

Study of perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness among newlywed military wives at boot camp: a comparative study

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ABSTRACT

Wives of serving soldiers cope with numerous stressors. This study sought to shed some light on this area. The present study examines the level of perceived stress, loneliness and social anxiety among newlywed military wives at boot camp. Thirty newlywed wives of non-commissioned military personnel and thirty civilian wives were selected as participants. Data was collected by administering Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale, University of California Log Angeles loneliness Scale (Version 3) and analysed through mean, t-test and correlation was computed. Result has shown that perceived stress and loneliness were significantly high in newlywed military wives as compared to civilian counterpart. It has been also observed that perceived stress strongly correlated ($r=0.69$) with loneliness among military wives but not in civilian wives. These results has shown newlywed military wives faced hardship due to transition from civilian to military life. There is a need to understand and address the psychosocial issues of newlywed wives. The study also suggests some measures to reduce perceived stress and loneliness among military wives.

Keywords: *Military wives, Newlywed, Loneliness, Social Anxiety, Perceived Stress*

Marriage is a basic social institution which considered essential for virtually everyone in India. A person who has recently entered in marriage is called newlywed. The time frame/limit during which a person is considered newlywed varies. In Indian society marriages are taken place between two families, rather two individuals. Precisely, getting married triggers a transition to a new and unique stage of life that includes a variety of norms and roles that influence the behaviour of new spouses (Rodgers & White, 1993). Newlywed wives can find the act of separating from their families of origin and establishing a new family unit to be challenging. A newlywed wife needs to adjust in new environment, this involves uniting two sets of perceptions, expectations, needs, goals, culture, social life values, communication, roles, cooperation, and personalities. Newlywed couples may mainly struggle with competing expectations about marital roles given the more varied nature of what it means to be married (Cherlin, 2004). Newlywed Indian wives experience a number of new and unfamiliar stressors. Some of the most common stressors include:

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unfamiliar environment, fear of being judged by others, fear of interacting with other people, loneliness or not having enough friends, nervousness and having to depend on in-laws.

Military Wives

Military service often begins with geographic separation from home, friends and family. Armed forces service is difficult, demanding, and dangerous and includes constant changes. This is even more difficult for those who has been not raised in a military family, entering service can require quite an adjustment to elements of military life. Military jargon, abbreviations, organization, culture, ranks, discipline, rules and regulations may present a sharp learning curve.

Military Wives face the challenges of traditional family life as well as the unique challenges associated with military life. Bowen (1989) observed that military wives are habitually stressed because of geographic separation from their spouses and frequent moves that alter social networks, change cultural settings, and financially strain families.

Military wives encounter challenges and experiences in life, just like civilian counterparts. However, some experiences are unique to military life and experienced differently because of the military context in which they occur. A civilian has a hard time adjusting to military life, while a person with military background makes the transition with no difficulties. For most recruits, transitioning from civilian environment into military environment is typically simultaneous with the transition to adulthood (Kelty et al., 2010). Some military spouses are also experiencing this transition.

Military personnel are part of a workforce with institutionalized standards and a unique warrior culture and ethos not present in the civilian workforce (Redmond et al. 2015). Military families, mainly those who choose to remain in the military, can be adaptable and resilient and they need to develop dynamic coping strategies for the stressors of military life like moves and deployments (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Meadows et al., 2016).

Man is by nature a social animal (Aristotle). Human being likes to live in social support system. Lack of familiarity, company and friendship leads to loneliness. Loneliness consider people's network of relationships and their relationship preferences Weiss (1973) distinguished two types of loneliness: emotional and social loneliness. Emotional loneliness concerned with a gap between one's actual and ideal level of social relationship. It results from not having a close and satisfying friendship and attachments (Weiss 1973). Emotional loneliness appears in recently divorced or widowed individuals, who feel that there is no one to turn to. Social loneliness is associated with social network, includes friends, acquaintances, relatives, colleagues and neighbors. This network gives a sense of belongingness and companionship and a small network will increase likelihood of social isolation. Individual who have recently moved to a new social environment should experience this form and feels bored and depression (Weiss 1973). Cacioppo et al. (2000) examined differences between socially embedded and lonely people and found that loneliness itself is a stressor, substantial social relationships were associate with positive outlooks on life and loneliness produces higher levels of anxiety, perceived stress.

