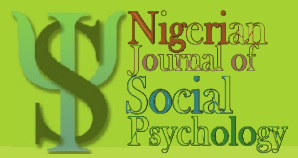


2024



NIGERIAN JOURNAL

OF SOCIAL

PSYCHOLOGY

Online ISSN: 2682-6151 Print
ISSN: 2682-6143

Volume 7, Issue 1, 2024

Editor-in-Chief

Prof. S.O. Adebayo

Managing Editor

Prof. B.E. Nwankwo

Published by

Nigerian Association of Social Psychologists

www.nigerianjps.com

Communication, Social Support and Psychological Well-being of Military Spouses in Kaduna State

Abdulahi, H. S.,

*Aigboje, H.M.

Mgbeanuli, C.C.

Oloke, S.

Department of Psychology,

Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna

*Correspondence: hmimogie@nda.edu.ng

Abstract

This study explores the vital concept of psychological well-being in military spouses, focusing on the influences of communication and social support. Amidst the unique challenges faced by military families, including deployments and separations, maintaining healthy psychological states becomes paramount for marital harmony and familial stability. Drawing on a cross-sectional study of 120 military spouses in Kaduna-Nigeria, this research investigates the correlations between communication, social support, and psychological well-being. The findings reveal significant positive relationships between communication ($r = 0.842$, $p = 0.001$), social support ($r = 0.757$, $p = 0.021$), and psychological well-being among military spouses. Enhanced communication is associated with improved psychological well-being, facilitating emotional expression, constructive conflict resolution, and heightened emotional support within marital relationships. Similarly, higher levels of social support contribute to enhanced psychological well-being, offering comfort, encouragement, and a sense of belonging during challenging times. This study underscores the importance of interventions aimed at enhancing communication skills and strengthening social support networks within military communities. Recommendations are proposed for military leadership, spouses, family support organizations, and healthcare providers to develop and implement programs that could promote mental resilience, foster stronger relationships, and enhance overall psychological well-being among military spouses.

Keywords: *Marital relations; Psychological well-being; Military families; Social Support; Communication*

Introduction

The importance of psychological wellbeing of military spouses cannot be overemphasized, as it is crucial in maintaining a healthy marital life and raising a sane and happy family with psychological stable family members. Military spouses, particularly the female spouse (stay home spouse) engages in a lot of marital duties all alone, due to the long and frequent deployments their husbands often have to go on. This has its resultant effects on their psychological states (Trautmann, Alhusen & Gross, 2015). Psychological well-being is simply positive feelings or the absence of negative feelings like symptoms of depression or anxiety (Stoll, & Pollastri, 2023). Psychological wellbeing is the cornerstone of human flourishing, and intricately weaves together an individual's emotional health and overall functioning (Ursu, 2010). It provides individuals with the necessary tools to confront challenges, embrace happiness, and lead fulfilling lives. Through understanding the contributing dimensions of

wellbeing and cultivating strategies to enhance them, individuals can embark on a journey towards increased mental resilience, contentment, and a profound sense of thriving (Sharbafshaaer, 2019). This concept extends beyond mere absence of distress, encompassing a dynamic equilibrium that fosters positive emotions, optimal cognitive functioning, and effective coping with life's challenges. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of human experience, this holistic approach emphasizes the importance of nurturing mental resilience (Tang et al., 2019).

According to Senior et al., (2023), military spouses face unique stressors due to their partners' deployments, alongside the typical issues encountered by adults. They grapple with circumstances specific to the role of their husbands such as recurrent deployments, geographical separation from loved ones, managing solo responsibilities during such deployments, and the burden of independent decision-making, which contribute to the intricate experiences of the spouse (Meadows et al., 2017). Studies have demonstrated that a host of factors can contribute to the maintaining good mental health, factors such as healthy communication and social support are evidently (Maurer, 2023; Wei, 2022; Hofsöe et al., 2019).

Social support refers to the network of relationships, assistance, and resources available to individuals through their social connections (Thoits, 2011). It encompasses various forms of support, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support, all of which serve to provide individuals with comfort, encouragement, practical assistance, guidance, and feedback in times of need (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Healthy psychological wellbeing is closely linked to social support, as it plays a crucial role in buffering the adverse effects of stress, promoting resilience, and enhancing coping strategies (Thoits, 2011). Research suggests that individuals with strong social support networks tend to experience lower levels of psychological distress, depression, and anxiety, while also exhibiting higher levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and overall psychological wellbeing (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Uchino, 2009). Moreover, social support fosters a sense of belongingness, connectedness, and reciprocity, which are essential for individuals' psychological health and functioning (Thoits, 2011).

