

# The Prevalence of Marital Transitions in Military Families

Francesca Adler-Baeder

Joe F. Pittman

Lisa Taylor

**ABSTRACT.** Department of Defense (DoD) surveys were examined to develop a demographic profile of military families affected by divorce and remarriage. It appears that a substantial portion of military personnel have experienced divorce, are in remarriages, and have nonresidential children, particularly given the young average age of military personnel. Compared to the U.S. population, service members marry, divorce, and remarry earlier. Divorced and remarried service members are slightly over-represented among the enlisted ranks, joint service couples, and lower education categories. Notably, the proportions of female service members who have experienced divorce and remarriage in different age

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Francesca Adler-Baeder, PhD, is an Assistant Professor, Joe F. Pittman, PhD, is a Professor, and Lisa Taylor is a Doctoral student, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University.

Address correspondence to: Dr. Francesca Adler-Baeder, 286 Spidle Hall, Department of Human Development and Human Studies, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849 (E-mail: [adlerfr@auburn.edu](mailto:adlerfr@auburn.edu)).

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categories are substantially greater than the proportions of male service members and women in the U.S. Implications are discussed. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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### INTRODUCTION

Although studies of military personnel routinely identify numbers of single parents and dual-military career couples, this is not true of other family types in the military (Military Family Resource Center, 2002). In particular, numbers of service members in remarriages and numbers of service members living in stepfamilies and binuclear families (i.e., where two households are connected by a common biological child) have not been described. Thus, it is not clear how many of the more than 700,000 married active duty personnel are divorced, remarried, and/or in stepfamilies, or how many of the approximately 1.2 million minor children of active duty service members are affected by divorce and remarriage (MFRC, 2002). It is also not clear whether experiences with divorce and remarriage in the military are more or less common than experiences in the general population. The goal of this study was to provide an enhanced demographic profile of military members, with an emphasis on the experience of divorce and remarriage and to provide an indication of the comparative prevalence of experiences with divorce and remarriage. The information provided lays the groundwork for the further study of military personnel and family members around issues of divorce, remarriage, and stepfamily functioning.

*Divorce and Remarriage in the Military.* Over one-half of DoD service members are married; yet, percentages of those whose marriage represents a remarriage are not typically reported and have not been consistently tracked (Adler-Baeder, 2001; Martin & McClure, 2000; MFRC, 2002). Several factors associated with increased risk of divorce are present in the military context leading to the expectation that experiences of divorce and remarriage may be at least equal to, if not higher than, prevalence rates among the broader population. Divorce risks include a lower average age at first marriage than is the case for the gen-

eral population (Martin & McClure, 2000). Another divorce risk is economic stress. Nearly 62% of service members are junior enlisted (E-1–E-5) and were making approximately \$1100 to \$1700 a month in base pay salary in 2000. In addition, the military has a higher proportion of African-Americans, with approximately 19.7% in the service compared to 12.9% in general population (Martin & McClure; MFRC, 2002; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Studies indicate that the divorce rate is higher among African-Americans compared to other ethnicities (Amato, 2000). Finally, job demands such as combat deployments, frequent relocations, separations from family, long hours, and stressful job tasks that involve physical and mental danger constitute another divorce risk. Based on these several risk factors for divorce, we expect that marital transitions (divorce, remarriage, stepfamily formation) are likely to occur frequently in the military.

To date, there has not been an emphasis on programs and services for divorced and/or remarried military personnel and family members. Programming for service members and families and training updates for mental health professionals on the subject of marital transitions and stepfamily formation are offered only sporadically or not at all. This is understandable if prevalence rates are unknown and if unique needs and functioning patterns as they relate to military life are undocumented. The first step toward providing rationale for uniform training and programming opportunities in these areas is to illustrate the extent to which the military population is made up of service members and family members experiencing divorce and step relationships.

Research questions for the current study were: (a) what are the proportions of divorced/single and remarried respondents, and the proportions of respondents with nonresidential children? (b) what are the demographic differences between first married, divorced, and remarried respondents? and (c) what are the proportional differences between the military and the U.S. population of divorced and remarried persons by age categories.

