

Running Head: MILITARY CHAPLAINS AND EFFECTIVE SPIRITUAL CARE

The Role of Military Chaplains and Effective Spiritual Care for Strengthening Military
Marriages During Deployments

By

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Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Military chaplains provide spiritual support and counseling to the military populations alongside conducting religious services. As a military process, chaplaincy operates as a liaison between military personnel, mental health professionals, and clinical marriage counselors. In this context, the military population is extensive and consists of military personnel, military chaplains, and their civilian families. It must be acknowledged that various service-motivated challenges confront these individuals. For instance, military marriages are threatened by lengthy deployment and family separations. Therefore, it is significant to contextualize military marriages' coping, survival, and strengthening as most contemporary researchers have focused on this subject. Most studies have investigated several in-house mechanisms like spiritual care and outsourced coping agents like professional psychiatrists and marriage counselors among military populations (Bliese et al., 2008; Seddon et al., 2011). However, this study focused on interventions available at military facilities—chaplaincy and spiritual care. It is important to understand the role of spirituality as advanced by military chaplains as a coping mechanism among military personnel and a marriage-strengthening technique to verify its ability to improve marriage sustainability. Therefore, the study investigated the association between spirituality and marriage strengthening among military personnel. This phenomenological study aimed to examine the effectiveness of military chaplains and the spiritual care and support they provide to strengthen military marriages among military populations. As such, the study qualitatively examined the role of chaplains and spirituality among two military population participants—military personnel and chaplains at the Ellsworth Air Force Base. The theories guiding this study were the family stress theory advanced by Bowen (1971) and Selye's (1956) stress theory, which helped explain the stressors in military marriages. Data were collected from semistructured, in-

depth interviews with a study sample of 15 participants. The data were then transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted. The findings indicated that spiritual care provided by chaplains was critical in building trust and strengthening bonds among married couples. At the same time, spirituality equipped military couples with essential virtues for marriage stability. The study also found that psychological well-being was a critical factor in promoting healthy relationships and chaplains played a role in promoting the mental well-being of the military couples, which furthered the stability of the unions. Finally, the study acknowledged that other interventions and resources were critical in supporting strong marriages besides the spiritual care provided by chaplains. As such, couples were advised to join personal and family-oriented programs (e.g., marital counseling, the strong bonds program, and reintegration counseling) and use other resources to maintain their marriages.

Keywords: chaplaincy, spirituality, military marriages, stress, moral injury, trauma, spiritual care

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Chapter One: Introduction.....	9
Overview.....	9
Background.....	10
Situation to Self.....	13
Statement of Problem and Research Gap	13
Purpose Statement	14
Significance of the Study.....	15
Research Questions	17
Definitions.....	17
Chapter Summary.....	18
Chapter Two: Literature Review	19
Overview.....	19
Theoretical Framework.....	21
Psychological Challenges Facing Military Populations	27
Psychiatric Care, Spiritual Care, and Their Integration for Military Populations	35
Military Marriage Sustainability, Strengthening, and Reconstruction.....	41
Military Families	46
Chapter Summary.....	48
Chapter Three: Methods.....	50
Overview.....	50
Design.....	50

Setting.....	51
Participants.....	51
Inclusion Criteria.....	52
Exclusion Criteria.....	52
Sample Size.....	53
Study Procedure	53
Interview Strategy	54
Working Interview Questions	55
Interview Questions to the Military Personnel	55
Interview Questions to the Chaplains	56
Data Interpretation Strategy (Data Analysis).....	57
Trustworthiness	57
Credibility.....	57
Dependability and Confirmability	58
Transferability.....	59
Ethical Considerations	59
Confidentiality	59
Informed Consent.....	60
Role of Investigator Biases	60
Evidence of Quality in Research Data.....	61
Chapter Summary.....	62
Chapter Four: Findings.....	63
Overview.....	63

Participants.....	64
Military Personnel.....	64
Military Chaplains	69
Results: Thematic Analysis Table.....	70
Research Questions	72
RQ1: How Does Psychological Well-Being Strengthen Military Marriages?.....	73
RQ2: How Does Spirituality and Spiritual Care Provided by Chaplains Play a Role in Supporting Couples and Their Marriages?	76
RQ3: What Support Systems, Resources, and Interventions Are Available to Help Couples Cope With Their Experiences During Deployment?	79
Summary.....	83
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	85
Overview.....	85
Summary of Findings	86
RQ1. How Does Psychological Well-Being Strengthen Military Marriages?.....	86
RQ2. How Does Spirituality and Spiritual Care Provided by Chaplains Play a Role in Supporting Couples and Their Marriages?	87
RQ3. What Support Systems, Resources, and Interventions Are Available to Help Couples Cope With Their Experiences During Deployment?	88
Discussion.....	88
RQ1. How Does Psychological Well-Being Strengthen Military Marriages?.....	88
RQ2. How Does Spirituality and Spiritual Care Chaplains Play a Role in Supporting Couples and Their Marriages?.....	92

