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MARITAL CONSIDERATIONS AND THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON JUNIOR SERVICE MEMBERS

December 2021

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**MARITAL CONSIDERATIONS AND THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE
ON JUNIOR SERVICE MEMBERS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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The purpose of this cross-sectional study is to gain a better understanding of factors that contribute to the increased likelihood of junior enlisted active-duty servicemembers marrying at a younger age than their civilian counterparts and subsequently divorcing at an increased rate. This study is designed to gain a better understanding of the beliefs and expectations that drive this marital proclivity by reviewing past literature, analyzing the divorce and marital tendencies of junior service members, and using existing data, collected from Marines and Sailors E-5 and below conducting their first enlistment, that assesses their perceptions and beliefs surrounding marriage and divorce. Prior literature indicates that the youthful marriage rate is driven by central themes, including financial incentives established by the Department of Defense (DOD) and a culture that promotes an idealistic expectation of marriage. This leads to a prevailing tendency to make life-altering decisions through an idealistic lens. Survey results indicated a desire by junior service members to rapidly mature into adulthood through marriage and an overwhelming agreement that premarital training was beneficial to the population, despite a reluctance to participate in such training. I advocate for continued exploration into evidence-informed training to educate this population regarding marriage, creating positive impacts in their personal lives, thus benefitting the force readiness posture of the DOD.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	PURPOSE.....	1
B.	BACKGROUND	2
C.	OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH.....	3
D.	RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	4
1.	Primary Research Questions	4
2.	Secondary Research Question	4
E.	SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF STUDY	4
F.	ORGANIZATION	5
G.	SUMMARY	5
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW	7
A.	STRESS HYPOTHESIS.....	7
B.	PERVERSE INCENTIVES	9
C.	IDEALISTIC DISTORTION	10
D.	TRAINING CURRICULA.....	12
E.	SUMMARY	13
III.	METHODOLOGY	15
A.	DATA	15
B.	SURVEY THEMES.....	17
C.	EFFECTIVENESS OF PREMARITAL TRAINING	17
D.	IDEALISTIC DISTORTION	18
E.	REASONS FOR MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.....	19
F.	ANALYSIS BETWEEN SURVEYS	21
G.	DATA RESTRICTIONS AND LIMITATIONS.....	21
IV.	ANALYSIS	23
A.	SURVEY TOTALS.....	23
B.	ANALYSIS BY SUBGROUP.....	23
1.	Intent to Marry in Six Months or Less	23
2.	Divorced	25
3.	Never Married and Never Divorced.....	27
C.	VULNERABLE POPULATION AND MILITARY CULTURE	27
D.	IDEALISTIC DISTORTION	28
E.	REASONS FOR MARRIAGE VERSUS DIVORCE.....	30
F.	CASE FOR PREMARITAL TRAINING.....	31

G.	SUMMARY	33
V.	RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS	35
A.	RESULTS	35
B.	RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	37
	APPENDIX.....	39
A.	NEVER MARRIED / NEVER DIVORCED SURVEY.....	39
B.	INTENTION TO MARRY IN SIX MONTHS OR LESS SURVEY	41
C.	DIVORCED SURVEY	44
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	47
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	51

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Expectations of Marriage by Respondents	30
Figure 2.	Reasons for Divorce by Divorced Respondents	31

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Survey Respondents ($N = 512$) Broken Down by Gender and Service	16
Table 2.	Respondents by Rank.....	16
Table 3.	Experience of Divorce by Premarital Training Attendance.....	32

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BAH	Basic Allowance for Housing
Div	Divorced
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DOD	Department of Defense
FSA	Family Separations Allowance
ITM	Intent to Marry in Less Than Six Months
NMND	Never Married and Never Divorced

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To my Son,

I'm sorry.

“For the sins of your fathers, you though guiltless, must suffer.”

— Horace, *Odes*

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I. INTRODUCTION

“We know that many future service members come from military families. So, family readiness is integral to mission readiness, both now and in the future. This cannot be an afterthought. It is a national security imperative, and it should be resourced and supported as such.”

— President Biden, campaign website, 2020

A. PURPOSE

The early years for a military member are some of their most formative. When many of America’s youth flock from high school to the military services, they are faced with occasions and decisions that will mark the transition into adulthood. One of the most prevalent decisions for this junior service member population is marriage.

For young couples in the military, this covenant entails a series of additional obstacles and incentives. The military culture creates distinct incentives for married personnel. Within these are financial, quality of life, and cultural/lifestyle incentives for married service members. However, the military culture is rife with obstacles to a traditional marriage not experienced by civilian counterparts. Examples of these are deployments, significant relocation, and inconsistent social support structures (Trail et al., 2015). Prior research shows that junior service members have a proclivity to marry earlier than their civilian counterparts and that these relationships tend to result in divorce at a higher frequency (Hogan & Seifert, 2009). In some studies, the marriage rates of junior enlisted service members are three times higher than their civilian counterparts of similar ages (Lloyd et al., 2015). This behavior is incentivized through pecuniary and psychological means and further reinforced by quixotic and cultural norms. However, the trend of early marriage manifests in increasing numbers of divorces for these junior enlisted service members (Lundquist, 2007). The consequences of divorce are then felt in the DOD through increased manifestations of physical and mental health problems, leading to reductions in personnel readiness (Gomulka, 2010). Illustrations of this are witnessed in substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal behaviors. The result

is an increased need for more robust DOD-sponsored treatment plans to service a vulnerable population that makes up the majority of the military services.

B. BACKGROUND

The incentives for marriage among military members are both monetary and cultural in their application. Marriage unlocks monetary incentives to which single members are not generally entitled. These pecuniary benefits create financial reasons for young couples to consider marriage at an earlier age. Cultural incentives refer to intangible benefits accustomed to military culture, the prospect of stability, security, and a sense of belonging.

The pecuniary incentives for a married couple include housing and food allowances and a family separations allowance during deployments. These incentives are generally not enjoyed by the single members, vary by location, and are significant financial windfalls compared to the junior enlisted base pay (Wallace & Rose, 1991). Additionally, financial motivations are captured in a family separations allowance for a married couple with a deployed spouse. When these are combined with the potential for a dual-income household, the marital covenant is financially incentivized. As an illustration of the financial incentives that are likely to entice junior enlisted service members, consider the case of Eric the Marine. Eric is 19 years old, an E-2, and emphatic about marrying his high school sweetheart. He has been in the Marine Corps for one year and recently arrived at his first permanent duty station. Eric knows he will get married and is questioning if it would be beneficial to marry before an upcoming deployment instead of after he returns. The monetary incentives would include Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for his present duty station and Family Separations Allowance (FSA). The BAH is \$1200 (representing a nearly 50% increase from basic pay), and FSA is \$275. Eric will not see his wife for the seven months he's gone, but those entitlements would give them a financial head start, setting the conditions to establish a life together when he comes back.

Cultural incentives are seen in both quality of life increases for military couples and a culture that encourages stability, security, and family. The military requires young adults to be agile thinkers and make rapid adult decisions despite age and inexperience. The

professional need to operate within this system encourages young service members to mirror these same mature decisions in their personal lives (Kelty et al., 2010). The junior service member is further encouraged by a culture that promotes congenial ties and seeks to enable those same attributes in a domestic setting. This environment creates idealistic distortion (i.e., the tendency to hold an overly idealistic perspective of married life that differs from the reality; Fowers and Olson, 1993) for vulnerable populations of service members and spouses who desire the intangible and emotional benefits of marriage but are naïve to the complexities that come with these decisions. When the luster wears off, and the marriage is subjected to the unique challenges of a military lifestyle, the propensity of junior service members to seek a divorce intensifies as they experience their marriage deviating from the expected result (Fowers et al., 1996).

C. OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH

Concerns about the marriage and divorce rates of young servicemembers are well documented among both military leaders and the DOD (Gomulka, 2010). Prior literature is abundant with research and analysis dedicated to identifying common themes and proposing treatment plans to address the rising divorce rate of this population. Research suggests that deployments, financial incentives, lack of maturity, and a culture that inadvertently promotes marriage contribute to the penchant of young service members to marry at a younger age than their civilian counterparts.

This research builds on past literature and identifies the many explanations for this phenomenon spread across multiple articles. It studies the problems through a holistic lens, examining why young service members marry early and divorce early in life and the trends associated with this phenomenon. This research analyzes secondary data obtained through surveys of junior service members in one of three groups: those who have never been married and never been divorced (NMND), those who are in a relationship and intend to marry in less than six months (ITM), and those who are divorced (Div). Survey questions include expectations for marital satisfaction, beliefs about the strength of the relationship, reasons for getting married and reasons for divorce, the perceived utility of premarital training at different relational stages, the desire to attend premarital training, and beliefs

about how one might have done things differently (asked of the Div group). The survey includes ranking scales to assess personal reasons for marriage and divorce, as well as measures of how these decisions affected respondents. The surveys for divorced service members allow us to compare their beliefs before marriage (reported retrospectively) to their views when their marriage was dissolved. The survey data is analyzed to evaluate common tenets of idealistic distortion, which may be exacerbated by military incentives that promote youthful marriage leading to an increased likelihood of divorce.