Social support has been linked to improved psychological wellbeing (Cui et al., 2021), high self-esteem (Shin, & Park, 2022) and internal locus of control (Dağ & Şen, 2018). Getting assistance, care, and comfort from social networks, such as friends, family, colleagues, and community members often help to reduce the likelihood of mental illness (Li et al., 2021; Shin & Park, 2022). Wang et al., (2015) discovered that social support promotes high level of self-efficacy and increase the confidence in one's choices. In yet another study it was seen to enhance feelings of happiness and life satisfaction (Emerson et al., 2021). Therefore, social support serves as a protective factor against the negative impacts of stress and adversity, and may contribute significantly to the promotion and maintenance of healthy psychological wellbeing. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, there is a dearth of studies investigating the place of social support in maintaining healthy psychological states among spouses of serving military personnel, hence the relevance of this study.

On the other hand, is communication. Communication, the exchange of information and emotions between individuals, profoundly shapes perceptions, relationships, and emotional experiences. These may play significant roles in influencing the state of mind of an individual,

feelings of emotional health and psychological wellbeing. Positive communication, characterized by empathy and active listening, fosters self-esteem, social connection, and emotional validation, promoting psychological flourishing. Conversely, negative communication, such as criticism and invalidation, can lead to distress and interpersonal conflict, undermining wellbeing. Effective emotional expression through communication facilitates stress reduction and adaptive coping, while difficulties in expression or experiences invalidating communication may exacerbate psychological distress. By fostering positive communication patterns and addressing communication barriers, individuals can cultivate healthier psychological states and interpersonal dynamics, thus enhancing overall wellbeing (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2020; Burleson & Samter, 2020; Vangelisti, 2017).

Studies have demonstrated that effective communication helps to reduce gaps in relationship and help each partner to know their place in the relationship, particularly within marital relationships (Fatimayin, 2018; Iagnik et al., 2016). Effective communication was demonstrated to have significant influence on the overall marital satisfaction that spouse tends to enjoy (Johnson et al., 2022). Vital for constructive conflict resolution, healthy communication skills enable couples to address disagreements without resorting to harmful behaviors or prolonged resentment, thus reducing stress and fostering emotional well-being (Fatemeh et al., 2023) and building intimacy as well (Lavner et al., 2016). A paucity of studies investigating the place of communication in maintaining healthy psychological wellbeing was observed. It is against this background that this study intends to investigate the relationships that exist between social support, communication and psychological wellbeing of spouses (wives) of serving military personnel.

Statement of Problem

The demands of military service not only affects service members but also profoundly impacts their spouses, who grapple with prolonged separations, frequent relocations, active single parenting and solo home care, as well as other associated stressors of deployment (Skomorovsky, 2014). Military families navigate a structured lifestyle fraught with unique challenges, including frequent and prolonged deployments, relocation following separation, exposure to danger, disrupted work routines, detachment from civilian life, and adherence to masculine norms such as emotional suppression (Betsey Mercado, 2022). Lately, there has been a lot of anecdotal evidence suggestive that there has been increase in cases of divorce and extra marital affairs among military spouses especially during long deployments. The unfortunate incidents of cheating and emotional outbursts demonstrated by some military related spouses, may suggest the need to investigate the place of psychological wellbeing and related factors among the mentioned population. Also, there is an obvious paucity of empirical studies investigating important factors to explain the psychological states of spouses of military personnel in the Nigerian context. It is against this backdrop this study was conducted.

Method

Research Design and Participants

The study uses a cross-sectional study design to assess 120 spouses of military personnel, aged between 18 and 50 years. Participants were selected using a snowball sampling technique, and their involvement was voluntary. An online questionnaire was distributed to leaders of the association of military wives in Kaduna and with permission obtained through a group member,

links to the survey were disseminated to the groups. Responses were collected via email and subsequently analyzed. The duration of marriage among participants ranged from one year to twenty years, and all participants were wives of Nigerian Army officers, ranging from commissioned to non-commissioned officer ranks.

Instruments

The Self-perceived Communication in the Couple Relationship (SCCR)

The Self-perceived Communication in the Couple Relationship (SCCR) Scale, created by Iglesias-García et al. (2019), consists of 21 items and serves as a tool for assessing communication within a romantic relationship. Using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," respondents rate their perceptions of communication quality. The scale aims to gauge overall satisfaction with communication dynamics within the partnership. The scale has demonstrated a reliability score of ($\alpha = .75$), making it adequately reliable (Iglesias et al., 2019). Sample items include: 'I try not to show my feeling to my partner'; 'When I have a problem with my partner, I talk it through with them'; 'When we argue, I usually shout at my partner'; and 'I am satisfied with the level of communication in our partnership.'

