

Family Cohesion

I want to focus on ways to decrease the prevalence of emotional abuse and IPV by enhancing family cohesion.

Family Cohesion Construct

Each family consists of individuals with unique attributes, values, and beliefs. However, the family as a whole often fosters common traits that are indicative of their shared life experiences. Using the Circumplex model, first established by Olson, Sprenkle, and Lewis in 1979 and revised in 2011, family characteristics are measured on perpendicular continuums consisting of cohesion and flexibility. The theory behind the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems suggests that balanced levels of cohesion and flexibility significantly correlate with healthy or satisfied families and any form of unbalance in the aforementioned domains would often result in familial dissatisfaction. In order to describe deficits in familial functioning, four unbalanced scales are used including: disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity, and chaos. While cohesion and flexibility are both balanced scales within the model, the theory of Circumplex family functioning relies heavily on cohesion as a predictor of every other domain of family functioning. Olson and Gorall define family cohesion as “the emotional bonding that couple and family members have toward one another” and that it “focuses on how systems balance separateness versus togetherness (2003, p. 516). Cohesion relates to the unbalanced scales of enmeshed (extremely high cohesion) and disengagement (extremely low cohesion); showing that typically a balanced level of cohesion is ideal for family functioning. Likewise, flexibility typically corresponds with the unbalanced scales of rigid (extremely low flexibility) and chaotic (overly flexible). Per the model, maintaining familial stability amidst change is dependent upon a healthy level of flexibility, which is related to leadership, roles, and rules (Olson & Gorall, 2003). In short, too much or too little family cohesion or flexibility is to be avoided in favor of a balanced amount of each factor, which tends to correlate with families’ perceived satisfaction levels (Thomas & Olson, 1993, 1994).

- relational cohesion between spouses has been identified as a protective factor reducing adverse mental health risks in service members returning from deployment (Spera, 2009).

- In some military partnerships, the effects of deployment on the spousal relationship may also extend beyond the separation period of deployment and into the ensuing reunion or reintegration of the soldier (Knobloch et al., 2016).

- Deployment is likely to have an influence on each family member and by examining the family more broadly as a unit, potential risk and protective factors of family functioning can be identified concisely and effectively.

- The FACES IV is unique in its measurement of satisfaction as it incorporates overall family functioning including each of the members rather than a dyadic marital satisfaction model (Olson & Gorall, 2003).

- mediator role cohesion plays in predicting family satisfaction, including during pre/post deployment

- cohesion was a far stronger predictor of family satisfaction and overall functioning. Congruent with previous research on military families (Rossetto, 2013) and concurrent with a non-military

population, focusing on improving family cohesion and communication would have the greatest influence on relational satisfaction within a military population.

1. Armed Forces Strength Figures for January 31, 2020.pdf
https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp
4. Active Duty Military Personnel by Service by Rank/Grade January 2020.pdf
https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp
5. Table of Active Duty Females by Rank/Grade and Service January 2020.pdf
https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp
2. Prevalences of intimate partner violence in a representative U.S. Air Force sample
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21480693>
3. SHATTERED FAMILIES, SHATTERED SERVICE: TAKING MILITARY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OUT OF THE SHADOWS
<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS02/20190918/109935/HHRG-116-AS02-Wstate-JohnstonA-20190918.pdf>
6. Military Families and Intimate Partner Violence: Background and Issues for Congress
<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46097>
7. D'Inverno, A.S., Smith, S.G., and Zhang, X., et al., The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence: 2015 NSVS Research-inBrief, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), August 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs/nisvs-impactbrief-508.pdf>.