

Reintegration processes affecting military families involved in domestic moves: From the father's view

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Abstract

This study explored the effects of domestic moves on military families as a system through the lens of fathers who are service members. The Bowen family systems theory (BFST) and family systems theory were used as frameworks to discuss how domestic moves have potential to affect the effectiveness of their service as well as their family roles. This study aims to introduce how family life educators possess the necessary skills and knowledge to provide preventive education programs to raise the awareness of familial changes and potential stress associated with domestic moves on the entire family system.

Key Words: Military families, Reintegration, Domestic moves, Family life education

Introduction

Military service members and their families relocate more often than their civilian counterparts. Domestic moves can be very stressful when military-specific resources are not available in communities where military families reside. The Migration of Military Spouses using the 2007-2011 5-Year American Community Survey found that 47% of active-duty families with deployed members reportedly 3 or more times of relocation within a 5 year period (Davis, Blaschke, & Stafford, 2012; Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009). Moving is not a new process for service members and their families, from a short temporary duty (TDY) or permanent change of station (PCS) to long deployments, military families move frequently. Within the past three years, at least 60% of military families relocated (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro 2006; Davis, Blaschke, & Stafford, 2012).

The Bowen family systems theory (BFST) and family systems theory share intriguing thought processes about military families enduring the transitions of moving. The BFST defines the military family as a single unit and by treating or educating the family, the family members learn to cope and deal with changes related to domestic moves (Gilbert, 1992). In addition, the family systems theory acknowledges that when one individual leaves the family unit, then the family seeks to establish stability (Gilbert, 1992). Both the BFST and the family systems theory ultimately identify the interworking of military families and how relocation has potential to affect the quality and stability of family life.

The amount of preparation it takes to move a military family or member from one stateside base to another stateside base can be quite an undertaking. Each type of move may affect a family and children in different areas of their lives. This paper will look at relevant theories, military family demographics, spousal employment, community support and education grants that affect military families and children during domestic moves from the father's view and how the family is affected at the pre-move, during the move and post-move processes. In addition, the paper introduces the Certified Family Life Educators (CFLE) who have the skills and training to incorporate the theories in the lives of military families coping with the domestic move process.

Theory

Murray Bowen during the 1950's made a major contribution known as BFST (Gilbert, 1992). A key focus was viewing family as a single unit or entity, not just focusing on the individual members of the family (McGoldrick & Carter, 2001). This unit consists of family interactions, family relationships, and family dynamics. Bowen proposes that by changing the functioning of one family member the entire family can change (Gilbert, 1992; McGoldrick & Carter, 2001). When a service member who is a father moves to a new location, the relocation associated with the new assignment will affect his availability and accessibility with his family members which in turn produce immediate changes to the family functioning. According to Bowen, when the family functioning is healthy, the individual is healthy as well. On the other hand, when changes associated with relocation bring stress, the whole family may be distressed.

Furthermore, the family systems theory also reflects the processing of life events of the family (Friedman, 1991). When a domestic move (life event) disturbs the family stability, the family will need to adjust to reach stability again. The disturbance of the domestic move (life event) will change family interactions, family relationships, and family dynamics (Friedman, 1991). As quoted by a participant in the study by Greentree, Johnson, Cook, and Bolton (2010) from the Blue Star Families, "When my kids do better I do better and my marine does better while deployed." This statement supports the fundamental approach of the BFST approach. It is a theory that deals with family relationships and how they influence each family member. The family operates as a functioning unit and the fluctuations of deployment, moving, training, TDYs and other duties on military personnel influence the family dynamics which in turn affects its

stability. The BFST specifically focuses on the family's ability to be adaptable and flexible with different life situations that have a potential to affect family stability