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

The Multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al., (1988), is an instrument consisting of 12 items aimed at assessing individuals' perceptions of various sources of social support. The questionnaire is divided into three subscales focusing on support from family, friends, and significant others. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, spanning from "strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree." The MSPSS scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's α -value of 0.933. Additionally, the scale displayed robust construct validity, as confirmed by the retention of three factors (family, friends, and significant others) through confirmatory factor analysis for both depressed and non-depressed samples. The study also established the internal reliability and construct validity of the scale (Sharif et al., 2021). Some sample items of the MSPSS include: 'I can talk about my problems with my family'; 'I can count on my friends when things go wrong'; and 'I get the emotional help and support I need from my family'.

Data analysis

Statistical analyses were carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics: version 23 with significance set at $p < 0.05$. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was utilized to analyse the relationship between communication and psychological wellbeing as well as social support and psychological wellbeing.

Results

Table 1.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	correlation index	p
communication	123	32.08	6.23			
				121	0.842**	0.001
psychological wellbeing	123	65.11	7.9			

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ($p < 0.05$)

The analysis of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between communication and psychological wellbeing among military spouses in Kaduna ($r = 0.842$, $p = 0.001$). The correlation coefficient (r) indicated a strong positive association between the two variables.

Table 2.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	Correlation Index	p
Social Support	123	45.83	9.87			
				121	0.757**	0.021
Psychological Wellbeing	123	65.11	7.9			

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ($p < 0.05$)

The analysis of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing among military spouses in Kaduna ($r = 0.757$, $p = 0.021$). The calculated p value of 0.021 was found to be below the predefined alpha level of significance (0.05), indicating that the relationship is statistically significant.

Discussion

In the current era of active-duty military service, military families encounter significant challenges that can undermine psychological well-being. The deployment of service personnel to combat zones, along with uncertainties about their future assignments, introduces a layer of

worries that can overshadow the daily management of spousal communication, support, and the psychological well-being of the civilian spouse. The study explored the correlation between communication, social support, and psychological well-being among military spouses in Kaduna, Nigeria. The findings indicate that increased levels of communication correlate positively with higher psychological well-being among military spouses. The results suggest that spouses who engage in healthier communication patterns tend to experience improved psychological well-being. This phenomenon is attributed to the fact that each partner feels more comfortable expressing their concerns whenever necessary and is more likely to receive empathetic listening from their spouse. The psychological benefit derived from feeling heard and understood contributes significantly to enhanced psychological well-being.

Additionally, spouses who engage in healthier communication styles are better equipped to understand their partner's expectations and emotions, fostering a greater sense of internal peace within the relationship. Improved communication also leads to heightened emotional support, decreased feelings of isolation, and the cultivation of a deeper sense of belonging, connectivity and mutual understanding within the marital relationship, as evidenced by previous research (Lavner et al., 2016). These findings align with the works of Hofsöe et al. (2019) and Sigelman et al. (2019), highlighting the importance of healthy communication for a flourishing marital relationship.

Also, social support emerged as a significant factor correlating strongly and positively with psychological well-being in this study. The results revealed a positive association between social support and psychological well-being, indicating that higher levels of social support lead to improved psychological well-being. This correlation can be explained by the fact that spouses who perceive their partners as consistently supportive are more likely to feel secure in their relationships, thus reducing stress levels during challenging times. Furthermore, with the presence of supportive family and friends in their environment, spouses are better able to handle stressors and may feel less overwhelmed. Such supportive environment encourages spouses to seek refuge at home, especially during periods of separation due to military operations. This strengthens the bond between spouses, helps them navigate marital problems more positively and enhances overall marital satisfaction. These findings are consistent with the research of Sharma (2021) and Seagle et al. (2021), which underscore the role of social support in promoting psychological well-being within marriages.