D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Primary Research Questions

- a. What are the individual and psychological factors that increase the likelihood of junior enlisted marriage?*
- b. What are the individual and psychological factors that lead to an increased rate of divorce within this population?*

2. Secondary Research Question

- a. Are DOD sanctioned programs effectively designed to treat this persistent problem in the junior enlisted ranks?*

E. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Beginning with an inductive approach to my research question, I will identify and review relevant, previously published research on this topic in the form of journal articles and technical reports. I will then use existing survey data administered by members of the Chaplain Corps to identify the psychological factors (beliefs and expectations) that contribute to early marriage and divorce. This research will allow me to identify critical themes such as deployments, financial incentives, military culture, and premarital training to generate hypotheses about how relational perspectives and beliefs contribute to the population's proclivity to marry at an early age. I will then identify trends and recognize gaps in the literature and examine the role of idealistic perspectives on the tendency to marry and divorce early in the junior service member's career.

From there, I intend to conduct a review of DOD-sanctioned premarital services and specific methodologies for counseling and treatment of service members that are available prior to marriage. Next, I will use this research to examine the utility of service-sponsored premarital curricula, including preventative and reactive approaches used when ministering to the population. Finally, I will conclude with recommendations for curricula based on the responses from the surveys to create informed premarital training that yields evidence-based results to educate the junior enlisted service member population.

F. ORGANIZATION

The remainder of this thesis will be organized as follows. Chapter II reviews prior research related to the marital proclivities of junior service members E-5 and below and the perceptions and beliefs which promote this population to marry at a higher rate than their civilian equivalents. Chapter III is devoted to the methodology and descriptive statistics of survey respondents. Chapter IV is dedicated to analyzing the survey data provided by junior service members. This data will be explored through the lenses of idealistic distortion, causes for marriage, causes for divorce, perception of premarital training, and the perspectives of the sample population who submitted them. Finally, Chapter V concentrates on the results of the surveys compared to themes discussed in the literature review and established treatment plans, including their methodologies and efficacy.

G. SUMMARY

This thesis analyzes the beliefs and expectations associated with junior service member marriage and divorce. It expands on previously published literature and identifies knowledge gaps. This thesis utilizes secondary survey data to understand this population's ideas of idealistic distortion, their reasons for marriage, their perception of premarital training, and broader proclivities to marry and divorce. It explores the aftereffects of divorce and degrading features of personnel readiness through physical and mental health concerns. It concludes with an examination of DOD-sponsored programs and their efficacy in being preventive.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Junior service members, E-5 and below, have a strong penchant for marrying at an earlier age and divorcing at a faster rate than their civilian equivalents. This situation has been studied from various perspectives to determine if the greedy institutions (spheres of life in constant competition to weaken other institutions) of the U.S. military and the covenant of marriage compete for dominance against the same population, leading to the unintended consequence of early marriage resulting in early divorce (Lundquist, 2007). With a finite amount of time, money, and mental bandwidth, the demands of married life and priorities of military service vie against one another in the domains of deployments, incentivized financial instruments, and military professional values. Prior studies have examined this through the lens of the stress hypothesis, idealistic distortion, and perverse incentives. The stress hypothesis considers variables unique to a military lifestyle and how these impact the marital satisfaction of servicemembers and their spouses. Idealistic distortion is the tendency to hold an overly idealistic perspective of married life that differs from reality, leading to rapid decreases in marital satisfaction. Perverse incentives are created when the military inadvertently creates incentives for marriage with unintended consequences that impact personnel readiness. The effect of these factors has been examined from the Vietnam era to the present day (Routon, 2016) to determine whether the unique features of military life create conditions that lead to higher rates of junior service member marriage and divorce. The advent of the Operation Iraqi Freedom/ Operation Enduring Freedom generation has created a renewed interest in the relationship between military service and the marital and divorce tendencies of the junior service member population (de Burgh et al., 2011).

A. STRESS HYPOTHESIS

The stress hypothesis accounts for characteristics of military service (military family demands, increased risk of injury and death, long working hours, frequent relocation, and deployment considerations) and considers these impacts on the military members' marital life (Routon, 2016). The stress hypothesis is a consideration from the

earliest parts of the recruiting process. The military recruits from a targeted population of young volunteers, with many coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Trail et al., 2015). This process works in conjunction with the stress hypothesis, entailing at least two components: selection from a population that is at a greater risk of divorce paired with the ongoing stress of military life. These unique stressors (though common in the military lifestyle) can diminish the expected gains and create unexpected losses in marital satisfaction, leading to increased marital strife and divorce (Pflieger et al., 2018). The problem is caused by the competing “greedy institutions” that pit the demanding stressors of military culture and lifestyle against the equally challenging stressors of youthful marriage (Lundquist, 2007). Research conducted by Hogan and Seifert (2010) suggests that the significant demands and stressors of military enlistment affect the vulnerability of young military couples. This hypothesis works in conjunction with studies by Negrusa et al. (2013), who note that the unexpected shock of military life (specifically caused by deployments) comes with additional stressors on this vulnerable population that have negative ramifications for marital satisfaction. According to Kelty et al. (2010), when the dual institutions of military and marriage vie for dominance, the larger, more demanding, and all-encompassing “military culture puts pressure on the military family structure” to force acquiescence and conformity. With the constant presence of military-specific stressors, the marital benefit for military couples becomes more negligible. A marriage that is not established on a solid and mature foundation becomes increasingly prone to dissolution.

A significant portion of the stress hypothesis refers to military deployments. Deployments have long been considered both a driver for early marriage and an agent of divorce. Prior literature suggests that the frequency of deployment versus the length of deployment is strongly linked with the divorce rate of junior service members (Arenstein, 2011). The type of deployment (combat versus routine) and subsequent mental hardships create additional stressors in a marital union to which the civilian population is not exposed. Research conducted by Negrusa et al. (2013) found that the frequency and point in time of the deployment related to increased levels of marital dissatisfaction and rising divorce rates. Specifically, this study found that during a time of war, couples experienced

additional emotional angst when one partner was deployed, especially if the couple held no prior expectation that their partner could be involved in combat operations. This was observed in a study of couples who had deployed pre-9-11 as well as during the Global War of Terror. Couples' optimistic expectations of no deployment were altered based on the national security posture of the United States, and couples lost marital stability with new and unanticipated stressors on their relationship, inviting the specter of marital dissolution (Negrusa et al., 2013). Upon return from deployment, service members are at increased risk for instances of substance abuse, depression, anger, and suicidal behavior (Wang et al., 2015). This combination can create irresolvable differences between spouses and contributes to the divorce rate of the junior service member populations (Pflieger et al., 2018).

B. PERVERSE INCENTIVES

A common theme within the literature focuses on military incentives for marriage through financial and quality of life measures, specifically, the increase in pay and allowances for married personnel versus single members (Ross et al., 2017). Financial incentives are aligned with basic allowance for housing (BAH), basic allowance for subsistence (BAS), and family separation pay (FSA) during deployments. These pay and allowances can be substantial monetary windfalls for junior enlisted members and represent significant increases in income (in some cases doubling servicemember's monthly compensation). However, by monetizing the decision to marry, this system may create perverse incentives for marriage, encouraging junior service members to marry before they are ready, leading to rising divorce rates (Lundquist & Xu, 2014).

In a contrary view, Karney et al. (2007) and Cadigan (2000) argue that the financial incentives instituted by the DOD act as agents to keep couples together and serve as a barrier to divorce. Cadigan (2000) identifies that the recruitment of vulnerable populations creates incentives to marry early to obtain the financial opportunity. Karney et al. (2007) postulate that the loss of money, stability, and quality of life for each spouse is not worth the perceived gains found in dissolution. By analyzing prior research and surveys by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), Karney et al. (2007) conclude that additional

pay from marriage and deployment provides concrete type benefits that counter the emotional costs captured under the stress hypothesis.

Research shows some consensus that the financial incentives act as agents to bring couples together, but that financial management creates discord within the marital unit, reducing the utility of the financial incentives. As enticing as these incentives may be, research by Ross et al. (2017) suggests that monetary incentives were generally inadequate to prevent partner hostility brought on by financial concerns. The stress caused by challenges with financial management results in discord through poor communication between partners and significant decreases in marital satisfaction. Existing clinical research (noted in this same study) found that one-third of couples seeking marital therapy listed financial concerns as a reason for marital dissatisfaction. The perverse incentives created by the military to galvanize young couples to marry may create unintended consequences of relational hostility brought about by financial management concerns.

C. IDEALISTIC DISTORTION

The study of rising divorce rates resulting from unrealistic marital expectations of service members has been examined through the lens of idealistic distortion (Fowers & Olson, 1993). Idealistic distortion involves the expectation that marriage will enhance one's life paired with the lack of acknowledgment of the realistic challenges of maintaining a healthy relationship. When the realities of married life sink in, the resulting disappointment is exacerbated by unexpected changes in circumstance (deployment, homesickness, financial concerns) and becomes magnified by the tendency of the service member and spouse to seek immediate resolution to the perceived problem through permanent dissolution.

