

Home front - Exploring associations between household structure, coping strategies and behavioral health visits within the military

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Abstract: Research shows that family supports can mitigate military-service related Behavioral Health (BH) problems. As women play a growing role in military operations, it is important to assess if relationships between family ties and coping skills are the same for servicemen and servicewomen. This study uses data from the 2005 Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military (HRB) to explore interactions between the household structure and gender of a servicemember with BH symptoms, and their probability of a BH visit. This study focuses on three elements of household structure: servicemember's relationship status; servicemember's parental status; and servicemember's proximity to their family.

The study's three aims examine: 1. *The association between household structure and having a BH visit.* 2. *The association between marriage and the use of specific provider-types.* 3. *If servicemembers who use talking with informal supports as a coping mechanism are more likely turn to talking with formal supports when family and intimate relationships are under stress.*

Aim I results indicate that, controlling for comorbidities, there was an association between household variables and the modeled probabilities of either gender having a BH visit. Motherhood was associated with a higher modeled probability of servicewomen having a BH visit. Separation from a spouse was associated with a higher modeled probability of servicemen having a BH visit. Aim II results indicate that servicewomen were more likely than servicemen to use military provider-types for BH visits. Servicemen were more likely than servicewomen to use civilian provider-types, particularly if servicemen had a history of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Aim III results indicate that servicewomen with effective coping skills were likely to substitute BH visits (a type of formal help-seeking) for informal supports when their intimate and family relationships were under stress.

This study adds to the literature by examining if household structure is associated with the coping strategies and help-seeking behavior of active-duty servicemembers. This is one of the first studies to consider how gender differences and household structure interact to affect the coping and BH visits of servicemembers with combat/operational stress.

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