></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Misconduct</td>
<td>Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge Code</td>
<td>340 (3.2)</td>
<td>6,307 (5.3)</td>
<td>35,221 (4.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Operational Readiness Now

Research suggests:

- The well-being of the service member’s family is a **key factor** in the operational readiness of the service member\(^\text{19}\).

- Service members’ **concerns about their families** while on deployment were the cause of more stress than combat-related concerns\(^\text{20}\).

- A **spouse’s readiness** for an upcoming deployment is impacted by communication, marital quality, and the service member’s mental health\(^\text{21}\).

- Spousal employment and child care issues are important **positive factors** in military retention\(^\text{22}\).
Operational Readiness in the Future

Research suggests:

- Children from military families were up to 8 to 10 times more likely to join the service than children of non-veterans\(^{23}\)
- Current military members are much less likely to encourage their children to join military service than in the past\(^ {24}\)
- The presence of a military family can positively impact service members’ likelihood of remaining in the military\(^ {25}\)
How Can We Support Military Families of the Future?

- Sailor 2025: Career Readiness
- Extended time at one location to build military and community support systems
- Programs to strengthen marriages and committed partnerships
- Programs to further develop parenting skills and techniques in high-stress situations
- High-quality and safe child care options for working parents
- Parental leave (vs. paternity or maternity leave)
- Increase in pay for military service members, particularly in enlisted ranks
- Official military recognition for families after service member deployments
References


11. Department of Defense. All about DoDEA Educational Partnership. Retrieved from https://www.dodea.edu/Partnership/about.cfm


References