When considering how idealistic distortion may contribute to future marital decline, multiple studies examine the relationship between expectations of marriage and marital typology. Fowers et al. (1993, 1996) developed a typology for classifying relationship quality and divorce risk among engaged couples to better understand the predictors of marital satisfaction. In one study (Fowers et al., 1996), engaged couples were categorized into one of four relationship types, vitalized, harmonious, traditional, and

conflicted based upon their responses to a battery of questionnaires. Couples who had high degrees of overall relational satisfaction and indicated that they were comfortable communicating emotions and problem solving with their partner were categorized as vitalized. Couples who scored moderately high on relationship and marital satisfaction and emphasized dyadic processes related to communication and intimate familiarity were categorized as harmonious. Couples who scored higher in stability and moral structure (i.e., children, parenting, social support, and religion) were classified as traditional couples. This category is best described by strengths in decision-making and future planning. The couples identified as having the most marital angst were categorized as conflicted couples. The conflicted couples reported dissatisfaction in their partner's habits, communication abilities, and personalities. In a two - to three-year follow-up, conflicted couples were found to have separated at three times the rate of the vitalized, two times the rate of the harmonious, and nearly three times the rate of the traditional couples. The harmonious couples (who put the most significant emphasis on relational satisfaction and personal processes) were twice as likely as the traditional couples to have gotten separated or divorced. In fact, the traditional couples were the least likely to separate or divorce compared to all types. The stability and moral structure of the traditional couples suggest that they valued these traits over the marital satisfaction ideals held by the vitalized and harmonious couples. Such pragmatism limited the negative effects of idealistic distortion: by not falling victim to positive illusion and unrealistic optimism about marriage, these couples created more enduring marital satisfaction.

When researching the marital inclinations and idealistic distortion of junior enlisted service members, couples follow similar clustering, with the early portion of the marriage falling in line with that of a traditional couple. However, even as pragmatism and relationship quality degrade, couples may drift toward the category of conflicted couple, increasing the likelihood of divorce due to variables unique in the military culture (Pflieger et al., 2018).

D. TRAINING CURRICULA

The aftereffects of divorce on service members are linked to an increased likelihood of substance abuse, mental health problems, and suicidal manifestations (Ruger et al., 2002). The Department of Defense has witnessed the repercussions of divorce on this population and responded with various sanctioned programs to address the rush to marriage and the detrimental results of divorce (Trail et al., 2015). A report commissioned by the Committee on the Well-Being of Military Families by Kizer et al. (2019) details findings and recommendations designed during the overhauled Family Readiness Planning in 2012. Their findings suggest that “evidence-based and evidence-informed interventions yielded more positive results” (p. 9) by targeting specific risk events (a couple’s poor problem-solving skills and inadequate conflict resolution) to prevent cross-over into other areas of the client’s life. The study found that the current Military Family Readiness System (MFRS) was siloed, and the services offered were fragmented, resulting in an inadequate framework of support. This study recommended a more dynamic approach grounded in “evidence-based and evidence-informed practices” (p. 11) to create a culture of learning and awareness.

Previous studies by the Chaplain Corps and published by Lloyd et al. (2015) had similarly examined this issue through the lens of preventative measures provided through services sponsored by the Navy and Marine Corps. A review of prior literature displayed a tendency to provide reactive and fragmented services that are detailed and critiqued by Kizer et al. (2019). Both papers suggest a targeted approach versus a holistic approach when confronting marital strife and the likelihood of divorce based on awareness, information, and evidence. The targeted approach spans individual service settings and attends to military culture, identity, values, and geographic location to incorporate perspective. A holistic approach is level across the services and fails to account for differences in service branch, location, and values. When examining the vulnerable populations of both members and spouses, the literature supports the idea that DOD sponsored services need to adopt multifaceted, targeted techniques, including treating the symptoms of early marriage and divorce (via educational programs) versus being reactive

agencies that provide services to distressed and divorced couples (Trail et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2015).

E. SUMMARY

Much research is dedicated to examining the marital tendencies and cycle of divorce for junior enlisted service members. This literature review concentrates on common themes of idealistic distortion, military culture and the impact of the stress hypothesis, perverse incentives, and existing curricula that has been established to make positive inroads in curbing these detrimental effects on military families.

The present research examines some of these same themes through an analysis of survey data from this population, which asked about young service members' beliefs and expectations for both marriage and divorce. In addition, this paper seeks to answer if military culture is an impediment to successful marriages for junior enlisted members and if these members find that they are incentivized to marry at a younger age without fully appreciating the gravity of that decision.

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III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the demographics of individuals surveyed, a description of the surveys used, and the data collection methodology. In addition, this chapter contains key questions asked in the surveys and a summary based on identified themes relevant to this paper. Survey questions were drafted from prior research on the topic by Lloyd et al. (2015); while many questions changed, there were some that were similar or identical to past survey instruments. Data collected by the Chaplain Corps was used for their purposes in refining premarital training curricula and provided for this thesis to analyze common themes considered dominant when examining the marriage and divorce proclivities of junior enlisted service members.

A. DATA

The Chaplain Corps collected the data utilized for this study from multiple units within the Fleet Marine Corps and the Navy. The sampled population was junior enlisted members E1-E5 on their first enlistment, under the age of 25. The surveys were administered to three subgroups: (1) service members who had never been married and never been divorced (NMND), (2) service members who intended to get married in the next six months or less (ITM), and (3) service members who had been married and were now divorced (Div). These junior enlisted Sailors and Marines were invited to participate in a survey investigating the relational behavior of junior service members, their perspective on marriage, feelings after divorce, and the perceived benefits of premarital training in the military. Chaplains administered surveys in individual and group settings at locations convenient to the respondents. All three surveys asked the respondents to give their gender, service branch, and rank. Tables 1 and 2 provide a breakdown of demographics for all surveys.

Table 1. Survey Respondents ($N = 512$) Broken Down by Gender and Service

Participants by Gender and Service	Male	Female	Marines	Navy
Intent to Marry in Six Months or Less group	95	66	91	70
Divorced group	55	56	71	40
Never Married Never Divorced group	132	108	145	95
Total	282	230	307	205

Table 2. Respondents by Rank

Participants by Rank	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5
Intent to Marry in Six Months or Less	6	26	72	44	15
Divorced	2	6	27	43	31
Never Married Never Divorced	6	38	125	57	15
Totals	14	70	223	144	61

I utilized a quantitative approach and synthesized the data to calculate aggregate totals of answers. The answers were categorized into common themes relating to both the surveys and the broader literature. These themes are compared between subgroups to analyze perceptions and tendencies of respondents to inform the hypothesis of the marital proclivities and divorce tendencies of junior enlisted service members.

B. SURVEY THEMES

Three versions of the survey were administered to the three subgroups, respectively. The three versions shared some common questions but also asked unique questions to each subgroup. Shared and unique questions for each subgroup will be visited later in this chapter. The surveys are presented in their entirety in the Appendix.

The surveys' primary questions sought to identify the individual and psychological factors that increase the likelihood of junior service members to marry, as well as the individual and psychological factors contributing to and resulting from divorce. In addition, the surveys provide indirect information pertaining to the secondary research questions, allowing us to infer how these factors influence physical and mental health, including substance abuse that may lead to psychological and physical health detriments, and the utility of premarital counseling/training. Consistent with the themes examined in the literature review, the surveys concentrated on the expected value of premarital training, idealistic distortion, pecuniary and quality of life incentives, and the military service culture that contributes to marriage and divorce.

C. EFFECTIVENESS OF PREMARITAL TRAINING

All three surveys asked questions about the perceived benefits of premarital training, and two of the surveys asked about the respondents' attendance of premarital training prior to marriage. The purpose of these questions was to assess whether provided answers differed among the respondent subgroups. For example, did divorced members see more utility to premarital training post-marriage than those who intended to marry in six months or less? Did the NMND subgroup believe first-term service members would benefit from premarital training more so than the ITM subgroup? Respondents' answers were compared against each subgroup to gauge the perceived utility of these sponsored premarital resources.

The question related to the past or planned attendance of premarital training differed slightly between the ITM and the Div subgroups. The planned attendance or past attendance of premarital training question had choices of (1) yes, (2) no, or (3) undecided. The Undecided option was exclusive to the ITM subgroup.

The Div and ITM subgroups were also asked their reasons for attending or not attending premarital training. The ITM subgroup was asked if their planned marriage would benefit from this training. If they answered *no*, respondents were asked for their reasoning, and could choose from options stating (1) our relationship is great and doesn't need to improve, (2) we already know each other well enough, or (3) we are not going to have any major relationship issues. If the ITM subgroup answered *yes* to the attendance of premarital training, they were then asked why they attended. They could choose from the following list: (1) it satisfies a family or church requirement, (2) it helps the prospective couple get to know one another better, (3) it develops conflict resolution skills, (4) it establishes clear expectations of marriage, (5) it refines the couples communication skills. The premarital training attendance question was also asked of the Div subgroup. If they had not attended premarital training, they were asked to provide a reason why. The answers reflected the same options as the ITM, but in the past tense (i.e., "Please indicate why you chose not to seek premarital training prior to marriage"). This was then followed with a question to ask the Div subgroup their thoughts of perceived value if they would have attended premarital training ("As you reflect on your previous marriage, how do you think your relationship would have benefited from premarital counseling?"). The answers reflected the same as the ITM *yes* responses, but in the past tense (i.e., "It would have satisfied the requirements of our family/church").