Military family demographics

The demographics are illustrated in Figure 1. This information was obtained from the *2012 Demographics Profile of the Military Community*. This demographics profile is updated every year. The profile also contains detailed information of enlisted members, officers, and pay grades. For this study the main issues were concerned with marital status, parental status and family status. The focus of this analysis is to report information of funding to determine if outcomes have changed for the 1,945,456 children family members. The total of military and family members as well as sex, race, ethnicity, and education are also included. The gender distribution of military personnel is 14.6% female and 85.4% male. The majority of active-duty members are White at 69.7% and Non-Hispanic at 88.7%. The majority of members 78.6% have at least a high school diploma and some college. The total member's marital status sits at 56.1 % and those never married at 39.3%. The total number of military personnel and family members is 5,295,065. This includes the entire workforce of the military and family members. Family members' number 3,066,717 and consist of spouses, children, and adult dependents. The total children in military families are 1,945,456. This consists of the following arrays of children/adolescents: 0 to 5 years (37.5%), 6 to 11 years (30.4%), and 12 to 18 years (24.9%). The domestic moves of these family members can be full of stress and anxiety. The children are moved from school to school and the relocation process makes it tough to maintain a stable home environment (Clever & Segal, 2013). In many cases, it disrupts the spouse's employment. Furthermore, domestic moves directly create changes for all family members. It can be challenging for family members to keep up with changes associated with these transitional experiences.

Fathers

The majority of military personnel are male. These members consist of 1,185,152 personnel, 85.4% of the military force. Domestic moves are typically associated with relocation which creates ongoing changes over a period of time to these service member's role and responsibilities outside of the base. Consequently, reintegration has the potential to affect the families of service members who are fathers in a profound manner. Domestic moves disturb their role, relationship and interaction with the family as fathers. According to Carter-Visscher, Polusny, Murdoch, Thuras, Erbes, and Kehle (2010) the entire family is affected by domestic moves, when the father leaves for an extended period. Stress and changes associated with domestic moves can affect his role, relationships and interactions which may require increased support from the family. According to Gewirtz, Erbes, Polusney, Forgatch, and DeGarmo (2011), a father must stay devoted and connected to his family while in his military role. Both situations can cause a tremendous amount of stress. Chibucos and Leite (2005) advocated that family can change over time, especially under a tremendous amount of stress. The service member can find a balance to deal with the domestic move process and stay committed to his family. In the midst of change and adjustment, the educational resources that a CFLE can offer provide for adapting, managing and/or coping with domestic moves from a preventive approach. The CFLE's knowledge of the family stress during domestic moves can educate the father and his family prior to the domestic move about coping, managing and adapting while he is deployed and during reintegration. It is critical to preventively raise the awareness of immediate changes associated with the relocation which can lower positive family interactions. By so doing, family members are readily prepared to face possible changes with relevant coping skills.

The CFLEs understand domestic moves as a stressful event to the father and his family. To these service men who are fathers, the attempt to balance both their military role and family roles at the same time

can become quite challenging and exhausting. In many cases, service men value their dedication to the country more which in turn places their families in a lesser important priority. As a matter of fact, it is vital to educate these fathers as well as their family members to learn coping skills during the transitional time to help make better adjustments. As a result, the family life will then regain its stability in the new environment. Besides skills and knowledge about adjustment at the familial level, the CFLEs can also organize other military fathers to maintain a support group. These service men can be educated about family roles, relationships and interactions prior, during and after domestic moves. Those families who are in the similar situations can offer support for each other which serves as a buffer mechanism to offset many potential risks to lower family functioning. In addition, the CFLEs can introduce preventive measures for relatives, friends, and family to cope with the different levels of stress prior, during, and after domestic moves so that the social support outside of a military family can be enhanced.

Spousal Employment

Service members are required to move frequently which may cause the spouse's employment to be interrupted and extremely hard to maintain a continued career. Once military orders are received, pre-move preparations begin. Family life education can make a major contribution to the military family by covering their content areas during a domestic move. Preventive education can be strategically presented to service members as part of pre-domestic move tasks to educate about potential stressors and changes associated with the move. Bredehoft and Cassidy (1995) list the 10 Family Life Education Content Areas:

1. Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts
2. Internal Dynamics of Families
3. Human Growth and Development across the Lifespan
4. Human Sexuality
5. Interpersonal Relationships
6. Family Resource Management
7. Parent Education and Guidance
8. Family Law and Public Policy
9. Professional Ethics and Practice
10. Family Life Education Methodology.

The Family Life Education covers a wide scope of areas that can serve the military family throughout the domestic move process. It contains areas of education for taking care of the entire family. In fact, family life education will increase the awareness level of changes and stress directed to each family member and the entire family system. The CFLEs must meet standards and qualify to become certified by the National Council on Family Relations. The specialization in the 10 content areas makes them a qualified educator for educating the military family in coping and dealing with domestic move concerns. The military family can learn to accept, cope, and embrace the domestic move which will minimize strain on family members, particularly the young children.