This paper thus submits that increased social support and healthy communication patterns is associated with enhanced psychological well-being among military spouses, as it provides a sense of security and reduces stress during challenging times, fostering stronger marital bonds and satisfaction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of psychological well-being among military spouses, given its profound impact on marital harmony and family stability. The findings highlight the significant roles of communication and social support in fostering positive psychological outcomes within military families. Specifically, our results indicate that higher levels of communication and social support are associated with improved psychological well-being among military spouses in Kaduna. These findings emphasize the need for interventions aimed at enhancing communication skills and enhancing social support networks within military communities to promote better mental health outcomes and marital satisfaction. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by military families, such interventions can play a pivotal role in fostering resilience, strengthening relationships, and enhancing overall psychological well-being among military spouses.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Military Leadership and Policy Makers:

Should

- a. Develop and implement programs that promote healthy communication skills among military personnel and their spouses, with a focus on active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution.
- b. Provide resources and support services to enhance social support networks within military communities, including access to counseling, support groups, and community events aimed at fostering connections and camaraderie among spouses.
- c. Incorporate psychological well-being initiatives into military training programs and deployment preparations, emphasizing the importance of maintaining open communication with family and specifically partners and seeking support during challenging times.

2. Military Spouses

Should

- a. Prioritize communication within the marital relationship, making efforts to express thoughts, feelings, and concerns openly and constructively.
- b. Proactively seek out social support networks both within and outside the military community, engaging in activities and relationships that provide comfort, encouragement, and a sense of belonging.
- c. Take advantage of available resources and support services, including mental health counseling, peer support groups, and community organizations, to address any psychological challenges or stressors encountered during deployments or periods of separation.

3. Military Family Support Organizations

Should

- a. Expand and enhance existing programs and services aimed at supporting military families, including initiatives focused on communication skills training, relationship building, and mental health promotion.
- b. Collaborate with military leadership, mental health professionals, and community organizations to ensure comprehensive support for military spouses and their families, addressing both practical and emotional needs throughout the deployment cycle.

4. Healthcare Providers and Mental Health Professionals

Should

- a. Increase awareness and understanding of the unique challenges faced by military spouses, including the impact of deployments, relocations, and separation on psychological well-being.
- b. Offer specialized services and interventions tailored to the needs of military families, such as couples counseling, communication building, stress management techniques, and support for military spouses.
- c. Foster partnerships with military organizations and community resources to facilitate timely access to mental health care and support services for military spouses, particularly during periods of heightened stress or transition.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The authors diligently adhered to ethical considerations.

Competing Interests

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest to be disclosed.

REFERENCES

- Beebe, S. A., Beebe, S. J., & Redmond, M. V. (2020). *Interpersonal communication: Relating to others* (10th ed.). Pearson.
- Betsey, M. (2022). MOAA - Here's Why Taking the Military Family Lifestyle Survey Matters. <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2022-news-articles/heres-why-taking-the-military-family-lifestyle-survey-matters/>
- Burleson, B. R., & Samter, W. (2020). Communication and emotion: Transformation and validation. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (5th ed., pp. 277–310). Sage Publications.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310–357.
- Cui, S., Cheng, F., Zhang, L., Zhang, C., Yuan, Q., Huang, C., Zhang, K., & Zhou, X. (2021). Self-esteem, social support and coping strategies of left-behind children in rural China, and the intermediary role of subjective support: a cross-sectional survey. *British Medical Psychiatry*, 21, 158.
- Dağ, İ., & Şen, G. (2018). The Mediating Role of Perceived Social Support in the Relationships Between General Causality Orientations and Locus of Control With Psychopathological Symptoms. *Europe's journal of psychology*, 14(3), 531–553.
- Emerson, E., Fortune, N., Llewellyn, G., & Stancliffe, R. (2021). Loneliness, social support, social isolation and wellbeing among working age adults with and without disability: Cross-sectional study. *Disability and Health Journal*, 14(1), 100965. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dhjo.2020.100965>
- Fatemeh, B., Maryam, Mazaheri, & Hassanzadeh, A. (2023). Can Communication Skills Training for Veteran's Spouses Increase Positive Communication Patterns? *Journal of Military and Veterans Health*, 29(2). <https://jmvh.org/article/can-communication-skills-training-for-veterans-spouses-increase-positive-communication-patterns/>
- Fatimayin, F. (2018). *What is Communication?*
- Hofsöe, S., Lehane, C., Wittich, W., Hilpert, P., & Dammeyer, J. (2019). Interpersonal Communication and Psychological Well-Being Among Couples Coping With Sensory Loss: The Mediating Role of Perceived Spouse Support. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36, 2323–2344.
- Iagniuok, I., I., P., & A.A., O. (2016). Book 'Communication Psychology'.