The purpose of analyzing the responses to the premarital training questions between each group is to establish linkages between beliefs about premarital training and the theme of idealistic distortion. In addition, these questions will assess the degree of perceived utility of premarital training, including whether perceived utility differs among the three subgroups.

D. IDEALISTIC DISTORTION

All three surveys asked respondents to weigh the expected benefits of marriage. This data is used to test idealistic distortion. The weighted responses can be used to identify overly optimistic, optimistic, or realistic beliefs about the benefits of marriage. The question asked respondents to choose a statement that best reflects their expectations of

marriage. Respondents could choose from a list of (1) marriage will be effortless and make me happy all of the time (overly optimistic), (2) marriage will take some effort but make me happy most of the time (optimistic), (3) marriage will require a lot of hard work and there will be extended periods of unhappiness, but in the long run, marriage will bring me happiness (realistic). I plan to compare answers across respondent subgroups to test whether expectations of marriage systematically differ for those intending to marry, those who have married and divorced, and those who are not currently in a relationship. A subquestion directly ties into the emotional state of the Div subgroup who were asked their experience of divorce and the level of emotional pain it caused. The Div subgroup could choose from a list of (1) a very painful event, (2) a painful event, (3) a somewhat painful event, (4) not painful at all. Using this, I can analyze how the pain of divorce relates to individuals' expectations of marriage and any connection with the attendance (or non-attendance) in premarital training.

E. REASONS FOR MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

The ITM and the Div subgroup questionnaires give insight into how military culture, pecuniary, and quality of life incentives may affect junior enlisted servicemember marriage and divorce tendencies. Respondents were asked to list their top three reasons for getting married and (in the case of the divorced subgroup) why the marriage ended. As a complement to this question, the Div subgroup was asked to report on why their marriage failed by selecting from a list of both common and military-specific reasons.

When asked to list the top three reasons for getting married, the ITM could choose from (1) we are in love and want to spend our lives together, (2) getting married will get me off the ship or out of the barracks, and away from work, (3) getting married will provide my significant other with health benefits they need, (4) my significant other does not live locally; marriage will allow us to live closer together, (5) getting married will benefit me and my significant other financially, (6) I am ready to get married because I am a Marine or Sailor, capable of taking on adult responsibilities like marriage, (7) we are going to have a child together, (8) I am going to deploy and want to make sure my significant other is cared for if something were to happen to me. Answers (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), and (8) tie into

the unique pecuniary and quality of life incentives and variables specific to military life. Answer (6) ties directly into the military culture that appears to drive the junior enlisted tendencies towards marriage based on a desire to transition into adulthood and a reliance on security and stability encouraged by military service. Answers (1) and (7) tap into emotional and social constructs that are traditional reasons for marriage.

When asked to list the top three reasons why their marriage failed, the Div subgroup could choose from a list of: (1) marriage was too much work, (2) we spent too much time apart due to work/deployment, (3) marriage did not bring the financial gain that we thought it would, (4) we were too young and immature to be married, (5) we didn't take the time to really get to know each other before we got married, (6) financial problems, (7) our values/beliefs were just too different, (8) one of us was unfaithful or (9) my spouse or I had a substance abuse problem. Only (2) in the context of deployment displays a unique military trait. However, the remaining answers will be compared to answers from the ITM responses on why they want to get married to understand if initial junior enlisted expected marital gains morph into negative results leading to marital dissolution.

The final question in the Div subgroup survey asks respondents to reflect on the divorce experience and what they would have done differently. The respondents could choose three answers (ranked by preference). Available answers were that couples should have (1) taken more time to get to know fiancée prior to marriage, (2) received premarital training, (3) waited until I was older, (4) waited to marry until after deployment, (5) received marriage counseling while we were married, (6) stayed married for the sake of our children, (7) taken more time to get to know my partner before physical intimacy, (8) taken more time to ensure similarity of values/beliefs, (9) not gotten married because my spouse was pregnant. Answers (2) and (5) relate to the secondary question of this research and tie to the value of premarital training and its efficacy for making an educated and informed decision. Answer (4) deals with the military uniqueness of deployment. Responses (1), (3), (6), (7), (8), and (9) are not unique to military life, but they will inform the hypothesis that military culture promotes rapid adult decisions in a targeted population that fails to differentiate between professional military decision-making requirements and personal life decisions that are sometimes at odds with one another.

F. ANALYSIS BETWEEN SURVEYS

When possible, I compared responses to survey questions between subgroups to determine any similarities and differences in answers based on present relational status. The themes to be considered will include the utility of premarital training at all stages of the relationship, intent to receive premarital training, perceived values of premarital training, expectations of marriage, reasons to get married, reasons for divorce, and, in the case of the Div subgroup, things to do differently. These answers inform the primary and secondary questions, concentrating on themes identified in the literature review.

G. DATA RESTRICTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this thesis is to identify trends relating to the propensity of junior service members to marry at a younger age and divorce at a faster rate than their civilian equivalents. Many of the primary findings from this thesis will be derived from the survey results. Because the survey questions and administration were developed by members of the Navy Chaplain Corps and administered around the globe, any recording errors or omitted answers cannot be revisited. The respondent population is voluntary and limited by age, rank, and time in service. Many survey questions offered a response option of OTHER; these answers were omitted from the aggregate results.

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IV. ANALYSIS

A. SURVEY TOTALS

The Chaplain Corps surveyed 512 service members ranked E1-E5 from the Navy and Marine Corps. The respondents belonged to one of three subgroups: NMND, ITM, and Div. This analysis will proceed in three steps. First, I will examine survey responses broken down according to subgroup, assessed by percentages to identify trends amongst responses. Second, the data will be compared between subgroups related to common themes specific to this research. Topics specifically analyzed are idealistic distortion and the biases established before marriage, motivations to marry at a young age in the military, motivations not to marry, things the divorced service members believe they could have done differently, and the perceived value of premarital training. Last, the analysis will explore additional research into the premarital training programs instituted by the services to educate their populations before marriage.

B. ANALYSIS BY SUBGROUP

1. Intent to Marry in Six Months or Less

This group consists of 161 respondents (95 male and 66 females), with 69% of respondents clustered within the E3 to E4 ranks. When asked about the length of their relationship leading to an intention to marry, 14% answered less than six months, 24% answered 7–12 months, 22% answered 13–18 months, 14% answered 19–24 months, 8% answered 25–36 months, and 19% answered greater than 36 months. Thus, the majority of respondents (60%) indicated a relationship length of 18 months or less.

When questioned on their expectations of marriage, 54% of participants in this subgroup believed that marriage would require a significant amount of work with periods of dissatisfaction but that the future benefits would bring greater personal happiness; 37% thought that marriage would take some effort but that they'd be happy most of the time, and 7% believed that marriage was effortless, and they'd be happy all the time. There was no significant difference between males' and females' expectations.

When asked about reasons to get married, the most common reason (indicated by 31% of respondents) was that they were in love and wanted to spend their lives together. The second most common reason was the perspective of making adult decisions (16%), followed by a tie at 12% between a desire to be geographically co-located and recognition of financial benefits. Female respondents prioritized making adult decisions as their second most important reason to get married (20%) and recognized financial benefits as a third reason (16%). Male respondents prioritized equally a desire to be geographically co-located with their prospective spouse (13%) and make adult decisions.

Among ITM participants, only 39% planned on seeking premarital training. Of the remaining respondents, 35% were undecided, and 26% were opposed. When analyzing by gender, there was no substantive difference between males and females. Interestingly, although slightly more than one-third of participants indicated an intention to seek training, a full 70% of respondents in this subgroup believed there was a benefit to premarital training. The 70% positive response to the benefit of premarital training was held roughly equally by males and females. Among respondents declining premarital training, the most common reason for doing so was that they knew each other well enough and did not believe premarital training was necessary (42%). The second most common reason was a belief that the relationship was great and there was no need for improvement (27%). Among respondents indicating an intention to seek premarital training, the most common reason was establishing expectations before marriage (29%), followed by a desire to develop conflict resolution skills (22%) and refine communication skills (19%).

The general theme for this subgroup was familiarity and improved communication regardless of intentions to seek premarital training. For those respondents opting out of premarital training, there was a belief that enough familiarity existed and would lead to limited or diminished gains. For those electing for premarital training, there was a desire to increase understanding and develop communication skills. This suggests that preference for premarital training within this subgroup seemed to be a function of perceived familiarity.

2. Divorced

This group consists of 111 respondents (55 males and 56 females), with 67% of these respondents clustered in the E4–E5 ranks from this population. When asked about the length of the relationship (from the time they started dating until the time they decided to file for divorce), 30% answered greater than 36-months, 15% answered 25–36 months, 20% answered 19–24 months, 15% answered 13–18 months, 12% answered 7–12 months and 8% answered less than six months. Thus, the length of relationship question showed nearly 70% of respondents indicating a relationship length less than three years, from dating through divorce.

When questioned about the primary reason for divorce, 21% of respondents believed that they were too young and immature to be married; 16% blamed infidelity in the relationship; and 15% blamed an inability to get to know one another before getting married. There was no substantive difference between rankings by gender.

