



Military REACH's review of
**SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISOR TRAINING IMPROVES FAMILY
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG EMPLOYEE AND SPOUSE DYADS**

Brady, J. M., Hammer, L. B., Mohr, C. D., & Bodner, T. E. (2020). Supportive supervisor training improves family relationships among employee and spouse dyads. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 26(1), 31-48.
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BRIEF SUMMARY: Supportive supervisor training is designed to help supervisors meet work-related and nonwork-related needs of employees. This longitudinal **randomized controlled trial** evaluated the effectiveness of a supportive supervisor training specifically tailored to also equip supervisors with military cultural competence. Supervisors across 16 organizations were randomly assigned to the treatment group (i.e., received training), whereas supervisors across 19 organizations were randomly assigned to the control group (i.e., had yet to receive training). Using a sample of 250 Veteran employees and their partners, this study examined the extent to which supervisor training was associated with improvements in marital quality and positive parenting at baseline, three- and nine-month follow-ups. Further, this study examined Veteran employees' stress as a potential factor that may alter the associations between supervisor training, marital satisfaction, and positive parenting. Results suggest that a military-tailored supportive supervisor training program can improve Veteran family outcomes, particularly for those who are under higher stress.

KEY FINDINGS

- Supervisor training was *not* associated with marital quality or positive parenting at the three-month follow-up. However, supervisor training was associated with greater *marital quality* for Veteran employees and their partners at the nine-month follow-up (comparing employees and partners with supervisors in the treatment group to couples with supervisors in the control group).
- Improvements in marital quality at the nine-month follow-up were greater for Veteran employees who reported higher levels of stress before the intervention.
- For Veteran employees with high levels of stress before the intervention, the supervisor training was associated with more *positive parenting practices* for Veteran employees and their partners at the nine-month follow-up (comparing employees and partners with supervisors in the treatment group to couples with supervisors in the control group).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES

- Be mindful that it can take time for positive results from an intervention to materialize. Notice small, beneficial changes and intentionally recognize couple and family improvements.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- Seek out **training on military culture**, terminology, and experiences of military families to improve cultural competence and potentially increase the efficacy of interventions.
- When working with businesses and organizations, train supervisors in **supportive supervisor behaviors** as a prevention approach to family challenges.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP

- To enhance family relationships and unit cohesion, examine supportive supervisor trainings and identify relevant aspects that can be adapted for military leadership training.
- Coordinate with VA programs and organizations with a large Veteran workforce to improve workforce training and integrate military cultural competence in supportive supervisor trainings.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ 250 couples at baseline, 178 couples at the 3-month follow-up, 154 couples at the 9-month follow-up.
- ✓ Most couples were married (89%) and had children living at home (70%).
- ✓ On average, employees were 38.4 years old; most were White (82.8%), men (88.8%), and had at least an undergraduate degree or certificate (68%).
- ✓ Romantic partners were, on average, 36.5 years old; most were White (78.4%), women (88%), had at least an undergraduate degree or certificate (63.2%), and half were employed full time (49.8%).

METHODOLOGY

- Thirty-five organizations were recruited to take part in this longitudinal randomized control trial, 16 of which were randomly assigned to receive the training. Veteran employees were recruited primarily through emails. Partners were contacted through information acquired from eligible employees.
- Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed via email at baseline, three months, and nine months following the training. Veteran employees completed a measure on their personal stress at baseline. Employees and their romantic partners answered questions on *marital quality* (i.e., couple agreement, closeness, and overall relationship satisfaction) and *positive parenting practices* (i.e., warm parenting behaviors). Veteran employees and supervisors reported on supportive supervisor behaviors to assess perceptions of training effectiveness.
- Preliminary analyses indicated that Veteran employees did not differ from their spouses in their reports of marital quality and positive parenting. As such, these data were analyzed at the couple level. Comparisons were made between the couples based on whether the Veteran's supervisor was in the treatment group or control group.
- Random effects models were used to examine group differences in marital quality and positive parenting over time, as **moderated** by baseline employee stress. Analyses were conducted to account for **attrition**, baseline supportive supervisor behaviors, and military factors (e.g., deployment information).

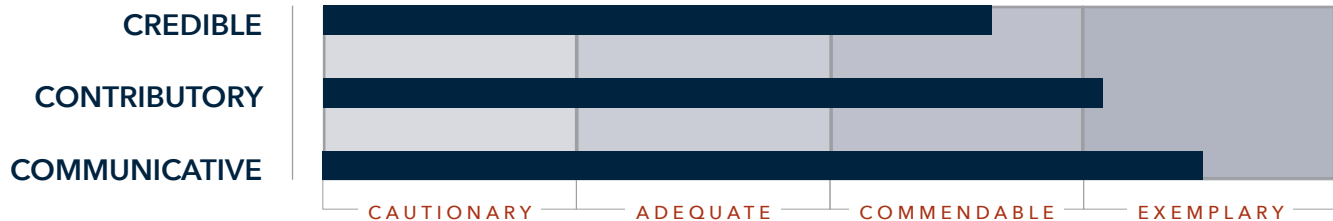
STRENGTHS

- This study leveraged a strong study design (i.e., a randomized control design accounting for baseline levels of supportive behaviors along with an attrition analysis), which bolsters confidence in the key findings.

LIMITATIONS

- It is not clear if there were demographic differences between the couples in the treatment and control conditions. As such, it is possible that demographic differences between the groups could contribute to the results.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY



DIMENSIONS OF ASSESSMENT

- CREDIBLE: Research that is rigorous, transparent, consistent, and generalizable. This dimension reflects an evaluation of the study's scientific methodology.
 - CONTRIBUTORY: Research that is original, applicable, and has the potential to enhance the well-being of military families. This dimension examines the impact of the study.
 - COMMUNICATIVE: Research that is coherent, understandable, and readable. This dimension assesses how effectively the authors convey the content of the study.
- * These dimensions are adapted from the work of Mårtensson et al. (2016). For more information on the REACH evaluation framework and rubric visit: MilitaryREACH.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Underlined terms in **red font** are linked to the definition in the Military REACH Dictionary. To explore more terms visit: <https://militaryreach.auburn.edu//DictionaryResult>. Terms in blue font are linked to additional resources.

PARTNERSHIP

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