Stress occurs when individuals encounter situations they perceive as threatening, demanding, or that tax or exceed their capacity to address (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Women are more likely to report home and family life events as stressful (Oman & King,

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2000) and experience stress, related to gender caring roles (Lee, 1999, 2001; Walters, 1993). Some of the most common stressors of newlywed wives include: psychological, social adjustment, shift in family orientation, loneliness and relocation. Women were also more affected by the stress of those around them, as they tend to be more emotionally involved in family and social networks than men (Kessler & McLeod, 1984; Turner et al., 1995). Due to Involuntary relocation women with high school/trade school education had significantly higher levels of perceived stress, feelings of less control, and lower levels of satisfaction with family life than women with more education (Makowsky 1988). Padden et al. (2011) concluded that higher level of perceived stress was correlated with lower mental and physical well-being”

Social anxiety is characterized by excessive fear of negative evaluation and criticism embarrassing in social situations. Researchers report that women score significantly higher than men on self-report measures of social anxiety (Callablllo et al, 2008, Hiraj, Vernon, Clum & Skidmore, 2011). The self-presentational theory proposes that people experience social anxiety when they are motivated to make particular impression on others but doubt they will do so (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Researchers found socially anxious people are often lonely and depressed, lonely people are typically anxious and depressed (Anderson & Harvey, 1988; Johes, Freemon, & Goswick, 198; Russell, Peplau & Cutrona ,1980)

Since the Indian armed forces are closed organisations, very few research is available on Indian military personnel by academics and military research institutions and out of them, military wives remain invisible. In India very few scholarly sources available that addressed the problems & culture of Indian military families. Some research suggest that family well-being is an important consideration to individuals who are deciding whether to enter or remain in military service (Meyers, 2018). So it is important to study the mental health of military wives with special consideration. To the best of my knowledge, this is probably the first empirical study focusing on the Indian newlywed military wives mental health aspects. The present study aims to explore the perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness among newlywed military and civilian wives. The objectives of the present research are stated as follows.

1. To assess the level of perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness among newlywed military wives at boot camp.
2. To assess the level of perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness among newlywed civilian wives at home.
3. To compare the level of perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness between newlywed military wives and civilian wives.
4. To study the relationship in perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness among samples.
5. To formulate strategies to reduce perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness.

Hypothesis

Keeping in view the above-mentioned objective, the following hypotheses were framed:

1. There would be no significant difference in scores of perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness between newlywed military wives and civilian wives.
2. There would be a correlation between perceived stress, social anxiety and loneliness among samples.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The first group of participants involved 30 newlywed military wives from two military stations with a mean age of 22.37 (SD=1.49). At the time of assessment 86.6 % were graduated. The second group of participants consisted of 30 newlywed civilian wives from same locations of military stations with a mean age of 23.63 (SD=2.31) and out of them, 70 % women were graduated at time of assessment.

Inclusion criteria

1. Only first-time married women were selected
2. Minimum education qualification of participants was Inter/ Diploma.
3. Women who gave consent for participation in study
4. Age criteria 18-28 maintained
5. Wives of noncommissioned military personnel were selected as participants
6. From date of marriage up to 3 months, a woman considered as newlywed and selected for study

Exclusion criteria

1. Women who had any psychiatric disorder
2. Women with military background

Instruments

Present study was cross-sectional and comparative in nature. Following tools/questionnaires were adopted for this study

1. **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10):** Perceived Stress Scale-10 was created by Cohen et.al in 1983 is the most widely used measure of global perceived stress. It surveyed individuals' thoughts and feelings during the last month and how different situations affect feelings and perceived stress. The PSS was designed for use in community samples with at least a junior high school education The 10-item (PSS-10) is scored on the basis of a 5-point Likert scale of never (0) almost never (1) sometimes (2) fairly often (3) and very often (4). Positively worded items (4, 5, 7, and 8) were reverse scored, and the ratings summed, with higher scores indicating more perceived stress. The lowest score was 0 and the highest score was 40. Scores ranging from 27-40 considered high perceived stress. The Hindi version of the 10-item (PSS-10) had an adequate level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.731).
2. **The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale:** SIAS assesses the degree of self-reported anxiety associated with situations involving interactions in dyads or groups. The measure contains 20 statements rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 4 (*extremely characteristic of me*). Higher total scores represent greater social anxiety. Researchers have found the SIAS to have high test-retest reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity across clinical and community samples (Brown et al., 1997)
3. **University of California Log Angeles loneliness Scale (Version 3):** The UCLA Loneliness Scale developed in 1996 by Russel, in order to measure individuals' general levels of loneliness, one's subjective feelings of loneliness and feelings of social isolation. The UCLA consists of 20 (11 negative and 9 positive) statements to which responses are given on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The UCLA scores range from 20 to 80, with higher scores indicating higher

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levels of loneliness. This scale is a reliable tool, internal consistency (coefficient 0.89 to 0.94) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.73$) were found significant (Russell, 1996). This scale is a reliable tool, both in terms of internal consistency (coefficient ,0.89 to 0.94) and test-retest reliability over a 01 year period ($r = 0.73$) (Russell, 1996).