## **METHODS**

*Samples.* We utilized three datasets obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). These datasets had been prepared for use in the public domain by the Department of Defense and were based on service-wide surveys conducted in 1992 and 1999. Participants were service members and spouses in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force,

and in 1999 only, the Coast Guard. The first dataset, collected in 1992, had 18,370 matched couples (military members and paired spouses). The second dataset was a representative sample of service members with 30,384 cases; 10,813 single service members (approximately 36%) and 19,571 married service members (approximately 64%). The third dataset, also collected in 1999, focused on 18,043 military spouses. The members and spouses in these two 1999 datasets did not come from the same couples and therefore could not be matched to form couple-level units.

*Procedures.* Items in the datasets were not straightforward regarding marital and family type; codes had to be constructed. Marital history of the respondent could be determined through the intersection of responses to current marital status (i.e., married, single) and other items related to previous divorce experience. In the 1999 datasets we did not have information on the respondent's spouse's marital status; therefore, we focused on the marital status of the respondent. In the 1992 couple sample, information was provided on the marital history of both the respondent and their spouse, therefore we could determine the marital type (i.e., a first-married respondent could be in a remarriage because of their spouse's marital history). We note that in the 1992 couple sample, nearly half (42.8%) of active duty personnel identified with a remarried couple were in their own first marriage.

In addition, combinations of items permitted identification of residential and nonresidential children. To be clear, for the 1999 datasets, we could identify marital *status* of respondents (i.e., first married, divorced, or remarried) and the residential status of respondent's children, and in the 1992 dataset we could identify marital *type* (i.e., in a first marriage or in a remarriage) and the residential status of the children of either the respondent or their spouse.

A major goal of this study was to describe the characteristics of military members and spouses in terms of variation in their marital history. For these comparisons, first married and remarried members, in 1992, and spouses, in 1999, were compared in terms of a variety of demographic attributes. Military members in 1999 included not only first and remarried respondents, but divorced respondents as well, so for this sample the three groups were compared. For all of these comparisons, unweighted data were used.

Another primary goal of the current study was to compare the U.S. Armed Forces and the general U.S. population in terms of divorce and remarriage experience. In order to conduct these comparisons, the 1999 member data were weighted using the final post-stratification weights

supplied in the dataset. These weights were designed to yield a sample demographically representative of the population of the U.S. Armed Forces at the time of data collection in 1999. Although the weights did not account specifically for marital status, they did account for age, gender, race, education, service branch, location, living arrangement, years of service, and rank, among other factors. For this comparison, weighted data were compared to 1996 census data.

## **RESULTS**

*Demographic Characteristics of Married Respondents.* Table 1 provides demographic descriptions of the currently married military members (1992, 1999) and spouses (1999). Personal attributes of respondents, including age, gender, race, and education are shown. In addition, family related characteristics including marital status and divorce history, as well as presence of children and their residential status, are presented. Finally, military-linked factors are addressed, such as service branch and rank. Relevant to the current study, proportions of remarried respondents ranged from 16.3% in 1992 to 19% for spouses in 1999. In the 1992 couple sample, considering the marital status of both respondent and spouse, 29.2% of respondents were in a remarriage. Although not represented in the table, we noted that nearly 22% of single service members in 1999 had experienced divorce. We also could determine that of the more than 22,000 respondents who had ever married, 27.6% had experienced divorce.

Families with children ranged from 64.4% of the 1999 member sample to 77.8% of the 1992 couple sample. In 1999, approximately 10% of the respondents reported their own nonresidential children. In 1992, nearly one-third of the couples reported having nonresidential children (either their own or their spouse's).

*Comparison of Members in First Marriages and Remarriages.* Table 2 presents demographic information and comparisons for each of the 3 datasets by marital status for 1999 respondents and by marital type for 1992 couples. For these comparisons, the 8,419 never married service members from the 1999 member sample were excluded, but the 2,367 currently divorced members were included.

In Table 2, age was compared with a one-way ANOVA. All other comparisons were made with cross-tabulations and  $\chi^2$ . For these latter comparisons, Table 2 shows the  $\phi$  statistic for  $2 \times 2$  comparisons and the

TABLE 1. Demographic characteristics of currently married (1st or remarriage) military members (1992, 1999) and spouses (1999). (unweighted data)