RQ3. What Support Systems, Resources, and Interventions Are Available to Help Couples Cope With Their Experiences During Deployment?.....95

Contribution of the Present Study to the Field98

How the Present Study Extends Theory..... 100

Implications..... 100

 Theoretical Implications..... 100

 Empirical Implications 101

 Practical Implications..... 101

Delimitations and Limitations..... 103

Recommendations for Future Research..... 104

Summary..... 105

References 106

Appendices 122

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Military marriages have become a social institution highlighted by various experts in different studies and commentaries (Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Malinen, 2018). Spirituality's role in upholding military marriages and families is the most prevalent subject within this discourse. Notably, military marriages have been extensively studied (Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Seddon et al., 2011). Unlike other families, military marriages and families are confronted by various life stressors attributed to the deployment of loved ones and their exposure to the dangers of military operations. Various adverse psychological outcomes threaten children and spouses of deployed military personnel. For example, long separation periods affect the quality of a marriage and, at the same time, children may lose attachment with their parents.

Globally, militaries deploy their soldiers to various military and peacekeeping operations that are sometimes deadly. Soldiers die, and others return home with psychological injuries (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorders), physical wounds, and permanent disabilities (Stevellink et al., 2015). These injuries affect the combatants, but they also affect their families. These physical and psychological injuries often reduce the quality of life and social connections, which then escalates to military families postdeployment. Apart from the postdeployment outcomes, the detachment caused by the deployment often makes military families dysfunctional or less satisfied with their marriages (Meadows et al., 2017). The challenges confronting military families and deployed personnel leading to failed marriages can be traced down to the various psychosocial variables associated with the military population (Meadows et al., 2017).

Strengthening military marriages within various psychosocial frameworks involves engaging spirituality and religious intervention, which has been significantly explored in

different studies (Meadows et al., 2017; Seddon et al., 2011). Integrating spiritual care in confronting mental health challenges and offering family therapy has been commonplace. However, the link between spirituality and clinical practice and their evolution within the military environment remains unclear. Military personnel and their families face major deployment stressors that require redress, and spirituality may be a form of therapy and a coping mechanism.

In exploring this link further, this study investigated whether spiritual care can effectively confront mental health challenges and strengthen marital relationships among military populations. Focusing on enhancing marital bonds gives an integration blueprint to help military personnel fit within their families after deployment. This study's integrative approach examined family resilience and mental health coping of military spouses during deployment-motivated separations. Therefore, the current study provides an empirical foundation for understanding the application of spirituality in connection to mental health challenges and marriage counseling within military populations. This model for integrating spirituality into psychological care can inform future intervention and research directed toward leveraging adverse deployment outcomes on service members and their families.

Background

Defense departments have increasingly focused on strengthening family ties among service members (Carey & Hodgson, 2018). Several studies have explored the effectiveness of spiritual and religious approaches in fostering the marriage institution among military couples (Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Malinen, 2018). Malinen (2018) noted that military chaplains counsel active duty and veteran military couples to alleviate trauma and save their marriages. Mental health has become a concern among military personnel during and post deployment,

necessitating spiritual approaches to solve marital issues and strengthen marriages (Malinen, 2018).

Previously, most studies focused on the mental health issues facing military veterans, ignoring the actively deployed who might be facing similar issues. For instance, Stanley et al. (2010) highlighted how military veterans often face challenges when integrating back into society following mental health problems after serving in the military. The psychological issues are often detrimental and a leading cause of unstable marriages among veteran and actively deployed military personnel families. Thus, military chaplains significantly reduce these mental health challenges and connect personnel with their families through spiritual care during and after deployment (Seddon et al., 2011).

Several other studies have shown that applying spirituality and administering it alongside clinical interventions to psychological health has the least resonating frameworks (Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Hamlin-Glover, 2009; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Individuals often find it difficult to struggle with life's meaning and purpose, which influences various elements of their lives—their social lives, marriages, and individual lives, including mental health. As most studies have established a link between spirituality and psychiatry, military environments currently integrate integrated psychiatric responses with spiritual care (Hamlin-Glover, 2009). This combination ensures addressing the various aspects of the combatant's lives that are influenced by spirituality and religiosity (Bormann et al., 2012).

Brémault-Phillips et al. (2016) also argued the various elements of spirituality used to counter mental health challenges and ensure family resilience have lacked an integrated, measurable dimension combined with the different existing clinical approaches. These spiritual steps include engaging the clergy, attending religious worship sessions, meditation, among others

(Brémault-Phillips et al., 2016). According to Brémault-Phillips et al. (2016), despite the lack of associative statistics between spirituality and other clinical intervention to psychological challenges, the latter has influenced physical and psychological health outcomes by tackling heart diseases, cancer, behavioral changes disorders, and grief (Black et al., 2004). Therefore, combatants with high religious involvement are likely to survive family wreckage and mental breakdown after deployment.