One area in a military family's life that is of immediate concern is the spouse having to quit her job. Hosek and MacDermid-Wadsworth (2013) found service members on average work longer hours as compared to civilians and military spouses work fewer hours. Constant changes associated with relocation hinder the advancement opportunities through their jobs as a service member's spouse. In fact, it can translate to income loss over time for military families. As a service member's spouse, each domestic move a military family makes may bring a financial loss. Additionally, employers may be reluctant to hire military spouses for positions requiring vast trainings due to potential future relocations (Hosek & MacDermid-Wadsworth, 2013). Furthermore, this predicament causes military spouses to work shorter hours or be

unemployed and ultimately earn less; while civilian spouses are quite the opposite. Hosek and MacDermid-Wadsworth (2013) found that military service members maintain steady work, but spouses do not fare as well. Frequent moves interfere with steady employment for military spouses.

While spousal employment is important to the military family, readiness for domestic moves takes precedence for the military. Military families move three times more than civilian families (Clever & Segal, 2013). The entire family must adapt to the service members' availability and duty hours. As the service member and family members adjust to new duty hours and shifts, stress exists in these situations. One might think non-deployed members have life a little easier and may not work as hard as deployed members. In fact, non-deployed members do work harder to support those that are deployed and experience stress along with their families, due to a change in hours, new duties, etc. Pre-moves often bring about the question of whether the spouse will get a job at the next location. If it is not done in a timely fashion, financial concerns exist (Hosek & MacDermid-Wadsworth, 2013).

Although, the military has reasonable pay, junior enlisted ranks show financial distress while approximately 5,000 junior members qualified for food stamps in 2012. Military families who fall into this category usually have a spouse who is not working and have several children. For junior enlisted members, dealing with a military move on a small budget with children can be difficult. Along with money issues the military family has to become familiar with a new community, new friends, and a new way of life. This routine comes with the job more often than not.

Community Support

Kudler and Porter (2013) found that military families including children appear to be invisible in the community. During the move, schools, clinics, religious institutions, and law enforcement are not aware of parents' military status of a new student. It would be helpful to military families and especially to children for communities to know who they serve and become familiar with military culture. Although the military offers assistance to service members and their family, intentional help is needed in civilian communities to make meaningful connections for military families to be familiar with clinical and public health programs in the new city. Without the help during the initial transition, providers and military families become disconnected. Davis, Blaschke, and Stafford (2012) found pediatricians can assist with military moves to new communities by setting up possible military-specific benefits and family services. On the other hand, pediatricians who lack basic knowledge of the dynamics of military families can assist them better by becoming familiar with military systems, culture, and resources as well as benefits. Knowing how to access military-specific information and programs quickly would also benefit the community key players to help military families make better transition.

Davis, Blaschke, and Stafford (2012) found that access to military services and community support may not be available to Reserve and National Guard members living in nonmilitary communities. Living without the necessary support can be stressful to a service member's family. In the past, paper records were carried with military members from base to base; however, in 2005 electronic medical records became available. TriCare, the military's medical program is currently regionalized and offer better benefits for military families and children. These services have lessened the strain on military family members at a pre-move, during the move and post-move. When the stress level can be perceived, it has the potential to educate the individual and the entire family with proper skills and knowledge to lower the uncertain mentality found in service men. When this is happening, it provides one additional layer of protection to their family members.

Military families and children should not be unrecognized for their service, their presence, or their involvement in the community. Their presence should be honored and applauded for the service they extend

to the United States. According to Kudler and Porter (2013) military children usually become the next generation of service members and will carry years of stress and resilience with them into the future. Furthermore, the dynamics of military children go across generations, unlike careers which have a beginning and an end.

A recent stigma that has surfaced and follows military families into communities (at a pre-move, during a move, and at a post move) is mental health problems (Kudler & Porter, 2013). Reports concerning children may go unreported because the service member maybe held responsible if it is known the child has mental health issues. The key is to help the family recognize that the earlier a report is made the more likely both the child and the service member can receive needed medical attention. Keeping all necessary resources available within a community allows military members to feel safe enough to seek help (Kudler & Porter, 2013).