	1992 members N = 18,398	1999 members N = 19,571	1999 spouses N = 18,043
Age in years	M = 35.03 SD = 7.18	M = 33.84 SD = 7.37	Mode = 21.6% 30-34 yrs*
Gender			
male	80.0%	85.8%	6.6%
female	20.0%	14.2%	93.4%
Respondents' education			
high school or less	12.8%	10.1%	24.0%
some college	30.0%	39.2%	20.9%
Bachelor's degree	20.2%	25.6%	23.3%
some grad or other degree	37.0%	25.2%	31.8%
Education of respondents' spouse			
high school or less	25.2%	19.4%	,
some college	35.6%	41.1%	,
Bachelor's degree	20.4%	27.1%	,
some grad or other degree	18.7%	12.4%	,
Race			
Caucasian	82.7%	75.7%	69.7%
African-American	7.9%	10.1%	9.9%
Hispanic	5.4%	6.8%	9.3%
other or unknown	4.0%	7.4%	11.0%
Respondents' marital status			
1st marriage	83.7%	81.2%	81.0%
remarriage	16.3%	18.8%	19.0%
Family type based on both partners' responses			
1st marriage			
remarriage	70.8%	, +	, +
	29.2%	, +	, +
Families with children			
with residential-only children	77.8%	64.4%	74.8%
with any non-residential children	46.1%	54.2%	64.0%
	29.7%	10.2%	9.5%
Members' branch of service			
Army	23.3%	37.4%	33.5%
Navy	26.9%	19.2%	22.3%
Marines	18.1%	13.4%	14.4%
Air Force	31.8%	24.8%	20.0%
Coast Guard	,	5.2%	9.7%
Members' pay grade			
enlisted	42.2%	46.1%	68.3%
officer	57.8%	53.9%	31.7%
Joint service couples	7.9	10.6%	9.2%
Member & spouse together at location	94.0%	91.2%	91.9%

\*Was not possible to calculate meaningful means or standard deviations for this data set as the original responses were collapsed into categories.  
+ Both partners' responses were available only for the 1992 couple data set.

Cramer's-V statistic for all others. Not surprisingly given the large sample sizes in these comparisons, every test shown in Table 2 was statistically significant, but from the  $\phi$  and V statistics it is clear that most comparisons represent small relations. Consistent across samples, remarried respondents were older and considerably more likely to have nonresidential children than first married respondents. Nearly half of currently divorced members had children; 29.7% had nonresidential

TABLE 2. Comparison of demographics for service members by marital status.