The literature on spirituality, adjustment, and coping has demonstrated that these are significant elements that, if positively applied, affect mental health outcomes and can strengthen military marriages (Black et al., 2004; Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Malinen, 2018). Studies have indicated a correlation between spiritual dimensions, psychological well-being, marital resiliency, and adjustment (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2016; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). The combatants' quality of life also significantly improved with the focus and integration of spiritual care into the clinical interventions. Besides, religious involvement significantly influences marriage and military personnel's psychological health (Seddon et al., 2011). However, there are limited studies empirically connecting these elements. Therefore, my study explored the role of spirituality in confronting mental health challenges and strengthening marital relationships among military populations.

As noted in the literature, it is challenging to establish a practical intervention to address military personnel's marital challenges after deployment. Studies have shown that most military veterans are not willing to share their traumatic experiences with their spouses after a long period of disconnection (Carey & Hodgson, 2018). Therefore, lack of disclosure breeds posttraumatic stress and depression, which plunge most military marriages into chaos. Therefore, developing a

theory that seeks to integrate family attachment programs during deployment through spiritual interventions advanced by military chaplains is essential.

Situation to Self

The current study was relevant to me as an upcoming psychologist because it contributes to a highly contested discourse within an extensively discussed military population. In the research process, I familiarized myself with the various theories already constructed to understand the psychological challenges in different contexts. Through the study, I examined the significance of spirituality in the military environment and its application in addressing military families' various challenges during deployment. Contributing to this scholarly discourse improved my understanding of the subjectivity of research in the field of psychology and as a military chaplain. I engaged in data collection, classification, and analysis throughout the study. This gave me a real-world perspective of deployment challenges among military personnel and their families. Formulating a new theory is a significant contribution to this research body. Using the various existing theories to derive a new theory gives the current study a relevant framework that makes the complex subject of military marriages understandable. Therefore, this study is significant to me as a scholar, to the larger field of scholarship, and to other researchers interested in researching this field.

Statement of Problem and Research Gap

The problem is the lack of evidence regarding the impact of spiritual care on marital relationships among military personnel in deployment. Existing studies have explored the effectiveness of chaplains in connecting military members with their families (Cafferky et al., 2017; Davie, 2015). Carey and Hodgson (2018) highlighted how chaplains' spiritual care intervention in military marriages fosters resilience among couples. A significant number of

these studies investigated the roles of chaplains in responding to the mental health issues of military members during service. Others also looked at chaplains' responses to military marriage factors, like providing intervention-based marriage counseling after deployment (Malinen, 2018; Seddon et al., 2011). However, a gap exists in the availability of qualitative evidence on the impact of spiritual care on marital relationships among military personnel, especially during deployment. This gap has arisen because most of the focus has been on intervention rather than prevention. I explored chaplaincy and spirituality's role in ensuring sustainable military marriages during deployment. The current study addressed the existing gap in the literature through qualitative scrutiny to establish the direct role of chaplaincy and spiritual care in ensuring solid military marriages. This study also addressed another research gap, the inadequacy of social theories explaining the relationship between spiritual care, mental health, and marital relationships.

Purpose Statement

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the military population's experiences with chaplains' spiritual care and its effect, as well as how the support they provide strengthens military marriages among the military population at the Ellsworth Airforce Base. At the time of the study, chaplaincy was generally defined as advising military personnel on spiritual and moral matters, and spirituality as theistic beliefs and practices within religious structures. The theories that guided this study were the family stress theory advanced by Bowen (1971) and Selye's (1956) stress theory. These theories help explain families' stress and note families' unique needs during deployment (Bowen, 1971; Selye, 1956). The theories offered a useful perspective for understanding the family stressors affecting military marriages and the role of intervention through spiritual care and chaplaincy.

Significance of the Study

The current study aimed to highlight the contribution of spiritual care to resiliency and psychological health moderation, which can later significantly impact military marriage strengthening. Under this construct, spiritual care plays a significant role in resilient warrior culture, promoting tolerance and the soldiers' ability to resist, adapt, and thrive despite stressful operational and training environments (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2016). Studies have established a rising controversy that most military organizations increasingly demand spiritual fitness to help soldiers confront harsh combat experiences, operational realities, and family detachments (Malinen, 2018; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Seddon et al., 2011). The current study also embraced this approach. Spiritual fitness has been attributed to alleviating spiritual and moral trauma that often leads to unprecedented behavioral and psychological problems threatening the combatants' marriages and quality of life. In contrast, spiritual care does not have diagnostic procedures in which generalized trauma relating to mental well-being and marriage strengthening can be defined (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Therefore, the current study explored the relationship between spiritual response to mental health and marriage solidity among military personnel. This research examined how spiritual care can potentially assist in confronting mental health challenges and strengthening marital relationships among military populations.