When asked about their expectations of marriage, 46% of this subgroup answered that they expected marriage would require a lot of hard work but with long-term positive gains; 38% of respondents believed that marriage would take some effort, but they would have been happy most of the time; and 16% believed marriage would require no effort, and they'd always be happy. Breaking these patterns down by gender, 22% of male respondents and 11% of female respondents thought marriage would be effortless, and they'd be happy all the time; 42% of male respondents and 34% of female respondents believed marriage would take some effort, but they'd be happy most of the time; finally, 36% of male respondents and 55% of female responses believed marriage would take a lot of hard work but with long term positive effects. These data points suggest that the Div subgroup displayed a realistic viewpoint of marriage and the work it would require but maintained a higher percentage of idealism (16%) that marriage would be an effortless campaign after going through the divorce experience. The idealistic distortion was notably higher when compared by gender, indicating that male respondents (22% and 42%) were more inclined to view marriage through an idealistic lens than female respondents (11% and 34%).

One of the survey questions asked about the pain of going through divorce. Respondents selected one of four responses: “very painful,” “painful,” “somewhat painful,” and “not painful.” From the respondents, 40% found divorce to be a “very painful” event. Responses followed sequentially in order, with 28% finding it “painful,” 21% claiming it “somewhat painful,” and 12% finding it “not painful.” These rankings stayed consistent when compared by gender except in the “painful” category, where 34% of female respondents answered that divorce was “painful” and 18% indicated it was “somewhat painful.” Males indicated that divorce was “somewhat painful” at 24% and “painful” at 22%, suggesting that males found divorce slightly less painful than females.

The Div subgroup was also asked if they had participated in premarital training before marriage. From the respondents, 69% of the Div subgroup had not attended premarital training before marriage, and 31% had. When compared by gender, 36% of divorced males had undergone premarital training from this group, and 64% had not, whereas 75% of divorced females had undergone premarital training, and 25% had not. This data point showed that divorced females were more than twice as likely as males to attend premarital training.

When questioned why they had elected not to participate in premarital training, the top answer was a belief that their relationship had been great and there was no need for improvement (36%). The following most popular answer was a belief that they already knew each other well enough (32%). Both responses suggest that familiarity was the theme for non-attendance and was consistent across genders.

When the Div subgroup was asked if they would have done anything differently, respondents prioritized taking more time to increase familiarity before marriage (22%). The second most common answer was waiting until they were older before getting married (21%). The third most selected response was taking more time to ensure similarity of values (15%). The only difference between genders was males prioritized waiting until they were older (24%) while women prioritized taking more time to get to know their fiancé (23%). The theme by the Div subgroup for any actions they may have changed was delaying marriage until the couple had established more familiarity with one another.

3. Never Married and Never Divorced

This group consisted of 240 respondents (132 males and 108 females), with 76% of respondents clustered within the E3 to E4 ranks. When asked why they had never gotten married, 32% answered that they were waiting to find the right partner. The subsequent most selected response was a belief that they were too young (21%), followed by the perspective that the current timing in their lives was not appropriate (20%).

The NMND subgroup saw an overwhelming benefit to premarital training, with 92% of respondents believing there was a benefit to premarital training and only 8% believing there was no benefit. When asked about their expectation of marriage, 65% believed that marriage was difficult but that there was a long-term benefit; 32% thought that marriage would take some effort but would generally provide happiness; and only 3% believed that marriage would be effortless and there was infinite happiness to be had. These data points suggest a continued realism to the challenges of marriage and a positive perception of the utility of premarital training. There was no substantial difference in the expectations of marriage between genders.

C. VULNERABLE POPULATION AND MILITARY CULTURE

This research explicitly targets E1-E5 servicemembers on their first enlistment to better understand this population's tendency toward early marriage and divorce. Respondents in each subgroup generally clustered within similar ranks with similar lengths of relationships. The ITM subgroup was dominated by E-3 and E-4s, who made up 70% of respondents. This group had similar clustering in relationship length, with 60% answering that their relationship was shorter than 18 months. The Div subgroup was also asked about their rank and length of the relationship before the divorce. The Div subgroup was dominated by the E-4 respondents at 39%, with the E-3 and E-5 populations encompassing 24% and 28%, respectively. Among the Div subgroup, 30% answered that the length of the relationship was greater than 36 months from the inception of the relationship until the decision to divorce. The second highest percentage was 20% of respondents answering that the length of the relationship was 19–24 months.

Among the surveyed population, the E3-E4 ranks were the most likely to want to get married. This population generally has been in the military for less than two years and traditionally falls between 20 and 22 years old. Since most respondents indicated a relationship length of less than 18 months, it is reasonable to infer that couples met during the service members' tour of duty rather than a pre-existing relationship before service began. This analysis reinforces the vulnerable population hypothesis introduced in the literature review that young service members are targeted for military recruitment and more susceptible to early marriage within a military culture that promotes rapid adult decision-making. The adult decision-making is manifested into a propensity to marry earlier and achieve a rapid transition into maturity through the covenant of adult decisions (i.e., marriage).

The Div data set suggests that divorce was most prevalent among the most senior respondents. This population is dominated by the E-4 and E-5 ranks. Generally, these individuals have been in the military longer than three years. Within this population, most respondents indicated a relationship length greater than 25 months, suggesting that service members dated and married early on in their careers before rapidly making the decision to terminate the marriage before their first enlistment ends. This data reinforces the hypothesis of early marriage and rapidly deteriorating relationships concluding in divorce. The seniority of the rank further amplifies that the first term enlistee population will marry at an earlier age than is typical and divorce at a faster rate. This is supported by the percentage of ITM respondents and follows that those respondents are prone to divorce as their careers progress into the E-4 and E-5 paygrades.

D. IDEALISTIC DISTORTION

The primary objective of this research project is to assess the individual and psychological factors that increase the likelihood of junior enlisted marriage and divorce. Within the ITM survey, the respondents were directly asked why they were getting married and their expectations of marriage. Of this population, 31% answered that they were in love and wanted to spend the rest of their lives together, 16% responded that they were ready to make an adult decision, and 12% of respondents said they desired to live closer

together and/or achieve financial benefits. The respondents were also asked about the expectations of marriage. 54% of the population endorsed a realistic perspective that marriage would require a lot of hard work with extended periods of unhappiness, expecting there would be positive long-term results; 37% answered that marriage would take some work but that they'd be happy most of the time, and 7% answered that marriage would be effortless and that they'd always be happy. When assessing these responses, the idealistic distortion of this population does not appear to be a root cause for marriage. Instead, respondents seem fairly realistic in their approach to marriage. A minority of the respondents exhibited idealistic distortion with a preconceived belief that marriage would be an effortless event.

This same question was also asked the Div and NMND subgroups as to their expectations of marriage. The NMND subgroup was the most realistic, with 64% answering that marriage would be a lot of hard work, with extended periods of unhappiness, but yield long-term positive benefits. The Div subgroup was the least realistic, with 46% believing the same. However, as the answers became more idealistic, the percentages rose for the divorced respondents, expressing an increased positive illusion. When queried if marriage will take some effort but create happiness most of the time, 38% of Div respondents agreed compared to 32% of the NMND. When asked if marriage would be effortless and make them happy all the time, 16% of divorced individuals believe that, compared to 3% of NMND respondents. The increasing percentages of divorced members agreeing that marriage is effortless lent credence to the notion that idealistic distortion is more apparent in divorced members than in other respondent categories. The level of realism was high for all populations, but the level of idealistic distortion was highest in the divorced population as if they hadn't learned from prior relational experiences. Figure 1 illustrates the findings.