	1992 Military members in 1st marriages n = 13,024	1992 Military members in remarriages n = 5,374	% expected	$\Phi$ , V, or f	1999 Military members in 1st marriages n = 15,863	1999 Military members in remarriages n = 3,686	1999 Military members currently divorced n = 2,367	% expected	$\Phi$ , V, or f	1999 Spouses in 1st marriages n = 14,608	1999 Spouses in remarriages n = 3,435	% expected	$\Phi$ or V
Age†	M = 34.36 SD = 7.27	M = 36.71 SD = 6.63	f = 445.63	M = 33.10 SD = 7.33	M = 37.06 SD = 6.65	M = 35.15 SD = 6.95	f = 489.12	M = 39.9** SD = 1.52	M = 50.0** SD = 1.40	f = 1425.83			
Gender*													
male	85.0%	67.7%	79.9%	$\Phi = -.20$	87.2%	79.6%	63.3%	83.4%	$\Phi = -.20$	5.5%	11.0%	6.6%	$\Phi = -.09$
female	15.0%	32.3%	20.1%		12.8%	20.4%	36.7%	16.6%		84.5%	89.0%	93.4%	
Branch of service*													
Army	22.9%	24.1%	23.3%	V = .05	36.5%	41.2%	38.1%	37.4%	V = .04	32.7%	36.9%	33.5%	V = .04
Navy	26.3%	28.2%	26.9%		19.2%	19.4%	20.3%	19.4%		22.6%	21.2%	22.3%	
Marines	19.3%	14.8%	18.1%		13.6%	12.3%	9.9%	13.0%		14.8%	12.8%	14.4%	
Air Force	31.4%	32.9%	31.8%		25.5%	22.2%	26.5%	25.0%		20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	
Pay grade*													
enlisted	36.9%	48.3%	42.2%	V = -.08	44.5%	52.7%	48.0%	46.3%	V = .06	76.0%	82.6%	77.3%	V = -.06
officer	60.4%	51.7%	57.8%		55.5%	47.3%	52.0%	53.7%		24.0%	17.4%	22.7%	
Education*													
high school or less	12.8%	2.6%	12.8%	V = .09	10.3%	8.9%	9.3%	10.0%	V = .12	23.6%	25.8%	24.0%	V = .06
some college	27.7%	36.8%	30.0%		36.4%	51.0%	44.6%	38.8%		20.6%	22.4%	20.9%	
Bachelor's degree	22.0%	15.7%	20.2%		27.1%	19.5%	25.0%	25.6%		22.6%	26.0%	23.3%	
some grad/other degree	37.5%	35.8%	37.0%		26.2%	20.7%	21.2%	24.7%		33.3%	25.8%	31.8%	
Spouse education*													
high school or less	23.9%	28.5%	25.2%	V = .13									
some college	34.1%	39.5%	35.6%										
Bachelor's degree	23.6%	12.7%	20.4%										
some grad or other degree	18.4%	19.4%	18.7%										
Race*													
Caucasian	82.1%	84.0%	82.7%	V = .03	75.8%	75.2%	70.8%	75.2%	V = .06	69.3%	71.6%	69.7%	V = .02
African-American	8.0%	7.7%	7.9%		9.9%	11.3%	15.6%	10.7%		10.0%	9.6%	9.9%	
Hispanic	5.6%	4.8%	5.4%		7.0%	6.1%	6.8%	6.8%		8.6%	8.6%	9.3%	
other or unknown	4.2%	3.5%	4.0%		7.4%	7.4%	6.8%	7.3%		11.2%	10.2%	11.0%	
Joint service*	6.3%	11.7%	7.9%	$\Phi = .09$	9.9%	13.9%	n/a	10.6%	$\Phi = .05$	8.6%	11.6%	9.2%	$\Phi = .04$
Families with children*	77.2%	79.2%	77.8%	$\Phi = .02$	63.6%	67.7%	47.5%	62.5%	$\Phi = .11$	74.2%	78.4%	75.0%	$\Phi = -.04$
residential only*	50.8%	34.6%	46.0%	$\Phi = -.15$	57.2%	41.4%	17.8%	50.3%	$\Phi = .25$	65.9%	61.8%	65.1%	$\Phi = -.03$
ANY non-residential*	24.7%	41.9%	29.6%	$\Phi = -.17$	6.4%	26.4%	29.7%	12.2%	$\Phi = .29$	7.3%	15.5%	8.8%	$\Phi = .11$

\*Chi-square tests indicated group differences were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .  
†Independent sample T-tests indicated group differences were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .  
\*\*Age categories were used in the 1999 spouse sampler; '3' indicated 25-29; '5' indicated 35-39.

children. Comparing observed percentages with expected percentages across the rows of Table 2, it can be seen that females were considerably over-represented among remarried military members. We cautiously interpret the modest statistics that indicate that remarried respondents were slightly over-represented in enlisted pay grades and in joint service couples. Although the statistics suggest that some branches may have disproportionate numbers of remarried cases, the pattern was too inconsistent across the datasets to be trusted. Finally, in terms of race, currently divorced respondents were over-represented by almost 50% among African-Americans (expected percent = 10.7; observed percent = 15.6) in the 1999 member sample.

We note that comparisons based on race, education, and presence of children appeared larger in the 1999 member sample than in the others. These apparently stronger differences, however, are primarily attributable to the differences between divorced service members and married service members. The differences between first married and remarried respondents are not actually discrepant from the more modest differences found in the other two datasets where the focus is narrowed to comparisons between marital type (1992) or marital status (1999 spouses).

The datasets used for the current study are large; therefore, very small differences are often statistically significant. For the analyses presented in Table 2,  $\phi$  and  $V$  statistics can be interpreted like correlations and thus, offer an indication of the actual size of the relation or difference under consideration. Differences based on gender and presence of nonresidential children are noteworthy. For the other demographic comparisons, groups appear to be more similar than different across the datasets.

### *Marital Trends in the Military Compared to the General Population*

Table 3 provides a comparison between the weighted 1999 member sample and the U.S. Census report of marital history of the population in 1996 (U.S. Census Bureau). Age categories were constructed in the sample to match the age categories used in the census table. Readers should understand that census tables includes individuals as young as 15-years-old in its youngest category, while the military sample contains only respondents age 18 or older. Thus, the comparisons for this age range are not valid and are not included in Table 3. Also, census tables report on men and women through 70+ years of age. The military



TABLE 3. Comparison of 1999 active duty military personnel and respondents to the U.S. Census Bureau 1996 SIPP\*\* on marriage and divorce experience.

