Marriage Education in the Army: Results of a Randomized Clinical Trial


This study examines the short-term effects of an adapted version of the Prevention and Relationship Education (PREP) program, designed to increase communication and problem-solving skills among couples. This version was adapted for military couples to include information on managing deployment and reintegration. Pre-test and post-test surveys at two Army installations (site 1 had younger, lower rank, and more frequently deployed military personnel) were used to test for differences in the changes reported in outcome variables (i.e., marital satisfaction, communication skills, confidence, positive bonding, forgiveness, dedication, satisfaction with sacrifices made, and negative communication) over time between intervention and control groups at each site.

Key Findings:
- At both sites, the intervention group experienced a greater increase in communication skills between the pre- and post-tests, compared to the control group.
- At site 1 only, while the control group reported decreased confidence and satisfaction with sacrifices between the pre- and post-tests, the intervention group experienced less decline or modest increases in these variables over time (after participation). This was also true for positive bonding, although the difference was more pronounced for men than women. No other variables differed between the intervention and control groups.
- Both site 1 and site 2 interventions group reported a high level of satisfaction with the PREP program and its leaders.

Implications for Programs:
- Programs designed to offer interventions for military couples may consider using PREP, or components of PREP, as several aspects of marital relationships showed improvement (or stability) after participation.
- Programs like PREP may consider targeting younger couples under stress related to deployment, given that findings were more robust for participants at site 1.

Implications for Policies:
- Continuing to allocate funding toward improving and maintaining strong marriages among military couples may be beneficial to both couples and the military, particularly given the recent operational tempo.
- Policies that support the implementation of evidence-based programs should consider the programs’ demonstrated effectiveness in different populations and the effectiveness of developed adaptations.

Avenues for Future Research:
- Future research focused on evaluating interventions involving the relationships of military couples should include all branches and components.
- Future intervention evaluation research should consider including multiple time points beyond pre- and post-test assessments.
- Additional studies can examine the demographic characteristics of couples that may influence the effectiveness of PREP and similar interventions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age).

Prepared by Military REACH Team. For additional information, please visit http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu
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Background Information

Methodology:
- Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze differences in the changes in outcome variables between the pre-test and post-test between intervention and control groups (couples volunteered to participate and were randomly assigned to intervention or control group).
- This study focused on Army couples (both active duty and Reserve).

Participants:
- Participants were 476 couples (249 couples at site 1; 184 couples at site 2) in which one member was an Army active duty or Reserve Service member.
- At site 1, most participants were White non-Hispanic (65%), 12% were Hispanic, and 10% were African American.
- At site 2, most participants were White non-Hispanic (71%), 12% were African American, and 11% were Hispanic.

Limitations:
- The samples at the two sites differed in important ways: site 1 was populated by younger, lower rank, and more frequently deployed soldiers and their families. Site 2 had soldiers who had been married longer and were not facing imminent deployment.
- Outcomes are based on self-report measures, and participants in the intervention group may have tried to respond in the “best” ways; multiple methodologies are preferable when possible.
- Participants volunteered to participate in the couple intervention; therefore, they may differ from nonparticipants in a way that was not measured but affected the outcome variables (e.g., couples that volunteered may be functioning better than those that did not volunteer).

Assessing Research that Works

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<th>Research Design and Sample</th>
<th>Quality Rating:</th>
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Overall Quality Rating: ★★★