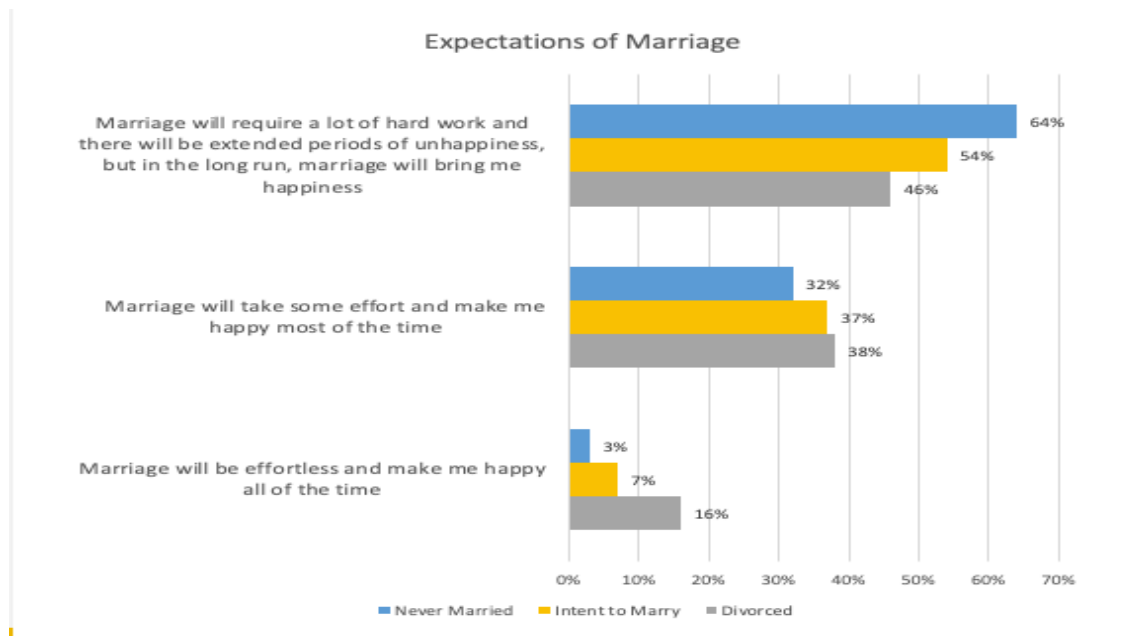


Figure 1. Expectations of Marriage by Respondents

E. REASONS FOR MARRIAGE VERSUS DIVORCE

The primary questions this thesis hopes to address are the overarching reasons that junior servicemembers get married earlier than their civilian equivalents and then divorce at an increased rate. The questions related to the expectations of marriage displayed overwhelming realism amongst respondents who believed that marriage is challenging. It also showed that (aside from love) the driver for marriage was a desire to make adult decisions. The military culture drives the junior service member to make daily rapid and adaptive adult decisions relating to their profession. These same habits naturally seep into the personal life of service members when making relational decisions. When the Div subgroup was asked what caused the end of their marriage, the most common answers were that they were too young and immature to be married (20%); that one individual in the marriage was unfaithful (16%); and that the couple did not take time to get to know each other (14%). The survey responses suggest that the desire to make an adult decision at a younger age was later recognized by divorced participants as premature and detrimental to marital success. The divorced service members appeared to reflect on their marriage and realize that immaturity was the dominant cause for divorce. Immaturity was captured in all

three answers either directly or indirectly by limited communication skills before marriage or infidelity in part by one member. Notably, there was little mention of financial motivations (6%) when reflecting on reasons for divorce. Figure 2 depicts the breakdown of divorced members and their reasons for ending their marriage.

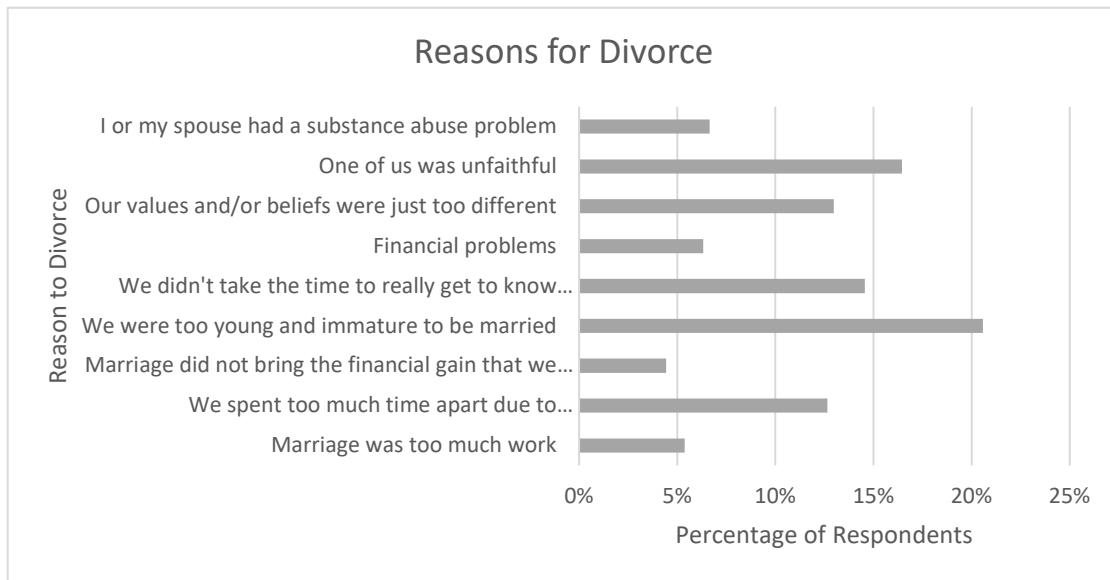


Figure 2. Reasons for Divorce by Divorced Respondents

F. CASE FOR PREMARITAL TRAINING

The secondary purpose of this paper is to analyze the efficacy of DOD-sanctioned programs in addressing the marital proclivities of junior enlisted service members, which leads to increased divorce rates. One proposed solution to this problem is preventative premarital training curricula to inhibit junior enlisted service members from making life-altering decisions from an immature and naïve vantage point. This can be examined through the respondents' answers to their feelings after going through a divorce and the utilization of premarital training.

The Div subgroup was asked about how they rated the experience. They could choose from “very painful,” “painful,” “somewhat painful,” “not painful,” or decline to answer. Most participants (40%) of the population answered that divorce was a “very painful” experience. The second highest was “painful” at 28%, and the third-highest was

“somewhat painful” at 21%. The findings from this question are not surprising as the experience of divorce has been compared to the experience of a loved one passing (Lloyd et al., 2015).

We compared the experiences of divorce for individuals who did versus did not participate in premarital training. Surprisingly, the experience of divorce was similar for both groups, with roughly two-thirds of individuals indicating the experience was “painful” or “very painful.” Table 3 summarizes the findings.

Table 3. Experience of Divorce by Premarital Training Attendance

Experience of divorce was:	Very painful	Painful	Somewhat painful	Not painful
No training group (n = 77)	27 (35%)	25 (32%)	18 (25%)	6 (8%)
Training group (n =34)	17 (50%)	6 (18%)	5 (15%)	6 (18%)

The findings of this question were surprising, as they showed little effect of premarital training on the emotional feeling of respondents. In both cases, the “very painful” and “painful” answers accounted for 67–68% of respondents. Thus, it appears that premarital training had little discernable impact on the experiences of divorce among junior service members.

These findings show that divorce is a significant emotional event in the lives of junior enlisted service members. Curbing these marital proclivities requires a mechanism to provide better information to this population about the realities of marriage. This furthers the argument for developing a preventative premarital curriculum designed to educate this population to reduce the number of junior service members who may marry and be more susceptible to divorce based on immature decision-making. When all three subgroups were asked about the value of premarital training, it was overwhelmingly positive; however, the value of premarital training nonetheless differed by type of respondents. The NMND subgroup overwhelmingly believed that first-term enlisted service members would benefit from premarital training, with 92% agreeing and 8% disagreeing. By comparison, 70% of

the ITM subgroup believed there was a benefit to premarital training even though only 39% of this population planned on attending. Finally, only 31% of the Div subgroup had undergone premarital counseling, with the top reason for those who opted out being “they believed the relationship is great and we didn’t need it.” Yet when asked how they believed their relationship may have benefited from premarital training before divorce, the top answer in this subgroup was “it would have given us clear expectations going into marriage.” These data points suggest that all three respondent groups recognize the benefit of premarital training but that NMND was particularly likely to perceive value. Still, there was a reluctance to seek training from the segment that arguably needs it most: those intending to get married in the next six months.

G. SUMMARY

Familiarity with one’s partner was a consistent theme within the respondents’ answers. For the ITM subgroup, familiarity was a driving factor to forego premarital training. This contrasted sharply with the Div subgroup, who felt that familiarity had been lacking when they had decided to get married. The Div respondents thought, in hindsight, that they were generally too young and immature to get married. However, the ITM subgroup seemingly could not wait to make adult decisions and make the transition into married life. This stands in comparison to the NMND subgroup, who seemed split between waiting to find the right partner and recognizing that they may be too young to make the type of emotional decision that is marriage.

Nearly all respondents supported premarital training. However, it was generally not utilized by the different subgroups. The curriculum of premarital training is designed to inform service members about the considerations associated with marriage while being an active-duty service member. Thus, the value of premarital training was acknowledged by our respondents, but its utility suffers from not meeting the targeted population.

None of the subgroups displayed a marked tendency for idealistic distortion. Ironically, they predominantly offered realistic perspectives of marriage. This is surprising as servicemembers do not want to wait to get married (i.e., make an adult decision), despite deciding not to attend premarital training and accepting that marriage is an incredibly

challenging ordeal. Common responses indicate a desire to establish (or a belief in) familiarity with their spouse and regrets for not establishing that familiarity as a cornerstone before getting married if the union dissolves.

V. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

A. RESULTS

This research conducted a cross-sectional study of the variables contributing to the increased likelihood of junior enlisted active-duty service members to marry at a younger age than their civilian counterparts and subsequently divorce at an increased rate. This research was conducted by reviewing past literature examining this phenomenon and analyzing existing data collected from junior enlisted Marines and Sailors, E5 and below on their first enlistment.

The results were inconsistent with some themes in the literature. Lundquist & Xu (2014) credit pecuniary incentives as a driver of early marriage, and Ross et al. (2017) credit financial management as a component of divorce. The data did not strongly support either finding. Financial considerations were typically one of the lower weighted reasons by ITM (All) at (12%) and Div (6%) when choosing to divorce. Female respondents from ITM put more emphasis on financial considerations than male respondents, with 16% acknowledging its importance (weighting it third most answered) as opposed to males (9%), who ranked it near the bottom. However, quality of life improvements were considerations for the ITM subgroup. The third most popular answer (12%) for this subgroup was a desire to be geographically closer. Further down in the weighting (6%) was a desire not to live either on ship or in the barracks. This data suggests that quality of life improvements is more of a consideration for junior enlisted service members when considering the decision to marry than financial incentives.