MALES % of military sample	20-24 yrs 32.0%		25-29 yrs 21.2%		30-34 yrs 15.9%		35-39 yrs 14.1%		40-49 yrs 9.1%	
	M+	C+	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C
Never married (%)	58.5	81.7	27.1	48.6	12.0	28.7	7.0	19.2	5.3	12.0
Ever married (%)*	41.5	18.3	72.9	51.4	88.0	71.3	93.0	80.8	94.7	88.0
Married once and still married (%)	37.6	16.2	59.0	41.8	64.0	53.0	64.5	54.0	62.1	51.6
Married twice and still married (%)	1.4	.4	7.5	2.0	14.4	7.1	17.0	11.1	18.8	16.0
Married three + and still married (%)	.1	--	.8	.2	1.9	.5	3.3	1.8	5.7	3.8
Ever divorced (%)	4.0	1.3	13.8	7.3	24.0	16.1	28.4	24.3	32.3	34.1
Currently divorced (%)	2.5	.9	5.5	5.2	7.6	8.1	8.2	10.8	7.9	13.9
FEMALES % of military sample	20-24 yrs 37.2%		25-29 yrs 20.7%		30-34 yrs 13.7%		35-39 yrs 11.6%		40-49 yrs 8.7%	
	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C
Never married (%)	52.4	67.0	37.7	35.3	23.9	18.7	16.5	14.1	18.9	8.6
Ever married (%)	47.6	33.0	62.3	64.7	76.1	81.3	83.5	85.9	81.1	91.4
Married once and still married (%)	8.2	27.4	38.8	48.9	43.2	57.0	35.5	53.3	27.2	49.2
Married twice and still married (%)	2.3	1.1	10.6	4.6	12.9	9.6	15.8	12.0	21.8	15.5
Married three + and still married (%)	.2	--	1.1	.3	2.9	1.1	6.6	2.3	10.0	3.4
Ever divorced (%)	9.6	3.2	23.5	12.2	32.9	20.8	47.6	27.8	54.0	37.0
Currently divorced (%)	7.1	2.1	11.6	7.1	17.1	9.5	25.2	12.8	22.1	17.2

+M columns indicate percentages in the military; C columns indicated percentages in the U.S. population.  
 \*Percent of "ever married" for the population is reported directly from the Census table and includes the percentage of "ever widowed" and rounding error; therefore, the number is not exactly equal to the sum of percentages of the 3 married categories and the currently divorced category.  
 \*\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1996 Panel, Wave 2 Topical Module.

sample drops off so dramatically as members' ages exceed 49, however, that we excluded these age categories from Table 3 as well.

For men, the most significant differences are in the 20-24 age category. Numbers of male service members who have married are more than double that of the population (41.5% vs. 18.3%). Service members who marry continue to outnumber the population proportionally in all subsequent age categories whether the focus is on first or subsequent marriages. Relatedly, proportions of never married service members are consistently lower than population proportions of never marrieds across the age categories. In addition, proportions of male service members who are still in first marriages are greater than proportions of men in the population who are still in first marriages in all age categories.

Although small in number, it is also notable that 4% of service members ages 20-24 have divorced and 1.4% have remarried. This is triple the proportion of divorced and remarried 20-24 year olds in the U.S. (1.3% and .4%, respectively). Proportions of male service members who have divorced and who are remarried in the 25-29 and the 30-34 age categories are also substantially greater than the population (i.e., 13.8% vs. 7.3% divorced; 7.5% vs. 2% remarried in the 25-29 age category, and 24% vs. 16.1% divorced; 14.4 vs. 7.1% remarried in the 30-34 age category). We also note that male service members are slightly less likely to remain single when divorced than the population in age categories over 30. In the 40-49 age category, the proportion of currently divorced military men is approximately half that of the population (7.9% vs. 13.9%).

For women service members, there is a reverse pattern compared to male service members regarding proportions of never marrieds. Although never married female service members are proportionally fewer than the population in the 20-24 (similar to comparisons between men in the service and men in the population), in all other age categories, proportions of female service members who have never married are greater than the population proportions. In the 40-49 age category, the proportion of never married female service members is over double the proportion of never married women in the population (18.9% vs. 8.6%). Relatedly, proportions of female service members who marry are slightly lower than population proportions across age categories over 25. We note substantial proportional differences for women over 25 who are still in first marriages. Contrary to comparisons for men, proportions of women in the military in first marriages are consistently lower than proportions of women in the population in first marriages.