The current study adds to the paucity of research on spirituality, which has narrowly focused on the manifestation of religious beliefs, experiences, and practices (Black et al., 2004; Hamlin-Glover, 2009). As it is connected to the religious world, spirituality has been emphasized under the measurable variables of religious affiliation and attendance of religious places of worship (e.g., churches and mosques) and how these variables influence individuals' mental and physical health. Studies connecting spirituality to mental health, marital, and family functioning

have focused on the universal relationship between marital satisfaction, psychological tranquility, stability, and adjustments to stressors (Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). The influence of religiosity is often examined under the elements of prayers, communication, commitment, enhanced intimacy, peace of mind, forgiveness, and ignoring the overwhelming combat experiences, and how these significantly contribute to mental and psychological health improvement and strengthening marital relationships (Malinen, 2018). A positive link is created between faith, psychological stressors, religious practices, and couple conflicts. Therefore, spirituality can be interconnected to the emotional support that helps in family coping and alleviating mental health challenges.

Similarly, the current study explored coping as a necessary theme when investigating mental health and marriage survival in the military context (Malinen, 2018). It is the central factor in family resilience and can be defined as the development of behavior patterns, resources, and skills that assist individuals in balancing normality and repressive circumstances (Hamlin-Glover, 2009; Malinen, 2018). Due to unpredictable combat outcomes, the military environment is oriented toward coping and adjustment. Therefore, the historic literature focuses on understanding the ability of military personnel to cope, adapt, and adjust accordingly to overcome combat adversities that affect their mental health and can escalate to their marital relationships (Hamlin-Glover, 2009). The studies reviewed under this subcomponent provide a unique insight into the twister's contribution to spiritual care, marriage, and psychological health. A study explored the military personnel's coping behavior in response to the deployment-caused separation. The integration of their partners back into the family after deployment affects their stability. It complements the Hamlin-Glover (2009) study that investigated the life

satisfaction of military personnel while in service and that of their wives back at home, the relationship between the outcomes, and the couples' religious lifestyle.

Research Questions

1. How does spirituality and spiritual care provided by chaplains play a role in supporting couples and their marriages?
2. How does psychological well-being strengthen military marriages?
3. What support systems, resources, and interventions are available to help couples cope with their experiences during deployment?

Definitions

Coping- Strategies for dealing with physical and emotional burdens despite being overwhelmed (Cozza et al., 2005).

Family Crisis- Challenges that affect the normalcy and order in a family (Weiss et al., 2010).

Marital Satisfaction- The degree to which couples are happy and satisfied about their marriage and its affairs (Brown et al., 2008).

Military- Armed and equipped systemic institution authorized and maintained by a state and primarily intended for warfare and peacekeeping activities (Bormann et al., 2012).

Psychosocial- An approach looking into an individual's interaction with their environments' social and psychological factors (Boelens et al., 2009).

Religion- A spiritual institution based on various values, beliefs, and doctrines (Brown et al., 2008).

*Spiritual Care**- A form of care meant to address spiritual needs and problems related to illness and crisis. It is known to increase the quality of life, and failure to provide it leads to an increased risk of depression and deteriorates health (Hvidt et al., 2020).

*Spirituality**- Spirituality is practicing personal religious beliefs and values based on one's background and faith (Brelsford & Friedberg, 2011).

**Spirituality and spiritual care have been used interchangeably in this work, spiritual care is related to spirituality but in an organizational sense.*

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced literature on the potential connections between spirituality and mental health, especially among veteran and actively deployed military personnel in a clinical way. It highlighted how psychologists have found positive correlations between spirituality and spiritual practices such as beliefs, experiences, and practice and subjective psychological well-being, marital resiliency, improved quality of life, and optimism. Significantly, the chapter introduces the proposed study of spirituality and the role of chaplains in the military context, specifically in the role of marriages. The concept of spiritual fitness is emphasized as the best approach to mental health, general well-being, resilience, operational readiness, and social life moderation—for instance, in military marriages. In sum, the chapter provided a background for the study and set up the context and the study population in the overview. It also highlighted the researcher's perspective and study situation to the author and later showed the significance of the current study and its contributions to the current discourse.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

The influence of chaplaincy and spiritual care on family strengthening among the military population is potentially significant, particularly in coping with traumatic combat experiences and family detachment (Johnson et al., 2001). Therefore, it is important to explore this issue as previous studies have shown that military combatants experience escalating levels of stress and trauma during their service, which trickles down to their families (Dirkzwager et al., 2005; Mailey et al., 2018; Moon, 2019). As the marital relationship status and strength affect the mental well-being of military personnel, which further affects the service outcome and efficiency of the soldiers, approaching this domain proves essential (Malinen, 2018). Although military personnel's mental health and family challenges are engaged clinically by psychological and family therapists, there has been a shortage in the military environment, which makes chaplains the only available alternative (Johnson et al., 2001). However, the spiritual domain has comparatively been ignored in military marriage stabilization based on the gaps in the literature. Many existing studies on family therapy and marriages in relation to spiritual intervention are mere attitudes, practice surveys, and declassified opinions (Butler et al., 2002; Carey & Hodgson, 2018). This elicits the need to conduct an empirical study to bridge the existing gap.

