



The Military (and Veteran) Family

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Purpose of the Workshop

- Explore a definition for a military family.
- Discuss why military families are important.
- Identify risk factors associated with military families.
- Identify protective or resilient factors associated with military families.
- Identify military family focused interventions.

Biography: Carl A. Castro



- Currently a professor at the University of Southern California
- A retired Army colonel.
- Enlisted as infantryman in US Army at age 17
- Deployed to Bosnia (1998), Kosovo (2000, 2002), and Iraq (2003, 2006)
- Authored, co-authored over 200 publications
- Serves on several NATO, Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs advisory boards
- Areas of research interest include:
 - Impact of combat and operations on mental health and well-being of service members and Families
 - Development of validated mental health training instrument and procedures to facilitate effective adaptation and growth
 - Junior Leader development and their role in facilitating mental health and well-being in subordinates



Keep in Mind

- Let's keep in mind that in general, over 80% of U.S. military families are doing fine.
- Military families and children are resilient, and/or services provided to them by the military are working.
- There are, however, a significant number of families that are struggling and that do need help.

Definitions of a Military Family



- Most militaries around the world don't actually define a military family.
- Instead, they identify who are members of a family.
- Is it important to have a definition of a military family?



Importance of Definitions

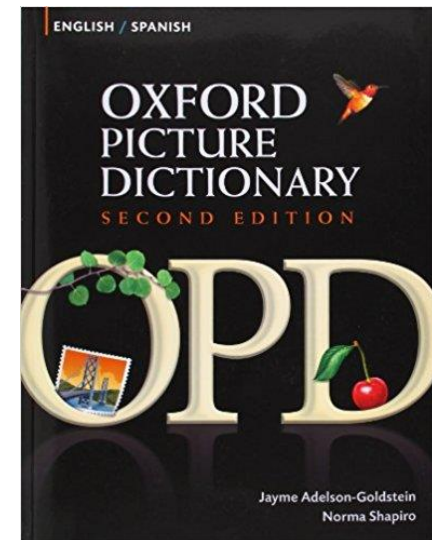
- Definitions are important because they identify who is eligible for services and benefits.
- Most services and benefits that families received are tied to the service member or veteran.



U.S. Military's Definition of a Military Family



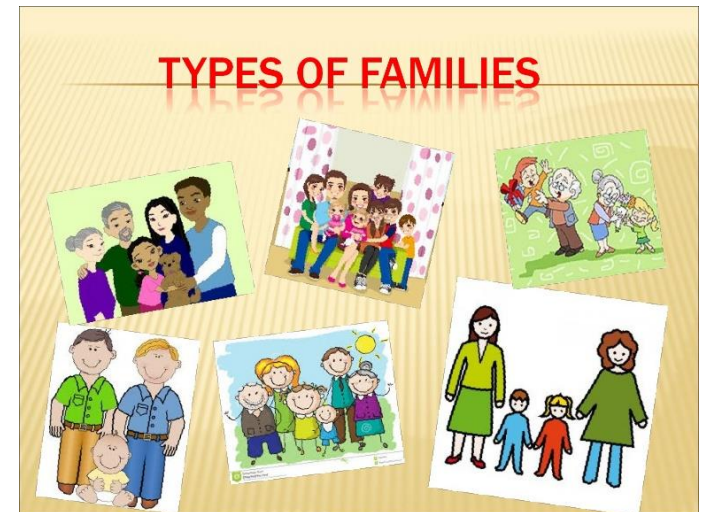
A **military Family** is “a unit that may consist of a husband, wife and children with either the husband and/or wife as the primary **military** enlisted.”





Types of Military Family

- Traditional families
- Blended families
- Single parents
- Dual military
- Same-sex marriages
- Couple may not be married
- LGBT couples
- Others?



The Life of a Military Spouse



- Unique issues/concerns of military families
 - Adjustment to a mobile lifestyle
 - Isolation from the civilian community
 - Isolation from extended family
 - Adjustment to rules/regulations of military life
 - Frequent family separations (training exercises, deployments, etc.)
- Serves as care givers for the seriously injured and wounded post military service
- All effect physical and mental health of military spouse

Effects of Deployment on Families



- Stress level increases with new roles/responsibilities brought on by deployment.
- Spouse must maintain everyday lives as well as contend with the constant uncertainty regarding the Soldier's safety while deployed.
- Spouse and children often exhibit greater symptoms of depression and anxiety during and shortly after separation.
- Health care utilization rates also increase during and shortly after separation.
- Health and well being of military families is important and effects Soldier performance and retention. Spouses who perceive the military lifestyle to be stressful show less overall psychological well-being and increased distress levels.
- Soldiers with dissatisfied spouses are more likely to leave the military than those with satisfied spouses, so the health and well-being of spouses affects retention and attrition rates.