The proportion of female service members ages 40-49 who are still in first marriages is roughly half that of the population (27.2% vs. 49.2%).

Experience with remarriage is greater for women in the military than women in the population across age groups. Especially noteworthy are the proportions of female service members in third marriages that are double and triple the proportions of women in the population in third marriages. Distinctly different from comparisons between ever divorced male service members and men in the population ages 40-49, the proportion of women in the military ages 40-49 who have divorced is much greater than the population proportion (54% vs. 37%). In addition, proportions of women in the military who remain divorced and single are greater than proportions of women in the population; for women 30-40, these proportions are nearly double that of population proportions.

### ***SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION***

It is clear that a substantial proportion of military members and their spouses have experienced divorce and remarriage. Based on the 1999 service member sample, 20% of all service members have experienced divorce (27.8% of all ever-married personnel have divorced) and, extrapolating from the 1992 couple sample, we estimate that at least one third of all married personnel are in a remarriage either through their own marital history or their spouse's, and approximately 30% have nonresidential children. These numbers appear to be substantial for a population where 64.8% are under the age of 30 and 78.8% are age 35 or younger (MFRC, 2002).

We also note that in the 1999 member sample, we are able to identify the proportion of single/divorced service members who have nonresidential children. In Table 2 it was shown that 29.7% of currently divorced members had non-residential children. We note that nearly all (92%) of these currently divorced service members have only non-residential children. This is especially noteworthy since demographic reports typically have not counted these individuals with only nonresidential children as single parents (MFRC, 2002).

In comparisons based on marital status and type, remarried service members are slightly over-represented among joint service couples and the enlisted ranks. Remarried personnel are more likely to have children than first married personnel. Because the mean age of remarried personnel is slightly greater than first marrieds, the increased likelihood of

having children can be explained. Consistent with population based patterns, divorce and remarriage rates are higher among lower SES individuals (i.e., enlisted ranks) compared to higher SES (Amato, 2000; Coleman et al., 2000). Finally, the slight over-representation of remarried personnel among joint service couples is similar to findings from studies of remarried couples in the general population, such that remarried couples are more likely to be dual-earner (Cherlin, 1992). Therefore, these differences are unsurprising. What is surprising is that these differences are smaller than might be expected from the literature.

It may be more important to consider how similar the comparison groups are on these demographic dimensions, rather than emphasize these small differences. It appears that personnel in remarriages are not readily distinguishable from personnel in first marriages based on rank, joint service status, ethnicity, and the presence of residential children. In other words, in the military context, it may be almost as easy to find remarried personnel among higher ranks, among non-joint-service couples, among couples without children, and across ethnicities.

Strong difference patterns, however, were found based on gender. It is clear that women in the military experience divorce at greater rates than men in the military. As previously noted, over one half of all career women in the military ages 40-49 have divorced compared to one-third of men in the same age category. Women in the military are also more likely than men to remain divorced. The proportion of currently divorced women is at least double the proportion of currently divorced men in the military in all age categories. Although women in the general population are more likely than men to remain divorced, the dramatic gender difference found among service members is not replicated in the general population. However, we suspect that women in the military as a group are not representative of the population of women, particularly in regards to their work experiences. When examining women's work experiences, it has been found that career women are at greater risk of divorce and are less likely to marry than non-career women (Cherlin, 1992).

In addition, service personnel who had experienced divorce were significantly more likely to have nonresidential children. Although having nonresidential children can occur from a variety of relationship history contexts, we would expect that a comparatively greater proportion of divorced/remarried personnel have children from a previous relationship living elsewhere.

From the military/civilian comparison table we can conclude that service members marry, divorce, and remarry earlier than individuals in

the general U.S. population. Proportions of divorced and remarried service members are greater, particularly among younger age groups and among women service members, than U.S. population proportions in similar age categories. In fact, among women service members, the numbers of currently divorced and the numbers of remarried persons are 2-3 times the proportion in the population in most age categories. Over half of women and over one-third of men in the military whose ages fall in the 40-49 category have divorced. One third of women and one quarter of men in this age category have remarried at least once. Although this cross-sectional snapshot of the military does not necessarily foretell the potential marital trajectories or divorce risk of others who will come along in the future, it does clearly indicate that a substantial portion of service members who make the military a career have experienced divorce and remarriage. For women, it appears to be the majority.

