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TITLE: The Military Spouse Resiliency Group (MSRG) Peer Support Program: Equipping Families for Resiliency with Tools (EFFRT)

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CONTRACTING ORGANIZATION: The University of Texas, Austin, TX

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# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

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<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> Active duty military spouses undergo many stressors as part of their partners' military service, including extended separation, relocations, single parenting, relationship strains and understanding their service members' health concerns. They also may struggle to establish careers or finish educational degrees due to the unpredictable nature of military life. This study will evaluate how military spouses' participation in a curriculum-based peer support group can help address these stressors and improve their quality of life by facilitating supportive discussions on topics relevant to spouses and by connecting them to relevant resources. Participants will be asked to complete study assessments at the beginning, end of the program, and three and six months after the program. Analyses will compare the outcomes of those who participated with those assigned to a waitlist group to understand whether the program led to outcomes such as military spouses' mental health, quality of life, self-care practices, social support, and knowledge about and confidence in supporting service members' access to health care.					
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**1. INTRODUCTION:**

This study will adapt and test an established peer support program for military spouses delivered over eight weeks in weekly group-based support sessions. The curriculum includes facilitated discussion on an array of topics that affect military spouses, including managing stressors of military life, relationships, career goals and self-care practices. It also provides psychoeducation on common psychological health concerns and available treatments. The group-based peer support curriculum will be first adapted for active duty spouses based on focus groups with spouses to understand their experiences and identify topics and formats that meet their needs. The study will recruit Army spouses to be randomly assigned to participate in a peer support program or be part of a waitlist control groups. Data from the two groups will be compared to understand the program’s effectiveness in improving spouses’ quality of life, mental health, self-care practices, social support and knowledge and confidence in supporting service members' access to care for psychological health needs.

**2. KEYWORDS:**

1. Military spouse
2. Peer support
3. Quality of life
4. Mental health
5. Psychoeducation
6. Social support

**3. ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

a. What were the major goals of the project?

<b>Specific Aim 1:</b> To adapt the existing veteran spouse peer support as the M-SRG curriculum for active-duty spouses based on data collected from focus groups and interviews with military spouses.	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Completion Date (month)</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Percentage Complete</b>
	Months	Months		
<b>Major Task 1: Obtain IRB approval</b>				100%
Coordinate with Fort Hood for CRADA and MOU	1-3	ongoing	Working with III Corps Legal Office to finalize an MOU. Pending	0%
Coordinate with Fort Hood for clinical trial agreements (CTAs) submission	1-3	3	Coordinated with UT for this submission. Fort Hood was not involved.	N/A
Refine eligibility criteria, exclusion criteria, screening protocol	1-3	3	Conducted as part of IRB study review and approval.	100%
Finalize consent form & human subjects protocol	1-2	3	Conducted as part of IRB study review and approval.	100%
Coordinate with Fort Hood for IRB protocol submission	1-3	NA	Did not require Fort Hood coordination.	N/A

Coordinate with Fort Hood for UT Austin IRB review	1-3	NA	Did not require Fort Hood coordination.	100%
Coordinate with Fort Hood for USAMRDC review (ORP/HRPO)	1-3	3	Coordinated with on-site PI, LTC Chris Paine.	100%
Clinicaltrial.gov registration	1-3	4	Completed	100%
Submit amendments, adverse events and protocol deviations as needed	As Needed	NA		N/A
<i>Milestone Achieved: Local IRB approval at Fort Hood</i>	1-3	NA	Local IRB approval was not required; no process for this exists.	100%
<i>Milestone Achieved: HRPO approval for all protocols and local IRB approval through UT Austin</i>	1-3	3	Completed	100%
Coordinate with Fort Hood for job descriptions design	1-2	NA	Not required	N/A
Advertise and interview/hire project staff	1-3	5	Advertised and hired project staff members	100%
Coordinate for space allocation for new staff	1-2	3	Obtained approval for use of Fort Hood space from III Corps during proposal stage with letter of support. Formal approval anticipated when MOU is finalized.	0%
<i>Milestone Achieved: Research staff trained</i>	4-6	5	Completed	100%
Recruit participants for focus groups for curriculum adaptation	4-5	4-5	Completed	100%
Conduct focus groups (N=30)	6-9	9	Completed	100%
<i>Milestone Achieved: Complete Focus Groups</i>	10	9	Completed	100%
Analyze focus group data for content to inform curriculum adaptation	7-9	9	Completed	100%
<i>Milestone Achieved: Complete M-SRG Curriculum Adaptation</i>	12	ongoing	Adaption of the curriculum is near completion; anticipated end of October 2023.	75%
<b>Specific Aim 2:</b> To conduct a randomized controlled trial (N = 150) to evaluate how military spouses' participation in a peer support group influences their mental health, quality of life, self-care and social support outcomes as well as improves their				