There are many proposed conceptual models for incorporating spirituality into family therapy, marriage education, and social life enlightenment among military individuals. However, referential and empirical analyses that support theoretical claims are almost nonexistent (Snyder et al., 2011). As such, there is a literature gap relating to integration theories between spirituality, chaplaincy, and marital strengthening (Snyder et al., 2011; Stanley et al., 2010). This creates the need for research examining the reliable effects of religious practices, spirituality, and chaplaincy

on marital systems. In addition, this proposed study can potentially illuminate the significance of spiritual care intervention in confronting marital issues and maintaining stronger marital relationships among military couples. Therefore, the importance of this problem lies in using the available resources within the military environment to solve real-world problems, for instance, marriage discord among military couples. The current study connected with previous studies, which support the growing consensus that aspects of spirituality, including beliefs, experiences, and practices, could be integrated into clinical therapies when dealing with psychological and marital challenges within military populations (Butler et al., 2002; Carey & Hodgson, 2018).

Carey and Hodgson (2018) reported that chaplains' spiritual care for military marriages fosters resilience among army couples. Many other researchers have also found positive correlations between resiliency among spouses, optimism, and spirituality (Butler et al., 2002; Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Seddon et al., 2011). For instance, Seddon et al. (2011) demonstrated that religiosity improves the overall quality of life, which could be seen in the outcomes of providing marriage-based counseling to military families before and after deployment. While studying the effectiveness of military chaplaincy and spirituality, there are several topics to consider; these form the building blocks of understanding the effectiveness of military chaplains. These include chaplaincy and pastoral care among military personnel, understanding the connection between mental health, spirituality, religion, and military marriage sustainability, strengthening, and reconstruction (Seddon et al., 2011). These topics build a connection that informed the basis of this study. Therefore, this study explored chaplains' role in guidance and bridging the gap between mental health providers, family therapists, and military personnel in helping salvage and strengthens military marriages. I theorized that spiritual care provided to

military personnel during deployment significantly quells the moral injury associated with military service, which might affect their marital relationships.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study relates to the theories and models supporting its central ideas. Two existing theoretical frameworks guided the current study; the family stress theory advanced by Bowen (1971) and Selye's (1956) stress theory. Selye's stress theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for probing stress. According to the theorist and endocrinologist, stress is a nonspecific body response to external or internal stimuli affecting how one relates with their environment. The theory has been repeatedly reviewed to establish that stress is an external threat to one's mental and physical well-being (Selye, 1956). This theorist emphasized how exposure to physical, emotional, and moral injury predisposes one to stress. Exposure to such stressors makes individuals vulnerable to various shortcomings. The theory significantly informed the current study's approach to the stressors facing military personnel and their spouses, contributing to their marriage turbulence.

On the other hand, the family stress theory advanced by Bowen (1971) focuses on the family patterns manifesting in defusing anxiety. The theory has been significantly used in most studies investigating the effect of military deployment on military marriages (Bowen et al., 2013; Jackson-Lynch et al., 2014). According to Hamlin-Glover (2009), the family stress theory is plausible for military marriage studies because it elicits the significance of understanding military families in their social and structural contexts. The theorist contended that when families are confronted with adversities, they strive to gain balance and maintain steady states (Bowen, 1971; Kerr, 2019). This made it relevant to the current study. This study referred to both theories to frame the research and focus on the individual efforts of military spouses in ensuring their

family successes and maintaining their marriages as they deal with the various stressors and marriage crises brought on by deployment.

Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy Among Military Personnel

The effectiveness of military chaplaincy in upholding and strengthening marital relationships can be understood by establishing a link between the various components, including chaplaincy and spiritual care, and how they apply within military environments. Various studies have examined this theoretical trinity in revealing the significance of chaplains among military populations. In an empirical quantitative study, Cafferky et al. (2017) examined 3,777 active-duty U.S. Air Force personnel to establish a connection between marital satisfaction, resilience, family coping, and satisfaction with military service. In addition, they examined the perceived effectiveness of the military chaplains assigned to the study population across different residence locations and ranks. Cafferky et al. established that Air Force chaplains play a significant role in upholding family and military personnel's resilience during deployment. However, this effectiveness was slightly contested by Berg (2011), who noted, despite this celebrated effectiveness, dimensions of spirituality contribute to the posttraumatic stress disorders witnessed among the study military personnel due to their service. Analyzing data collected from 94 Vietnam combat veterans, Berg found the veterans interviewed from the acute psychiatric units had various personality disorders and substance abuse influenced by spiritual distress, such as anger, loss of hope, despair, and grief.

Moreover, the effectiveness of a military chaplain does not override some of the psychological and social factors influencing mental health or the health of marriage relationships among military personnel. Seddon et al. (2011) argued, before applying chaplaincy in the military context, it is important to understand the influencing variables; these factors provide an

overview of the possible outcome when chaplaincy is applied to confront psychological or family matters. Cafferky et al. (2017) discussed some of these factors, including marital satisfaction and the spiritual inclination of the population over which spirituality is dispensed. A positive inclination toward these spiritual elements leads to positive health and marital outcomes. They outlined negative mental health outcomes (e.g., lack of purpose and meaning in life, religious doubt, anger, guilt, despair, grief). A significant proportion of the veterans diagnosed with depressive disorders in the study were experiencing higher levels of spiritual distress. Berg (2011) highlighted how religious communities, chaplains, and counselors play a significant role in quelling this spiritual distress within military environments. Some spiritual practices that moderated spiritual distress include chanting, memorizing, attending spiritual services, singing spiritual songs, and reading spiritual books such as the Bible and the Quran.