Interestingly, it appears that men in the military who divorce are more likely to remarry than similarly aged men in the U.S. who divorce. It is not clear what factors are related to this difference. One possibility may be that the supports provided for families in the military (e.g., housing, medical benefits) may provide additional incentives for members to remarry or may be attractive benefits for potential spouses.

Like men in the military, women in the military are more likely to divorce than their population counterparts, but unlike their male counterparts, they are less likely to remarry. In addition, although there is clear evidence of elevated rates of marital transition among military women; there is also a substantial number of military women who never marry. Up through the age of 49 (the latest age that we compared with population estimates), the number of military women who never marry was more than twice that of the general population. Interpretation of these findings benefits from the consideration that women in the military are probably best compared to other women in the population who have chosen demanding careers. As noted previously, comparing women in the military to the broad population of women, it is not surprising to find increased risk of divorce and decreased likelihood of marriage and remarriage.

We also note that in the 1999 spouse sample we were able to determine that 42.2% of remarried respondents had children from a previous relationship. This appears to be a lower rate than the population, where we find that approximately 65% of remarrying individuals bring children from a previous relationship (Cherlin, 1992). This phenomenon, however, could be explained by the earlier marriage rates and the earlier divorce rates. It is likely that these younger marriages are more likely to

end without children; therefore, there is an increased likelihood of remarrying without children.

*Directions for Future Research.* There is much to be learned about the experiences of military personnel and their family members who experience divorce and remarriage. Such research on families affected by divorce, remarriage, and stepfamily living in the military context will broaden the extant literature on military family functioning and factors related to troop preparedness and retention decisions. In addition, studies of family processes among divorce/remarried personnel in the military can inform the broader literature on work-family linkages particularly for families and couples involved with similarly demanding work environments. There remains a dearth of information on the impact of marital and family type on the work-family interface. There are a multitude of directions to explore. We offer a few suggestions.

Future research can move beyond the individual level of marital categories and identify marital types and family types by assessing the marital history of both partners, relationships between parents and children, and residence of children. In this way, the potential for differential patterns of work-family linkages can be examined with family level variables (e.g., child-free remarriages, remarried stepfamilies, first married stepfamilies, remarriages, and singles with nonresidential children).

The distinct gender difference between men and women in the military deserves further exploration. What factors account for the extraordinarily high proportions of women in the military who are divorced and remarried? Are conditions that put individuals at risk for divorce different for men and for women in the military? Also of interest is an examination of the factors related to the reduced likelihood that divorced women in the military will remarry compared to men in the military.

In post-divorce families, children often belong to two households and benefit from a positive "parenting coalition" between the biological parents and stepparent(s) (Bray & Kelly, 1998). The current study demonstrated that a substantial portion of service members, both single and married, have non-residential children. There is no information on the impact of military lifestyle demands on these binuclear families and co-parenting relationships. We would expect from the extant literature (e.g., Koel, Clark, Straus, Whitney, & Hauser, 1994), that frequent relocations result in stressful and expensive relitigation over custody arrangements, as some joint custody arrangements impose geographic restrictions on parents. Such geographic restrictions may be in the best interest of the child; however, often they are in conflict with mandated

duty assignment and can separate a nonresident parent from his/her children. Additionally, in instances of deployment, a stepparent may be left with the often difficult situation of dealing with a former spouse concerning child-related issues. Exploring further how the demands of the military lifestyle influence this non-residential parent-child relationship and these co-parenting relationships deserves further attention.

### CONCLUSION

This study and the research agenda it initiates can inform the exchange of knowledge between military and civilian communities on issues related to the health, well-being, and family-functioning of those who experience marital transitions. Indications are that this is a significant segment of the military population and developing better knowledge about these families' experiences is vital to family well-being and to the military mission. More detailed demographic profiles and information regarding demographic differences can be used to better inform military leadership, military human service personnel, and military family program specialists about the individuals and families with whom they work. Further, civilian services and programs that target military populations will have additional information on which to better prepare to meet the needs of service members and family members in their communities, since approximately 55% of military families live in the civilian community (MFRC, 1999). In addition, research in this area among the military will serve to inform the broader literature on work-family linkages for divorced/remarried individuals and stepfamilies in similar work environments.

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