



Military REACH's review of PATTERNS OF VULNERABILITIES AND RESOURCES IN U.S. MILITARY FAMILIES

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BRIEF SUMMARY: This study examined whether distinct profiles for Service members (SMs) and their civilian spouses could be identified based on areas of vulnerability (i.e., adverse childhood experiences, poor mental or physical health, stressful military or nonmilitary experiences, family stress) and whether couples experienced these vulnerabilities (i.e., risk of negative outcomes) to a similar degree. Data from 1,981 SMs and their spouses were used to determine their vulnerability profiles. Five distinct profiles emerged for SMs and six for spouses. For approximately half of the couples, both partners experienced low overall vulnerability. Supplementary analyses indicated that those who experienced a source of vulnerability in one area (e.g., childhood adversity) were more likely to report vulnerabilities in other areas (e.g., family stress).

KEY FINDINGS

Table 1. *Risk Profiles Based on Vulnerabilities for Service Members and Spouses*

Profile Name	SM Profile %	Spouse Profile %	Profile Description
Low Risk	50.3% SMs	56.2% of spouses	Low overall vulnerability across all domains
Low Current Risk - Moderate Childhood Adversity	13% of SMs	11.3% of spouses	More childhood adversity than individuals in Low Risk profile; low levels of other vulnerabilities
Low Current Risk - High Childhood Adversity	14.5% of SMs	4.5% of spouses	High levels of childhood adversity; average levels of other vulnerabilities
Moderate Risk	16.3% of SMs	N/A	Low levels of childhood adversity; moderately high levels of other vulnerabilities
Enduring Stressful Experiences	N/A	5.5% of spouses	Moderately high levels of adverse childhood experiences and stressful nonmilitary experiences; average levels of mental/physical health and family stress
High Family Stress	N/A	4.2% of spouses	High levels of family stress; average or low levels of other vulnerabilities
High Risk	5.8% of SMs	18.3% of spouses	High overall vulnerability

- In general, most military couples included two low current risk partners (61.1%); 11.2% had two moderate-to-high risk partners, and 27.7% had mixed-risk partners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES

- Consider [seeking resources](#) for yourself or a family member experiencing vulnerabilities. Doing so can prove beneficial for both the individual and family unit.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- When working with SMs or their spouses, helping them develop [coping skills](#) may address a wide range of potential sources of stress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP

- Coordinate current programs to provide holistic services to address multiple stressors for military families simultaneously, rather than implementing programs with an overly narrow focus.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ 1,981 couples where one partner was a Service member (SM) and the other was a civilian.
- ✓ SMs were mostly men (92.7%), White (74.8%), had an average of 9.7 years of military experience, and had an average of 3.1 years of overseas deployments.
- ✓ SMs were from the Navy (43.7%), Army (38.1%), Air Force (12.7%), and Marine Corps (5.6%).
- ✓ Civilian spouses were mostly women (92.7%) and White (73.4%).
- ✓ Couples had been married an average of seven years; most (75%) had at least one child at home.

METHODOLOGY

- Data were from the Deployment Life Study, a longitudinal survey of SMs (who were deployable and married) and their civilian spouses and children. The current study used the baseline data from a subsample of active-duty SMs (from the Navy, Army, Air Force, or Marine Corps who were not currently deployed) and their civilian spouses.
- SMs and their spouses reported demographic information and completed surveys about *adverse childhood experiences* (i.e., assessed experiences of abuse or neglect in childhood), *mental and physical health* (i.e., anxiety, depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms, health status), *nonmilitary circumstances* (i.e., economic strain, nonmilitary stress such as the death of a parent, and social support), *military experiences* (i.e., SMs' reported commitment to and satisfaction with military life), and *family dynamics* (i.e., marital satisfaction and quality of the family environment).
- Researchers identified risk profiles of vulnerabilities separately for SMs and civilian spouses using a **latent class analysis**. Second, risk classes were combined to represent four profiles for SMs and spouses (low risk; low current risk [but some adverse childhood risk]; moderate risk; high risk). **Chi-square tests** were then used to compare the similarity of each partner's risk profile within a couple.

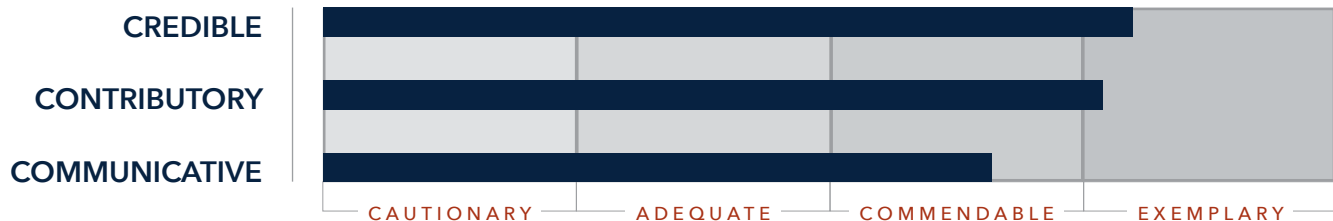
STRENGTHS

- This study investigated a variety of vulnerabilities that military couples may experience, which provided a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of vulnerabilities that individuals may face.

LIMITATIONS

- The latent class analysis examined vulnerability profiles separately for SM and civilian partner data. Because some vulnerabilities (e.g., family stress, social support) exist within couples, neglecting to capture such interdependence may not accurately reflect how such vulnerabilities operate.

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](https://militaryreach.org)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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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