Prior research also indicated that deployments were predictive of divorce. Negrusa et al. (2013) argue that deployments have a startling effect on the tendencies of junior service members to get married early and subsequently divorce their spouse. Again, the results did not support deployment as a top consideration for either choice. In fact, only 5% of ITM respondents had deployment listed as a reason, and 13% of the Div subgroup considered deployments as a leading cause for their marriage's termination. With such a junior population, it is possible that deployment experience is limited, suggesting it is an

unreliable measure to determine marital proclivity and divorce tendencies in this sample. Longitudinal research with a more senior population would provide granularity into whether deployment was a predictive measure for junior enlisted marriage and divorce.

The data did support the idea that military culture affects the marital tendencies of junior enlisted members. The ITM answered that making an adult decision (16%) was a key reason for marriage, while the Div subgroup indicated that they were too young and immature to get married (21%). The desire to make this rapid transition into adulthood is supported by Lundquist (2007) and reflective of prior research that explored the impact of military culture, which promotes the transition into adulthood, which can seep into the personal lives of its members.

Another topic of interest was the role of idealistic distortion among subgroups when examining their expectations of marriage. The data did not support overwhelming idealistic distortion by any subgroup. In fact, most respondents were realistic when considering their personal perspective of marriage. The surprising result was that only a small minority of each subgroup indicated an overly idealistic expectation of marriage. From this group, the data showed that the Div subgroup displays the most idealistic expectation of marriage (16%) despite a relational status that would suggest otherwise.

Premarital training was a common concentration of the survey. All three subgroups (ITM, NMND, and Div) overwhelmingly recognized the value of premarital training, and still, the ITM subgroup was reluctant to attend, and the Div subgroup mostly did not. The Div subgroup acknowledged that the benefits of premarital training would have aided in developing communication and conflict resolution skills while strengthening perspectives of familiarity with their past spouse (11%). Contrast this with the ITM subgroup who were overall reluctant to attend premarital training citing their perception of an already existing strong familiarity with their spouse and a belief that the relationship was strong enough to diminish the expected gains of training (26%). The theme of premarital training and its importance in educating the ITM population can be deduced from the contrasting responses. The top reasons for ITM to choose to marry at a young age was love for their prospective spouse (31%) and a desire to make adult decisions (16%). By comparison, the top reasons for divorce were that they were too young and immature when they married

(21%) and failed to take enough time to get to know one another (15%). This leads to the question of whether a preventative premarital training curriculum can fill the maturity gaps to promote more adult decision-making among junior service members.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Common within all prior research into the marital and divorce tendencies of junior enlisted service members is a recognition of the need to provide social support resources in the form of premarital training or marital counseling. Prior research that disagreed with the hypothesis of rising divorce rates of junior enlisted members nonetheless acknowledges that there is a penchant for this population to marry earlier than their civilian counterparts (Karney et al., 2007). This aligned with other research recognizing that preventative measures educating the target population on the challenges of marriage in the military would have positive effects on both the service members and the mission of the DOD (Kizer et al., 2019).

Research conducted by the Chaplain Corps and detailed in the paper by Lloyd et al. (2015) proves fertile ground for developing preventative curricula that serves as an educational tool for junior enlisted service members. The Chaplain Corps program (known as iRelate) recognizes the detriments to readiness that early marriage and divorce have on the DOD mission. This curriculum is broken down into three classes (awareness, training, and enrichment; Lloyd et al., 2015), targeting E-5 and below service members, and provides evidence-based solutions to promote realism in junior enlisted marriage. The iRelate program clarifies expectations about the effect of military culture on the relational patterns of the most vulnerable population in the services, and the curriculum targets the different relational stages of the junior enlisted service member to provide preventative and informative services. The program supports an end state of reducing junior enlisted service member divorce by educating personnel prior to marriage. Additionally, the iRelate program appears to be a starting point to address family readiness issues recognized in the report commissioned by the Committee on the Well-Being of Military Families by Kizer et al. (2019). The iRelate program is preventative in nature, targets the entire spectrum of junior service members in the Navy and Marine Corps, and supports a proactive approach that past research has argued is vital for the DOD institution (Lloyd et al., 2015).

Given the consensus that junior enlisted service members marry earlier than their civilian counterparts, the desire and need of the DOD to invest in curricula to address this seems appropriate. Additional research into the divorce tendencies of this population would reinforce the continued design of curricula to promote mature and healthy marital relations in this population and temper divorce tendencies. The importance of healthy relationships is tantamount to the improved force posture and readiness of the military services. Investing in our service members' personal lives through these social programs may reap the rewards in the professional and force posture of our nation's military for the next conflict.

APPENDIX

A. NEVER MARRIED / NEVER DIVORCED SURVEY

NSP1754.02

Marine/Sailor – Never Married/ Never Divorced

Thank you for agreeing to take our short survey. The information you provide will help the Navy Chaplain community better understand and serve young Marines and Sailors. We are looking into the marriage and divorce beliefs of E1-E5 Active Duty Marines and Sailors. Please answer these questions honestly and circle only one response, unless otherwise noted. Your answers will remain anonymous. Thank you again!

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT

Authority to request this information is granted under 5 U.S.C. 301, Departmental Regulations; 10 U.S.C. 5031 and 5032. License to administer this survey is granted per OPNAVINST 5300.8C.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this survey is to collect information about the marriage and divorce beliefs of E1-E5 Active Duty Sailors and Marines. The data will be utilized with interview and observation data to inform program offerings and program evaluations.

ROUTINE USES: The information provided in this survey will be analyzed by the Naval Postgraduate School, the Navy Chaplain Community and OPNAV N1. Results will be presented in summary form only.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All responses will be anonymous. Information you provide will be statistically summarized with the responses of others and will not be attributable to any single individual.

PARTICIPATION: Completion of this questionnaire is entirely voluntary. Failure to respond to any of the questions will NOT result in any penalties except possible lack of representation of your views in the final results and outcomes.

1. What is your current relationship status? (Circle **ALL** that apply.)
 - a. Single
 - b. Dating
 - c. Engaged
 - d. Widowed
 - e. If you are married, PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
 - f. If you are divorced, PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
2. Are you 25 years old or **YOUNGER**?
 - a. No. If your answer is "no," PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
 - b. Yes. If your answer is "yes," please continue to QUESTION #2.
3. What is your rank?
 - a. E-1
 - b. E-2
 - c. E-3
 - d. E-4
 - e. E-5

If you are above the rank of E-5, PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
4. Please indicate your gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
5. What type of unit are you assigned to? (Circle **ONLY** one.)
 - a. Cruiser, DDG, or CVN
 - b. LSD, LPD, LHA, or LHD
 - c. Navy Air
 - d. USMC Combat Logistics Battalion/Regiment
 - e. Marine Aircraft Squadron/Group
 - f. USMC Infantry, Artillery, L.A.R. or A.A.V. Battalion/Regiment

Other unit **NOT** listed above: _____

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

6. Do you think that a first-term Marine or Sailor who plans to get married would benefit from pre-marital counseling/training before they get married?
- a. Yes b. No
7. Which one of the following statements best reflects your expectation of marriage? (Circle **ONLY** one.)
- a. Marriage will be effortless and make me happy all of the time.
- b. Marriage will take some effort and make me happy most of the time.
- c. Marriage will require a lot of hard work and there will be extended periods of unhappiness, but, in the long run, marriage will bring me happiness.
8. As a young Marine or Sailor who has not gotten married or divorced before the age of 25, please indicate the reasons you have chosen not to marry. (Circle **ALL** that apply.)
- a. Waiting to find the right partner
- b. Timing hasn't been right
- c. Want to wait until older/too young right now
- d. Don't want to be in a committed relationship
- e. Not financially ready for marriage
- f. Other reason(s) **NOT** listed above:

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY TO THE CHAPLAIN. THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

B. INTENTION TO MARRY IN SIX MONTHS OR LESS SURVEY

NSP1754.04

Marine/Sailor – Intention to Marry

Thank you for agreeing to take our short survey. The information you provide will help the Navy Chaplain community better understand and serve young Marines and Sailors. We are looking into the marriage and divorce beliefs of E1-E5 Active Duty Marines and Sailors. Please answer these questions honestly and circle only one response, unless otherwise noted. Your answers will remain anonymous. Thank you again!

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT

Authority to request this information is granted under 5 U.S.C. 301, Departmental Regulations; 10 U.S.C. 5031 and 5032. License to administer this survey is granted per OPNAVINST 5300.8C.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this survey is to collect information about the marriage and divorce beliefs of E1-E5 Active Duty Sailors and Marines. The data will be utilized with interview and observation data to inform program offerings and program evaluations.

ROUTINE USES: The information provided in this survey will be analyzed by the Naval Postgraduate School, the Navy Chaplain Community and OPNAV N1. Results will be presented in summary form only.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All responses will be anonymous. Information you provide will be statistically summarized with the responses of others and will not be attributable to any single individual.

PARTICIPATION: Completion of this questionnaire is entirely voluntary. Failure to respond to any of the questions will NOT result in any penalties except possible lack of representation of your views in the final results and outcomes.

