

# Informing peer support programs for active duty military spouses of U.S. Army soldiers (2024)

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## RESEARCH BRIEF

*With 50% of active duty service members married, military spouses are pivotal to military readiness, underscoring the urgent need for targeted peer support programs.*

### WHY IS THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

- Military spouses encounter **unique challenges** that severely impact education and career progression due to frequent relocations and employment gaps.
- The inherent stressors of military life—including parenting, deployment, and disruptions in health care—demand **specialized support services**.
- **Structured peer support programs** offer a comprehensive framework to build community, foster social support, enhance resilience, and promote mental well-being—reducing the isolation and stigma that often accompany military life.
- Adapting an **existing, evidence-based support model** presents an opportunity to mitigate long-term adverse impacts on military family stability.

### WHO WAS INVOLVED AND HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

- **Participants included 35 active duty U.S. Army spouses** (97% female) representing diverse racial and geographic backgrounds.
- **Five focus groups** were conducted via Zoom over a **four-month period** (January–May 2023), with each session lasting between one to two hours.
- **Sessions were led** by a doctoral-level **facilitator** alongside a co-facilitator from an academic center specializing in military and Veteran family wellness.
- Recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a **general inductive approach with open coding** to identify key themes and sub-themes.

### WHAT DID WE FIND?

- Military spouses face challenges in **balancing career aspirations with the demands of military life**, especially during deployment and relocation periods.
- There are **significant challenges** in career and education, child care and parenting, deployment, and accessibility of medical and behavioral health care.
- Despite these difficulties, they value the **military community's support** and the **social connections** that come with relocation.
- There is a clear preference for **peer support programs that address their evolving needs**.

### ACTION STEPS

- **Expand the V-SRG program** to address career, parenting, deployment, and healthcare challenges.
- Develop an **8–10 week hybrid curriculum** with 90-minute sessions.
- Form **peer support groups of 8–10** participants from diverse backgrounds, independent of military units.
- Provide **onsite child care** to encourage participation.
- **Pilot the adapted program** through a randomized controlled trial to **assess its impact and refine the curriculum** further.