Military individuals face many traumatic and posttraumatic experiences, which can be termed spiritual or psychological concerns (Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Harris et al., 2011). Military personnel experience traumatic events (e.g., the fear of death, the grief of losing colleagues, seeing dead bodies, the guilt of killing other humans in combat; Ahrens et al., 2010). These experiences trigger behavioral health issues, which require a response. Military chaplains provide the most accessible spiritual response to these issues in the military environment. Bormann et al. (2012) contended that military rules and principles often make it challenging to have nonmilitary professionals as mental health care service providers. Therefore, as military chaplains play dual roles as combatants and counselors, they offer a unique perspective to assist those in need within the military environment. The various military combat experiences affect combatants' mental and behavioral health, affecting their social lives (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2016). Social life influences their relationship with their families after deployment, meaning

these issues must be addressed as they emerge during deployment to avoid reintegrating negatively affected veterans into society (Black et al., 2004). According to McLaughlin et al. (2010), the best way to do this is by ensuring the chaplains provide mental health and counseling services adequately before, during, and after deployment. This allows service people to be well-prepared and know how to act when facing various challenges that may affect their mental health.

However, military chaplaincy has been developed within religious services rather than mental health care services. Chaplains are known to conduct religious services and pray for combatants while going to war. Despite the overriding evidence of this in the chaplains' job description, Seddon et al. (2011) argued, alongside the overreported spiritual care, these individuals mediate the psychological health of the military personnel. Seddon et al. (2011) further acknowledged the shortage of psychiatrically trained medical personnel among combatants, thereby making military chaplains the best alternative.

Historically, the roles of military chaplains in the U.S. Army were limited to prayers and blessing the war; however, it has been extrapolated to the clinical environments, which serve individuals better within such an environment. Seddon et al. (2011) noted the intervention of chaplains includes nondirect discussions and thoughtful responses to traumatized individuals, which involves providing support, attention, and serving as advisors. It has been established that chaplains have added other resources to their use of historical holy books and word of mouth because they have been forced to take responsibility as the most dependable mental health specialists within their work environments (Davie, 2015). According to Seddon et al. (2011), professionals in the U.K. Royal Marines use resources like trauma risk management and decompression programs. These tools, together with their experience within the work

environment, enable chaplains to develop a collaborative model which fosters mutual understanding with the military personnel they are responding to. As soldiers require attention from individuals who understand the nature of their job, it becomes easier for the military chaplains to mediate the various psychological and spiritual issues.

The deployment of military personnel causes various mental and psychological health implications, which could be better handled through pastoral care and religiosity. In a qualitative analysis, Brelsford and Friedberg (2011) explored the link between combat stressors, religion, and spirituality. As established by various studies, the stressors caused by military deployment affect the combatants and their families alike; therefore, providing pastoral therapy and investigating its effectiveness should be done within both populations (Butler et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 2011). Brelsford and Friedberg highlighted spirituality and religion as therapeutic approaches to help families and individuals cope with deployment stressors. The study explored religion and spirituality as a psychological intervention for elements of emotional distress, loneliness, hopelessness, family dysfunction, and detachments that often characterize military families after deployment. Therefore, integrating religion and spirituality within other family therapy pathways may be an effective intervention among military families (Brelsford & Friedberg, 2011).

Apart from Brelsford and Friedberg's (2011) study, other analyses have shown military chaplains' roles in ensuring the satisfaction and resilience of their service members. Cafferky et al. (2017) provided evidence for the effectiveness of military chaplains from the perspectives of military personnel. Notably, military chaplains are the custodians of spirituality and religiosity in military environments; therefore, the significance of spiritual mediation is attached to their success. According to Cafferky et al., military chaplains have been fundamental in responding to

the spiritual needs of military service members and their families, thus supporting their resilience and strengthening their families. Specifically, these populations' spiritual components that caused positive outcomes include increased service and marital satisfaction, family coping, and perseverance (Cafferky et al., 2017). Military chaplains initiated, moderated, and monitored these outcomes in this study.

Additionally, various studies have shown that chaplains play a significant role in enhancing resilience among military populations (Cafferky et al., 2017; Malinen, 2018). Doehring (2015) presented a theological framework for understanding resilience as a relational ability that helps individuals highly predisposed to trauma integrate moral stress spiritually. In military environments, chaplains are responsible for advancing and nurturing resilience among service personnel. Examining trauma coping within theological constructs is an excellent approach to understanding the significance of nurturing resilience among actively deployed populations (Doehring, 2015). Doehring (2015) also argued that spiritual systems, theological beliefs, and values cause moral stress. For instance, spiritual distress is characterized by self-disgust, loss of purpose in life, guilt, fear, and shame. Such distress often occurs in military personnel, especially after killing in combat. The chaplains are responsible for cocreating a system of love, goodness, and compassion (Doehring, 2015) as moral support systems to advance resilience and help such individuals cope.