1. Are you in a committed relationship in which you plan to get married in the next **SIX** months?
 - a. No. If your answer is "no," PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
 - b. Yes. If your answer is "yes," please continue to QUESTION #2.
 - c.
2. Are you 25 years old or **YOUNGER**?
 - a. No. If your answer is "no," PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
 - b. Yes. If your answer is "yes," please continue to QUESTION #3.
3. What is your rank?
 - a. E-1 b. E-2 c. E-3 d. E-4 e. E-5If you are above the rank of E-5, PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
4. Please indicate your gender:
 - a. Male b. Female
5. What type of unit are you assigned to? (Circle **ONLY** one.)
 - a. Cruiser, DDG, or CVN
 - b. LSD, LPD, LHA, or LHD
 - c. Navy Air
 - d. USMC Combat Logistics Battalion/Regiment
 - e. Marine Aircraft Squadron/Group
 - f. USMC Infantry, Artillery, L.A.R. or A.A.V. Battalion/RegimentOther unit **NOT** listed above: _____

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

6. How long have you been in the relationship with the partner you are planning to marry?
- Less than 6 months
 - 7 to 12 months
 - 13 to 18 months
 - 19 to 24 months
 - 25 to 36 months
 - Longer than 36 months
7. Are you currently in or planning to get pre-marital counseling/training prior to getting married?
- Yes
 - No
 - Undecided
8. Do you think that your relationship could benefit from pre-marital counseling/training before marriage?
- Yes. If your answer is "yes," please **SKIP** QUESTION #9 and continue to QUESTION #10.
 - No. If your answer is "no," please continue to QUESTION #9.
9. If you answered "No" to QUESTION #8, which of the following statements best reflects why you do **NOT** think you need pre-marital training? (Circle **ALL** that apply.)
- Our relationship is already great and doesn't need to improve.
 - We already know each other really well.
 - We're **NOT** going to have any major relationship problems in the future.
 - Other reason(s) **NOT** listed above: _____
-
10. Please explain why your relationship could benefit from pre-marital counseling/training. (Circle **ALL** that apply.)
- It will satisfy the requirement of our family/church.
 - We (or one of us) want to get to know each other even better before getting married.
 - We (or one of us) wants to have clear expectations going into marriage.
 - We (or one of us) wants to develop conflict resolution skills.
 - We (or one of us) wants to refine our communication skills.
 - Other reason(s) **NOT** listed above: _____
-
11. Which one of the following statements best reflects your expectation of marriage? (Circle **ONLY** one.)
- Marriage will be effortless and make me happy all of the time.
 - Marriage will take some effort and make me happy most of the time.
 - Marriage will require a lot of hard work and there will be extended periods of unhappiness, but, in the long run, marriage will bring me happiness.

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

12. Please rank the **TOP THREE** reasons why you are going to get married in the next **SIX** months. (Put a number "1" next to your TOP reason, put a number "2" next to your second top reason, and put a number "3" next to your third top reason.)

- ☐ We are in love and want to spend our lives together.
- ☐ Getting married will get me off the ship or out of the barracks and away from work.
- ☐ Getting married will provide my significant other with health benefits that he/she needs.
- ☐ My significant other doesn't live locally; marriage will allow us to live closer to each other.
- ☐ Getting married will benefit me and my significant other financially.
- ☐ I am ready to get married because I'm a Marine/Sailor, capable of taking on adult responsibilities like marriage.
- ☐ We are going to have a child together.
- ☐ I'm going to deploy and want to make sure my significant other is cared for if something were to happen to me.
- ☐ Other reason(s) **NOT** listed above: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY TO THE CHAPLAIN. THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

C. DIVORCED SURVEY

NSP1754.03

Marine/Sailor – Divorced

Thank you for agreeing to take our short survey. The information you provide will help the Navy Chaplain community better understand and serve young Marines and Sailors. We are looking into the marriage and divorce beliefs of E1-E5 Active Duty Marines and Sailors. Please answer these questions honestly and circle only one response, unless otherwise noted. Your answers will remain anonymous. Thank you again!

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT

Authority to request this information is granted under 5 U.S.C. 301, Departmental Regulations; 10 U.S.C. 5031 and 5032. License to administer this survey is granted per OPNAVINST 5300.8C.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this survey is to collect information about the marriage and divorce beliefs of E1-E5 Active Duty Sailors and Marines. The data will be utilized with interview and observation data to inform program offerings and program evaluations.

ROUTINE USES: The information provided in this survey will be analyzed by the Naval Postgraduate School, the Navy Chaplain Community and OPNAV N1. Results will be presented in summary form only.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All responses will be anonymous. Information you provide will be statistically summarized with the responses of others and will not be attributable to any single individual.

PARTICIPATION: Completion of this questionnaire is entirely voluntary. Failure to respond to any of the questions will NOT result in any penalties except possible lack of representation of your views in the final results and outcomes.

1. Are you currently or have you ever been divorced?
 - a. No. If your answer is "no," PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
 - b. Yes. If your answer is "yes," please continue to QUESTION #2.
2. Did you get married **AFTER** you joined the Navy/Marine Corps?
 - a. No. If your answer is "no," PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
 - b. Yes. If your answer is "yes," please continue to QUESTION #3.
3. Are you 25 years old or **YOUNGER**?
 - a. No. If your answer is "no," PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
 - b. Yes. If your answer is "yes," please continue to QUESTION #4.
4. What is your rank?
 - a. E-1 b. E-2 c. E-3 d. E-4 e. E-5

If you are above the rank of E-5, PLEASE **STOP** TAKING THIS SURVEY AND RETURN IT TO THE CHAPLAIN.
5. Please indicate your gender:
 - a. Male b. Female
6. What type of unit are you assigned to? (Circle **ONLY** one.)

a. Cruiser, DDG, or CVN	d. USMC Combat Logistics Battalion/Regiment
b. LSD, LPD, LHA, or LHD	e. Marine Aircraft Squadron/Group
c. Navy Air	f. USMC Infantry, Artillery, L.A.R. or A.A.V. Battalion/Regiment

Other unit **NOT** listed above: _____

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

7. As you reflect on your previous relationship, how many **months** was it from the time you started **dating** until the time you decided to **file for divorce**?
- Less than 6 months
 - 7 to 12 months
 - 13 to 18 months
 - 19 to 24 months
 - 25 to 36 months
 - Longer than 36 months
8. Which one of the following statements best reflects your expectation of marriage? (Circle **ONLY** one.)
- Marriage will be effortless and make me happy all of the time.
 - Marriage will take some effort and make me happy most of the time.
 - Marriage will require a lot of hard work and there will be extended periods of unhappiness, but, in the long run, marriage will bring me happiness.
9. I would describe my experience of going through divorce as:
- A VERY painful event in my life.
 - A painful event in my life.
 - A SOMEWHAT painful event in my life.
 - NOT painful at all.
10. Did you receive pre-marital counseling/training prior to getting married?
- Yes. If your answer is "yes," please **SKIP** QUESTION #11 and continue to QUESTION #12.
 - No. If your answer is "no," please continue to QUESTION #11.
11. If you answered "No" to QUESTION #10, please indicate why you chose **NOT** to seek pre-marital counseling/training prior to marriage. (Circle **ALL** that apply.)
- We thought our relationship was great and didn't need to improve.
 - We thought that we knew each other really well.
 - We weren't having any major relationship problems.
 - Other reason(s) **NOT** listed above: _____
-
12. As you reflect on your previous marriage, how do you think your relationship would have benefited from pre-marital counseling? (Circle **ALL** that apply.)
- It would have satisfied the requirement of our family/church.
 - It would have helped us to know each other better before getting married.
 - It would have given us clear expectations going into marriage.
 - It would have developed conflict resolution skills.
 - It would have refined our communication skills.
 - Other reason(s) **NOT** listed above: _____
-

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

13. Please rank the **TOP THREE** reasons your marriage failed. (Put a number "1" next to your TOP reason, put a number "2" next to your second top reason, and put a number "3" next to your third top reason.)

☐ Marriage was too much work.
☐ We spent too much time apart due to work/deployment(s).
☐ Marriage did not bring the financial gain that we thought it would.
☐ We were too young and immature to be married.
☐ We didn't take the time to really get to know each other before we got married.
☐ Financial problems.
☐ Our values and/or beliefs were just too different.
☐ One of us was unfaithful.
☐ I or my spouse had a substance abuse problem.
☐ Other major reason(s) **NOT** listed above: _____

14. After having gone through a divorce and looking back, what would you have done differently? (Put a number "1" next to the FIRST thing you would have done differently, put a number "2" next to the SECOND thing you would have done differently, and put a number "3" next to the THIRD thing you would have done differently.)

☐ I would have taken more time to get know my fiancé before we got married.
☐ We would have received (more) pre-marital counseling/training.
☐ I would have waited until I was older to get married.
☐ I would have waited to get married until after I deployed.
☐ I would have received marriage counseling while we were still married.
☐ I would have stayed married for the sake of our child/children.
☐ I would have taken the time to get to know my partner before we got physically intimate.
☐ I would have taken more time to make sure our values/beliefs were similar.
☐ I would **NOT** have gotten married just because I or my fiancé got pregnant.
☐ Other major reason(s) **NOT** listed above: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY TO THE CHAPLAIN. THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

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