Education Military Grants

Schools play an integral part in the life of military families at the pre-move, during the move, and the post-move. Greentree, Johnson, Cook, and Bolton (2010) pointed out that the costs involved to fully support military children are not entirely known. Engel, Gallagher, and Lyle (2010) make a similar statement in their research of the education grants given to schools that support military children. The funding of these programs is promoted to help the entire school with a focus on military children. When and if this is properly implemented and evaluated, it would give service men who are fathers a sense of certainty, knowing their children will receive education services which come from the military. The project was designed to support the military student and family in academics and stress/anxiety from issues especially deployment, TDY, training and work. The main concern is how to track the effect of these grants and their support of the military children. No oversight or reporting is required to determine if the military student is meeting academic requirements or if his or her academic performance is improving or declining (United States Government Accountability Office, 2011). The Department of Defense has made recommendations to begin isolating these costs to military children with the help of the Department of Education (Greentree, Johnson, Cook, & Bolton, 2010; Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010). The cost information provided by the Department of Education does not provide utilization analysis of the funds from the Department of Defense for the military dependent students. In other words, the Department of Defense may not know for sure whether any funding to public schools is reaching the military dependent students. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2011) does want and has recommended implementing detailed reporting for military student tracking and fund tracking which demonstrates a real benefit to the military family.

The grants do involve training of personnel at schools to handle the special needs of military children that include the stress and anxiety of moving (Engel et. al., 2010). The move from one school to another can present unique challenges for students, depending on their age at the move. One state may have different requirements for each grade that may not reflect the requirements of a different state (Engel et. al., 2010). From a different perspective, the student may find that he or she cannot easily transfer to the same grade from one school to another school between states. Even if he or she is allowed to attend the same grade level at a new school, certain subjects or test scores may not be accepted. These students may require additional classes to enter the current grade when transferring to a different school in a different state. The grants help with this transition and are also used to develop and keep school programs available for all military children. In many cases, it also provides counseling for the children and parents (Engel et. al., 2010) who may benefit from these services. Education can be a highly effective alternative to counseling especially when a stigmatism exists (Richardson, Chandra, Martin, Setodji, Hallmark, Campbell, Hawkins, & Grady, 2011). It

serves as a triage. Stress is a part of life and it exists in military families and their children's lives. Educating parents and children about stress and anxiety can be beneficial for coping with a move. Evaluating programs and keeping track of students' progress for effectiveness is a key issue for the Department of Defense (Greentree, et. al., 2010).

The CFLE can serve as intermediary to bring the children, family, school and government (stakeholders) into sync with their information and benefits. The CFLE understands the overall process and can discuss each area in more detail for all stakeholders. The CFLE has the credentials to make recommendations to stabilize family life affected by domestic moves. According to the family systems theory, when the service member who is a father is negatively affected by a stressor (i.e., relocation, or deployment) other family members would experience the impact. His negative experience can in turn create a situation for other family members to encounter poor adjustment in a new city. In fact, poor adjustment associated with relocation can become a stressor itself. Conversely, a poor adjustment to a new environment displayed by military children can also affect the effectiveness and work quality of a service member. At the end, it becomes a vicious cycle for the entire military family to maintain a stable family life. Therefore, recommendations can target the family, the service member, spouse, and children of different ages. The additional funding to schools for military children begins a working process that works its way up to the Department of Defense. The gathering of this data to know the most effective method to educate children, family, and stakeholders can be valuable. The combined resources from funding and training of the 10 content areas from the CFLEs can provide the education the stakeholders.

Conclusion

Domestic moves can affect military families and children in various ways from the move itself, new service member duty hours, becoming familiar with a new community, childcare, spousal work and other issues. As military members live through pre-moves, during, and the post-move the family dynamics changes dramatically. At each "move" stage, family life education can help ease the changes in family dynamics by providing concrete and feasible skills to each family member. CFLEs understand that family stress is elevated during each "move" stage and can educate the military members from a preventive approach in understanding of the changes that can influence family stability. Besides increasing the awareness of stress associated with relocation, the military family members can also learn necessary skills to cope with changes. The CLFEs can educate a family on how a "move" stage affects the family and family members. It helps the family realize that the "move" stages are part of the military life which in turn requires mental preparation and relationship adjustments. They come along at different times and the family can learn to manage the "move" stages to make it a natural part of their lives.