- Iglesias-García, M.-T., Urbano-Contreras, A., & Martínez-González, R.-A. (2019). Escala de Comunicación autopercibida en la relación de pareja (CARP). *Anales de Psicología*, 35(2), 314–322.
- Johnson, M. D., Lavner, J. A., Mund, M., Zemp, M., Stanley, S. M., Neyer, F. J., Impett, E. A., Rhoades, G. K., Bodenmann, G., Weidmann, R., Bühler, J. L., Burriss, R. P., Wünsche, J., & Grob, A. (2022). *Within-Couple Associations Between Communication and Relationship Satisfaction Over Time. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 48(4), 534–549.
- Lavner, J. A., Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2016). Does Couples' Communication Predict Marital Satisfaction, or Does Marital Satisfaction Predict Communication? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 78(3), 680–694. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12301>
- Li, F., Luo, S., Mu, W., Li, Y., Ye, L., Zheng, X., Xu, B., Ding, Y., Ling, P., Zhou, M., & Chen, X. (2021). Effects of sources of social support and resilience on the mental health of different age groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Medical Psychiatry*, 21(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-03012-1>
- Maurer, M. (2023). *Well-being Processes: Insights into Personal Growth and Adolescent Mental Health*.
- Meadows, S. O., Tanielian, T., Karney, B., Schell, T., Griffin, B. A., Jaycox, L. H., Friedman, E. M., Trail, T. E., Beckman, R., Ramchand, R., Hengstebeck, N., Troxel, W. M., Ayer, L., & Vaughan, C. A. (2017). *The Deployment Life Study. Rand Health Quarterly*, 6(2), 7.
- National Academies of Sciences, E., Education, D. of B. and S. S. and, Board on Children, Y., Families, C. on the W.-B. of M., Menestrel, S. L., & Kizer, K. W. (2019). *Military Life Opportunities and Challenges. In Strengthening the Military Family Readiness System for a Changing American Society*. National Academies Press (US). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK547604/>
- Seagle, E., Xu, J., Edwards, N., & McComb, S. (2021). Social Networking, Social Support, and Well-being for the Military Spouse. *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, pp. 17-31.
- Senior, E., Clarke, A., & Wilson-Menzfeld, G. (2023). The military spouse experience of living alongside their serving/veteran partner with a mental health issue: A systematic review and narrative synthesis. *PLOS ONE*, 18(5), e0285714. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0285714>
- Sharbafshaaer, M. (2019). Correlation between dimensions of psychological well-being with life satisfaction and self-regulation. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health*, 21(3), 135–140. <https://doi.org/10.22038/jfmh.2019.13401>
- Sharif, M., Zaidi, A., Waqas, A., Malik, A., Haganan, A., Maselko, J., LeMasters, K., Liaqat, R., Bilal, S., Bibi, T., Ahmad, I., Sikander, S., & Rahman, A. (2021). Psychometric Validation of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support During Pregnancy in Rural Pakistan. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 601563.

- Sharma, K. (2021). A study on military wives psychological well being, life satisfaction & social support. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/DOI:10.25215/0901.133>
- Shin, H., & Park, C. (2022). Social support and psychological well-being in younger and older adults: The mediating effects of basic psychological need satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 1051968.
- Sigelman, C. K., Friedman, S. L., & Kildon, J. (2019). Communication, Context, and Well-Being Among Military Couples. *Military Behavioral Health*, 7(4), 363–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2019.1646173>
- Skomorovsky, A. (2014). Deployment Stress and Well-Being Among Military Spouses: The Role of Social Support. *Military Psychology*, 26, 44. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mil0000029>
- Stoll, S. J., & Pollastri, A. R. (2023). Social and environmental influences. In *Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Health* (First Edition).
- Tang, Y.-Y., Tang, R., & Gross, J. J. (2019). Promoting Psychological Well-Being Through an Evidence-Based Mindfulness Training Program. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 13. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2019.00237>
- Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145–161.
- Trautmann, J., Alhusen, A., & Gross, D. (2015). Impact of deployment on military families with young children: A systematic review. *Nursing Outlook*, 63, 656-679.
- Uchino, B. N. (2009). Understanding the links between social support and physical health: A life-span perspective with emphasis on the separability of perceived and received support. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(3), 236–255
- Ursu, A. S. (2010). *Psychological Well-being*. Nova Science Publishers, Inc. https://www.academia.edu/18971695/Psychological_Well_being
- Vangelisti, A. L. (2017). Understanding family communication patterns and interpersonal dynamics. In J. A. Beck (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Communication and Development* (pp. 148–162). Routledge
- Wang, C.-M., Qu, H.-Y., & Xu, H.-M. (2015). Relationship between social support and self-efficacy in women psychiatrists. *Chinese Nursing Research*, 2(4), 103–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cnre.2015.10.002>
- Wei, P. (2022). The impact of social support on students' mental health: A new perspective based on fine art majors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.994157>

Indexing