knowledge of psychological health problems faced by SMs and SM access to treatment.				
<b>Major Task 2: Randomized Controlled Trial</b>				0%
Subtask 1: Conduct Study, Report Findings				0%
Recruit and train military spouse peer support group leaders	7-12		Training is scheduled for Dec. 1-3, 2023. Marketing for leader recruitment will begin Oct. 5, 2023.	5%
Recruit study participants, screen and enroll in RCT	13-21		Marketing for participant recruitment will begin Oct. 5, 2023.	0%
<i>Milestone Achieved: 1st participant consented, screened and enrolled in study</i>	13			0%
<i>Milestone Achieved: RCT begins</i>	13			0%
Screen potential participants and consent (N=150)	13-21			0%
Assign participants to one of two randomized groups	13-21			0%
Assess all participants at pre-, post-program, 3- and 6-month follow ups	13-27			0%
<i>Milestone Achieved: Report findings from study</i>	13-36			0%
<b>Major Task 3: Data Analysis</b>				0%
Subtask 1: Coordinate with Fort Hood & Study Statistician for monitoring data collection rates and data quality	22-30			0%
Perform all analyses according to specifications, share findings with all investigators and study site teams	27-34			0%
Develop manuscripts and disseminate findings (abstracts, presentations, publications)	28-26			0%
<i>Milestone Achieved: Report results from study</i>	34-36			0%

b. What was accomplished under these goals?

- The major activities completed during this first year of the study were:

1. Milestone Achieved: HRPO approval for all protocols and local IRB approval through UT Austin

2. Hired and trained research staff
3. Recruited participants for focus groups for curriculum adaptation
4. Conducted focus groups (N=35 participants)
5. Analyzed focus group data for content to inform curriculum adaptation
6. Although not planned in the SOW, the study team submitted a manuscript describing themes identified in the focus groups. The abstract that was accepted for a special issue submission is included in Appendix 2; the manuscript is still under review.
7. Made significant progress on curriculum adaptation (to be completed by end of October, 2023).

There was one stated goal not yet met, which is: obtaining the CRADA/research agreement from III Corps. Although a letter of support was provided prior to the proposal, there have been delays in obtaining a research agreement. UT has shared a draft MOU that is under review by the III Corps legal office. A finalized MOU is anticipated during CY2023.

- c. **What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?**

Nothing to Report

- d. **How were the results disseminated to communities of interest?**

Nothing to Report

- e. **What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?**

During the next quarter of the study, from October 2023 – December 2023, the PI and study team will finalize all curriculum revisions. They will also market in order to recruit 15 peer leaders to register for training. Training will be conducted at Fort Cavazos during December 1-3, 2023. These peer leaders will be trained to deliver the peer support group intervention (with the adapted curriculum) during 2024.

#### 4. IMPACT:

- a. **What was the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?**

Nothing to Report

- b. **What was the impact on other disciplines?**

Nothing to Report

- c. **What was the impact on technology transfer?**

Nothing to Report

- d. **What was the impact on society beyond science and technology?**

Nothing to Report

## 5. CHANGES/PROBLEMS:

### a. **Changes in approach and reasons for change**

Nothing to Report

### b. **Actual or anticipated problems or delays and actions or plans to resolve them**

It has taken longer than expected to obtain a research agreement with III Corps. We are in regular communication through our on-site PI, and we are currently waiting for III Corps' legal department review of a draft MOU that UT has drafted for input.

### c. **Changes that had a significant impact on expenditures**

Nothing to Report

### d. **Significant changes in use or care of human subjects, vertebrate animals, biohazards, and/or select agents**

Nothing to Report

### e. **Significant changes in use or care of human subjects**

Nothing to Report

### f. **Significant changes in use or care of vertebrate animals.**

NA

### g. **Significant changes in use of biohazards and/or select agents**

NA

## 6. PRODUCTS:

### ○ **Publications, conference papers, and presentations**

Nothing to Report

### ○ **Website(s) or other Internet site(s)**

Nothing to Report

### ○ **Technologies or techniques**

Nothing to Report

### ○ **Inventions, patent applications, and/or licenses**

Nothing to Report

### ○ **Other Products**

We have a manuscript under review that shares results of the focus groups conducted during 2023.

## 7. PARTICIPANTS & OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

NA

a. What individuals have worked on the project?

Name:	Elisa Borah
Project Role:	PI
Researcher Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):	0003-2741-0299
Nearest person month worked:	6
Contribution to Project:	Dr. Borah has performed work related to overall study management, obtaining IRB approval, hiring staff, developing agreements with the study site, adapting curriculum, meeting with the advisory board and planning peer leader training.
Funding Support:	This award

Name:	Aubrey Harvey
Project Role:	Research Assistant
Researcher Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):	NA
Nearest person month worked:	6
Contribution to Project:	Ms. Harvey has supported scheduling for study team, focus groups and advisory board, travel arrangements, survey creation, coding data and supporting qualitative data analysis from focus groups.
Funding Support:	This award

Name:	Abby Blankenship
Project Role:	Research Coordinator/Curriculum Writer
Researcher Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):	0003-2829-1287
Nearest person month worked:	8
Contribution to Project:	Dr. Blankenship has performed work related to focus group data analysis, adapting curriculum, writing manuscript on focus group themes, meeting with the advisory board and planning peer leader training.
Funding Support:	This award