Aside from the normal concerns of moving, the service member's income is actually more when compared to civilian workers (Hosek&MacDermid-Wadsworth, 2013). In contrast, the spousal employment indicators show military spouses are paid much less than civilian spouses. For the military spouse, a move means accepting lower wages and readily available employers are aware they may not stay in that position very long due to the nature of the military (Hosek&MacDermid-Wadsworth, 2013). Moving can incur additional cost, especially during the initial phase of a relocation. As military families make domestic moves, they help to support local schools with the addition of military children, spouses who work in local communities, childcare, and medical care. According to Davis, Blaschke, and Stafford (2012) it would be helpful if pediatricians became aware of other civilian programs that are available to military families to be able to make referrals; therefore, integrating resources from both military and civilian sources. Once the move takes place the military family has to contend with new duty hours which can be quite different from their last assignment and the onset of a possible lengthy domestic move, this maybe a stressful loss for the

family members and the service member. According to Hosek and MacDermid-Wadsworth (2013), Congress is attentive to economic conditions military families face. Currently, resources are set aside to increase military compensation, reduce housing costs, and increased employment for spouses. This all sounds hopeful, but with the addition of special outreach training to families and encouraging employers to hire military spouses (Hosek&MacDermid-Wadsworth, 2013) additional risk factors may not occur. Contracted educators and Family Advocacy offices can offer courses that build and uplift skill sets that may allow spouses to be selected for immediate openings at the new base offering opportunities that did not exist before.

Service members who are fathers may have a need to change roles at home and in the new position at the new base. At home, the father is usually the head of the household. During relocations, the father's role may become more flexible and less traditional depending on the current duties and schedules at the new base. In the new position on base, the service member may feel under pressure to work long hours which keeps the father away from his family longer which has potential to lower the quality of family relationship.

Clever and Segal (2013) recognizes the complexity of military families and that they should not be forced to fit into rigidly structured programs. For instance, if a military family is only required to remain at a base for a year, the spouse should still be able to locate employment. Since a military family goes through numerous changes over time, being left out of support programs would add additional stress. Instead of offering any programs to military families, programs should aim to provide support and meet their needs (programs that support military members and families). By paying attention to needs of parents and needs of children, programs will be able to assist each family more effectively(Clever & Segal, 2013).Furthermore, the military roles may change when more women may serve and remain in the military longer which can add additional change to a family system. With this change, the male spouse will be responsible to be familiar with military policies, childcare, moving, and finding employment.

When support programs designated to military families, evaluation is necessary to sustain program delivery. Evaluations on support programs can help improve service quality and offer proof to sustain programs that add value. Education is needed to ensure military families receive proper information that keeps them informed of parenting techniques and related policies. Evaluation of all military support programs is highly recommended. Support programs for military families are necessary to keep awareness strong and embrace changes associated with relocation. Programs that affect military families may also affect civilian families. Keeping all families informed about benefit updates for military children and the families in the United States (Clever & Segal, 2013).

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FIGURE 1. Demographics of Active-Duty with family characteristics		
Total members	1,388,028	
Mean Age	28.7	
Sex		
Female	202,876	14.6%
Male	1,185,152	85.4%
Race		
White	967,633	69.7%
Black or African	233,383	16.8%
Asian	51,382	3.7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	21,415	1.5%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	14,194	1.0%
Multi-racial	39,212	2.8%
Other/Unknown	60,809	4.4%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	157,203	11.3%
Non-Hispanic/Latino	1,230,822	88.7%
Education		
No high school diploma or GED	4,834	0.3%
High school diploma/GED or some college	1,089,763	78.6%
Bachelors' degree	162,723	11.7%
Advanced degree	101,948	7.3%
Unknown	28,760	2.1%
Marital Status		
Never Married	545,683	39.3%
Married	778,305	56.1%
Divorced	62,101	4.5%
Other	1,939	0.1%
Military Personnel and Family Members		
Total	5,295,065	
Military Personnel	2,228,348	42.1%
Family members	3,066,717	57.9%
Parental Status		
Military Personnel with children	970,236	43.5%
Military Personnel without children	1,258,112	56.5%
Family Status		
Single no children	904,744	40.6%
Single with children	151,368	6.8%
Married to civilian, no children	294,598	13.2%
Married to civilian, with children	768,102	34.5%
Dual-military, no children	58,770	2.6%
Dual-military, with children	50,766	2.3%

Source: 2012 Demographics Profile of the Military Community