Understanding the context of military chaplains involves understanding their roles within the military environments. Studies have revealed that chaplains play significant counseling, spiritual care, and pastoral roles within active military and veteran populations. A case study of the state of chaplaincy in Sweden highlighted counseling and providing psychiatric support to emotionally injured service members as the most significant responsibility of military chaplains

(Grimell, 2020b). These extensive roles necessitate an understanding of a clinical approach to trauma and a profound understanding of psychology, which most Swedish military chaplains lack. While military chaplains are expected to deliver quality psychiatric care among traumatized populations with minimal training, they also become predisposed to the risk of secondary traumatization (Grimell, 2020b). Although chaplains are threatened with subsequent moral injuries, they learn from their experiences while providing spiritual care within the Swedish Armed Forces (Grimell, 2020b). Most significantly, the study illustrated military spiritual care within pastoral and theological models in Sweden (Grimell, 2020b), a standard reflection of most military chaplaincy establishments.

It is important to understand the scope of use of military chaplains. In light of this, Kazman et al. (2020) undertook a quantitative study to examine the behavioral health service and chaplain use pattern, and to compare this within military environments. The study sought to compare the use of chaplains against other sources of behavioral health services based on the counseling service. Grimell's (2020a) postulation that military chaplains provide spiritual care conceived within the clinical frameworks of mental health interventions was evident. Kazman et al. established that military chaplains are more frequently consulted by various segments of the military population than other mental health providers inside and outside military bases. Therefore, chaplains should be trained to meet the many needs of military personnel as this resource has become an indispensable social and healthcare asset to most military institutions.

Psychological Challenges Facing Military Populations

Military personnel and their families face various psychological challenges, making military chaplains significant professionals within the military environment. These psychological health challenges affect the people related to military personnel through family detachments or

losing loved ones in war (Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Waggoner, 2014). The challenges include posttraumatic stress disorders, anxiety disorders, substance abuse disorders, emotional injuries, and psychosocial injuries (Abernethy et al., 2006; Black et al., 2004; Bormann et al., 2012; Carey & Hodgson, 2018). Several studies have shown how war has detrimental effects on the mental health of military personnel and the people around them. Mailey et al. (2018) documented an overwhelming variety of psychological syndromes and mental health symptoms among populations facing repeated conflicts to show the effects of war on the psychological health of an individual. However, the study also recorded coping mechanisms that individuals within this population applied, for instance, the resilience they were taught during military training (Mailey et al., 2018). Studies have demonstrated a link between the psychological health and spiritual health of individuals serving in the military; therefore, there is no doubt that various facilities and professionals should be engaged in providing mental healthcare services to such populations as part of their reconstruction, relief, and rehabilitation (Black et al., 2004; Bormann et al., 2012). The over-reported mental health consequences of war on combatants can only be addressed in this way.

Various psychosocial topics arise in investigating the mental effects of war among military populations; these issues have been researched by clinicians and psychologists (Brelsford & Friedberg, 2011; Butler et al., 2002). According to Dirkzwager et al. (2005), the prevalence and manifestation of these psychological effects are universal; therefore, a universal and generalized study that proposes uniformity in the interventions should be considered. Although measuring the prevalence of these psychological effects has been limited by the lack of a uniform scale, the various measurements or observations show that the affected populations, especially military personnel, require specialized care and timely response (Harris et al., 2011;

Mahoney, 2010). Among the already discussed causes of negative mental health outcomes in military environments, mild but long-term symptoms can create negative spiritual health outcomes that must also be addressed. Mailey et al. (2018) highlighted how the U.S. Army established psychosocial and mental health support in its emergency wing and general service setting. This happens across different military settings following overwhelming evidence that military populations are adversely affected by war psychologically (Davie, 2015; Waggoner, 2014). As trained mental health personnel are limited within these environments, but the negative mental health outcomes are overwhelming, it forces improvisation and adjustment to better respond to combatants' needs.

Although the present study focused on spirituality in military marriages, it is important to look into military settings and some of the factors within these environments which might negatively influence such marriages; the mental health outcomes are typical factors (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). War negatively affects military personnel, spouses, and children (Black et al., 2004). Mailey et al. (2018) stated that when responding to the negative health outcomes of deployment and various barriers to healthy behavior and living in military environments, the loved one of the service personnel must not be left out; they should be included within the military populations. These populations face various negative health behaviors affecting their psychological well-being. These behaviors include challenges with diet and nutrition, physical activity, social connection, and stress management (Black et al., 2004). Mailey et al. argued that the negative aspects of these mental well-being determinants could cause depression, high levels of stress, and anxiety, which might build up to disproportionate levels requiring professional interventions. Therefore, Mailey et al. significantly acknowledged positive practices among these

populations, such as eating healthy diets, improving social connections, and engaging in physical activities.