Name:	Rachel Ortiz
Project Role:	Research Assistant
Researcher Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):	NA
Nearest person month worked:	2
Contribution to Project:	Ms. Ortiz attended and moderated chat during virtual focus groups.
Funding Support:	Other funding

Name:	Karie Hare
Project Role:	Research Assistant
Researcher Identifier (e.g. ORCID ID):	NA
Nearest person month worked:	2
Contribution to Project:	Ms. Hare has helped develop recruitment materials for focus groups, scheduled focus group participants and assisted with focus groups; she has also provided input on peer support curriculum revisions.
Funding Support:	Other funding

- b. **Has there been a change in the active other support of the PD/PI(s) or senior/key personnel since the last reporting period?**

Nothing to Report

- c. **What other organizations were involved as partners?**

Nothing to Report

## 8. SPECIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- a. **QUAD CHARTS:** We have uploaded current version.

## 9. APPENDICES:

## APPENDIX 1. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Focus Group Interview Guide: Military Spouse Resiliency Group

Verbal introduction: Thank you for agreeing to attend this focus group. We will be recording the session to document your comments. This discussion should take about 1.5 hours. We are designing a peer support program for active-duty military spouses. We want to learn from you what topics, format and program features it should have. We encourage everyone to honestly share their responses to the following questions.

“If you stay today, this means you are aware of the information shared in the research information sheet, including that we will be recording the session for notetaking purposes, but this recording will not be shared outside of the study team, and your name will not be associated with any comments you share today. You are not required to answer any question; just share what you feel comfortable sharing.”

Introductions: Please share your name, where you are from, how long your spouse/partner and /or you have served, and what is your favorite thing to do for self-care?

#### Curriculum Topics:

1. **What are some of the challenges faced by active-duty military spouses?**
  - a. ...pre, during, and post deployments?
  - b. ...related to children/parenting?
  - c. ...related to marriage and relationships?
  - d. Do you face difficulties related to pursuing your education?
  - e. Do you face difficulties regarding pursuing your employment or career?
    - a. **Are there other areas that you face challenges?**
    - b. For example, finding social connections?
    - c. Finding time to focus on your own health and wellness?
    - d. Knowing where or how to access medical care?
    - e. Staying connected to other family?
    - f. Managing the uncertainty of military life?
    - g. Financial planning?
    - h. Housing?
    - i. Child care?
    - j. EFMP?
    - k. Transition planning?
      - a. PCS support (cost and explanation)
      - b. Military separation or retirement
    - l. Knowing how/where to access supports?
2. **What are some thoughts on mental health support for military spouses?**
  - a. Where have you or others struggled in this area?
  - b. What have been good supports for your mental health?
  - c. What types of support would you like to have in your life?
  - d. What aspects of mental health do you think spouses need more information about?
    - a. If you or someone in your family needed behavioral health care do you believe you know where to find care?

7. Are there any other discussion topics you would suggest be included in a peer support group program?

6. What are positive and/or rewarding aspects of military life?

Support Group Format:

1. What would a good name be for a military spouse peer support group program?

- a. What type of program name resonates with you?
- b. What buzz words should we avoid?
- c. Spouse v. partner in title?
- d. What do you think of Military Partner Peer Group?
- e. Any creative ideas?

2. How important is it to have childcare available for you so that you can attend groups? Where is childcare available/easy to access?

3. Groups are usually offered weekly at different times of the day and week. Do you have a preference for the days of the week and times they are offered?

- a. Length of each session?
- b. Number of sessions?
- c. Frequency of meetings?

## APPENDIX 2: ABSTRACT OF MANUSCRIPT UNDER REVIEW DETAILING FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

### Informing Peer Support Programming for Active-Duty Military Spouses and Committed Partners

**Background.** Active-duty military spouses experience stressors supporting and adapting to the ever-shifting careers of their service members. The Veteran Spouse Resiliency Group (V-SRG) is a peer-based program designed to foster community, educate spouses about resources, and promote skills acquisition geared toward the unique needs of veteran spouses. While participation in V-SRG has resulted in promising outcomes for veteran spouses, military spouses face different challenges. This study used a qualitative research approach to understand: (1) The challenges of military life; (2) The needs of military spouses; and (3) The recommendations for adapting the V-SRG curriculum.

**Methods.** Participants included 35 spouses of active-duty service members. Participants were recruited through advertisements disseminated directly to military spouses and through social media. Interviews were conducted virtually and recorded and transcribed for researchers with expertise in military health to analyze.

**Results.** The transcripts were read and coded to develop upper-level categories derived from our research questions. Categories include challenges of military life, benefits of military life, and recommendations for peer support programming. “Challenges of military life” included education and career progression, parenting and childcare, deployment, and consistency and accessibility of medical and behavioral healthcare. “Benefits of military life” included the military community and relocation. Finally, “recommendations for peer support programming” included content, program structure, and program amenity recommendations.

**Discussion.** Military spouses face different challenges and have unique needs in comparison to veteran spouses. These data provide information that will lead to the development of a military spouse-informed peer support program.