Mental Health of Spouses



- 16.9% of spouses reported experiencing a moderate to severe emotional, alcohol, or family problem (16.9%) compared to 13.3% of Soldiers.
- 19.3% of spouses were currently interested in receiving help for the problem, while only 9.7% of Soldiers were interested in receiving help.
- 22% of spouses reported stress or other problems impacted negatively on the quality of their work or other activities.

Mental Health of Spouses Compared to Soldiers



Mental Health Outcomes	Spouses (n=940)	Married Soldiers (n=587)
Major Depression- DSM	114 (12.2%)	58 (10.0%)
Generalized Anxiety- DSM	162 (17.4%)	83 (14.3%)
Either Diagnosis - DSM	182 (19.5%)	93 (16.0%)
Major Depression DSM + Functional Impairment	63 (6.7)	35 (6.0%)
Generalized Anxiety DSM + Functional Impairment	67 (7.2%)	48 (8.3%)
Either Diagnosis with Functional Impairment	74 (7.9%)	49 (8.4%)

Health Care Utilization (past year)



Spouses who screened positive for mental health problems were much more likely to seek care than Soldiers (68.5% vs. 18.4%). In several other studies of Soldiers only 20-45% of those with mental health problems receive care.

Use of mental health services	Spouses, Screen Positive for Mental Health Problem (n=74)	Soldiers, Screen Positive for Mental Health Problem (n=49)
Military primary care	31 (43.7%)	2 (4.2%)
Civilian primary care	11 (15.1%)	1 (2.1%)
Specialty Mental Health Professional - Military	12 (16.4%)	4 (8.5%)
Specialty Mental Health Care - Civilian	23 (31.9%)	1 (2.1%)
Military Chaplain	16 (22.5%)	6 (12.5%)
Civilian Clergy	10 (13.9%)	1 (2.2%)
Any Provider	50 (68.5%)	9 (18.4%)

Barriers to Mental Health Care



Perceptions of barriers were similar to spouses and Soldiers, except that Soldiers reported higher concern about getting time off work and lower concern about cost.

Perception	Spouses who screened positive for mental health problem	Soldiers who screened positive for mental health problem
Difficulty getting time of work or childcare	43.1%	61.7%
Difficult to schedule an appointment	26.0%	34.1%
Mental health care costs too much	26.0%	14.9%
Don't know where to get the help	20.6%	17.0%

Stigma of Mental Health Care



Spouses reported much lower stigma to receiving mental health services compared with Soldiers

Perception	Spouses who screened positive for mental health problem	Soldiers who screened positive for mental health problem
It would be too embarrassing	20.5%	46.8%
I would be seen as weak	22.3%	77.1%
Harm to career	4.1%	56.2%

Positive Aspects of Military Service (from a Family Perspective)



- Full employment, good pay and benefits, retirement
- Education, new job skills
- Health and dental care
- Safe environment to raise a family
- Strong organizational values
- Travel, experience new cultures
- What else?



Building Resilient Families

- Soldier and Family Services (as an example)
 - Relocation Assistance
 - Deployment Services
 - Child and Youth Services
 - Family Advocacy
 - Money Management Services
 - Legal Assistance Services
- Health and Dental Care
- Military One Source
- Strong Bonds
- Other Programs such as FOCUS

Behavioral Health of Military Children



- In the U.S., early findings tended to show little or no differences between the behavior of children whose parent deployed versus those who didn't deploy.
- Subsequent studies have shown:
 - More likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors, such as joining gangs and taking weapons to school
 - More likely to be suicidal
- Do military children need additional support.



Summary and Conclusions

- Most active duty military families are doing well, although there are exceptions.
- The definition of a military family is lacking, and where one does exist it is limited.
- The status of families are linked to the service member.
- Research on military children is limited.
- There is no military family theory that is driving military family research, particularly in the area of interventions, thus interventions tend to be “best guesses versus evidence-based.”

Point of Contact



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