Procedure

Thirty newlywed military wives who joined military camp first time after marriage from two military stations and thirty newlywed civilian wives were enrolled in this study. Data were obtained by administrating Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), The *Social Interaction Anxiety Scale*, University of California Log Angeles loneliness Scale (Version 3) and collected data were analyzed using relevant statistical methods.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of military and civilian wives.

Tool	Military wives		Civilian wives		t value	p value	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
PSS	28	2.2	15.27	3.10	18.373	> 0.00001	HS
UCLA-LS	48.17	2.52	18.2	4.89	29.813	> 0.00001	HS
SIAS	14.33	1.62	15.3	2.48	-1.785	---	NS

Table- 1 shows that difference in perceived stress scale scores and loneliness scale scores between military wives and civilian wives is highly significant but scores of SIAS not found significant.

Table 2: Correlation among variables of the study military wives.

Variable	PSS	UCLA-LS	SIAS
PSS	1	0.69	0.14
UCLA-LS	0.69	1	0.24
SIAS	0.14	0.24	1

Table- 2 shows that perceived stress scale scores are positively correlated ($r = .0.69$) with Loneliness Scale Scores and PSS scores are weakly correlated ($r =0.14$) with SIAS scores. Weak Correlation found between SIAS and UCLA-LS scores ($r =0.24$).

Table 3: Correlation among variables of the study civilian wives.

Variable	PSS	UCLA-LS	SIAS
PSS	1	0.34	0.27
UCLA-LS	0.34	1	0.3
SIAS	0.27	0.3	1

Table- 3 shows that perceived stress scale scores are positively correlated ($r = 0.34$) with Loneliness Scale Scores and PSS scores are weakly correlated ($r =0.27$) with SIAS scores. Correlation found between SIAS and UCLA-LS scores ($r =0.30$).

DISCUSSION

As noted in the introduction, very little research has been conducted in military wives mental health. Eaton and colleagues (2008) found that 70% of military spouses screening

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positive for mental health problems required help. The present study highlighted the level of loneliness, perceived stress in newlywed military wives.

Military stations are male dominated environment that designed to meet the needs of soldier first and families second. Team working environment, close mingling within troops, sports events, social meets, welfare meetings are some of measures/provisions adopted by military for soldier's social support system but these are very few channels for women to forge social ties with others. Though the government and military forces recruited psychologists for soldier's better mental health, but these services rarely used by their wives. Lewy et al. (2014) conducted a study on 569 military wives in the United States, they found that 78% of their sample reported notable depression. Many (44%) reported un-addressed mental health needs. Military Barriers reported by distressed wives were (1) inability to attend daytime appointments (38%), (2) inability to find a counselor who understands military spouse needs (35%), (3) inability to find a counselor the participant could trust (29%), (4) concerns about confidentiality (29%), (5) lack of knowledge about where to get services (25%).

To reduce the level of loneliness and stress of military wives this study recommends the introduction of followings measures:

- a. Family oriented local recreation for newcomers will provide an opportunity to spend quality time with others women's will likely ease the transition of civilian to military environment.
- b. Provision of a counsellor exclusively for military wives will greatly help newlyweds to develop an understanding and acceptance of military environment and improve their well-beings.
- c. "Weekly community-based get-together" will help military wives to develop their own social support system and fill cultural gaps through shared ideas, memories, traditions, music, foods. Most elements of culture are reinforced deliberately and subliminally through common gathering and celebrations. (Elizabeth Chacko, 2003).

Limitation

This study has measured loneliness, social anxiety and perceived stress by self-report measures. A structured interview would be a more reliable and precise measure. A second limitation was that small sample size randomly selected from only two military. Despite these limitations, this study has important implication for self-report assessment of loneliness, social anxiety and perceived stress in newlywed military wives.

CONCLUSION

In brief, the findings of the study show that perceived stress and loneliness are high in newlywed military wife than civilian wives. It has also been observed that perceived stress is strongly positively correlated ($r = 0.69$) with Loneliness among military wives but weakly correlated ($r = 0.34$) in civilian wives.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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