Riggs and Riggs (2011) contended that military populations, combatants, and their families risk various psychological challenges because of the nature of service in the military environment. The authors argued this environment is not supportive of families. Riggs and Riggs noted military combatants are in constant loops of deployment and redeployment, which is not ideal for families. During these deployments, the combatants suffer physical and emotional injuries, predisposing them to adverse psychological outcomes (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Using the family networks, the needs of these populations vary during deployment.

Riggs and Riggs (2011) revealed how separation exposes these individuals to solitude during deployment, resulting in adverse mental health outcomes. Although it has been established that the resilience of military populations can significantly mediate these risks, Riggs and Riggs stated that the emerging risk negatively influenced the resilience of military populations, combatants, and their families. This reinforces the need to include military families when confronting the negative psychological outcomes of combat experiences; during deployment, there is a rising need to integrate various family systems theories to ensure that the mental health of the spouses and children of the service personnel is also considered (Black et al., 2004). As various military personnel are affected differently by combat experiences, it is important to understand the needs of specific military personnel and their families before, during, and after deployment. Black et al. (2004) argued assessing the postwar effects on military veterans after deployment makes it easier to understand the needs of these combatants to facilitate a reunion with their families and successful reintegration into civilian society.

Different studies have shown various ways to confront the psychological challenges these populations experience; notably, such studies acknowledge that these individuals experience various negative health outcomes attributed to their service in the military (Butler et al., 2002; Carey & Hodgson, 2018; Moon, 2019). In this light, Moon (2019) proposed a multidimensional approach to solving military personnel's mental health challenges. Moon's study exclusively focused on providing solutions to the various negative mental health outcomes in military environments. At the same time, the scholar reiterated the dependencies that cannot be overlooked to ensure adequate resolution of negative health outcomes. These resources include the availability of communities of faith to respond to these challenges, the willingness of military personnel to seek spiritual guidance, and the availability of mental health care services. When providing mental healthcare interventions, the various processes should consider family ties, meaning family members must actively reintegrate these individuals back into society. Moon noted that military families, active-duty service members, and veterans face significantly negative psychological health outcomes directly related to their military services. Carey and Hodgson (2018) also argued that responding to moral injury, trauma, and stress, among other psychological challenges, requires collective responsibility, including military organizations, society, families, and faith communities. Therefore, apart from the overemphasized clinical response to these psychological challenges, it is important to consider spiritual interventions.

In every clinical setup, confrontation of any suspected clinical issue begins with its establishment; therefore, diagnosis is a significant process while addressing the psychological challenges among military populations. Apart from the social support systems, such as attachment advanced by Basham (2008), screening is integral for addressing trauma among high-risk occupations such as military populations (Bliese et al., 2008). According to Bliese et al.

(2008), the consolidation of the various postdeployment clinical screening tools, such as the Primary Care Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Screen and the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist, a critical starting point for isolating and responding to the trauma and other psychological implications of combat among the military populations (Bliese et al., 2008).

Although it has been established that military personnel are predisposed to several psychological risks of trauma and moral injury (Dirkzwager et al., 2005), confronting these adverse psychiatric outcomes begins with isolating the discriminant properties and symptoms of such psychological challenges through screening (Bliese et al., 2008).

Despite efforts to screen and address trauma among military personnel, the scope of such adverse psychological health outcomes continues to widen; for instance, secondary traumatization affects individuals outside this population (Bliese et al., 2008). While addressing war's psychological and mental health outcomes, the combatants and their dependents, families, and spouses should also be covered. According to Bramsen et al. (2002), when combatants return from war and suffer traumatic stress, this negative psychological outcome might indirectly affect members of the families, such as their spouses. Therefore, the screening, diagnosis, and confrontation models that Bliese et al. (2008) advanced should additionally consider the spouses of combatants to establish a healthy postdeployment integration. Bramsen et al. substantiated this argument by quantitatively analyzing the psychological outcome among Dutch couples who were World War II survivors. The study hypothesized and validated that posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms among these veterans escalated to their spouses.

The adverse psychological outcomes these studies highlighted are sometimes caused by physical injury. While Bramsen et al. (2002) argued that combat-caused trauma could affect other social associates of the combatant through secondary traumatization, Clark et al. (2009)

contended that emotional symptoms of polytrauma vary with the level of exposure to the primary cause. Clark et al. compared physical and emotional injuries between soldiers injured by blasts and other means. Those injured by blasts recorded higher emotional and physical damage because these wounds cause physical and cognition damages that affect the combatants' overall behavioral and psychological health outcomes. Unlike soldiers injured through other means and spouses exposed to secondary traumatization (Bramsen et al., 2002), the physical pain and brain injury cause mental deterioration resulting in frequent emotional torture among blast-surviving military personnel. Such injuries have long-term physical and psychological health outcomes that might reduce the quality of life and cause disabilities.

Military organizations must investigate the impact of such extreme combat operations and address the physical and psychological adverse outcomes before reintegrating these individuals into civilian populations (Collins & Kennedy, 2008). As it has been established that injuries cause severe emotional impacts on the victims and their families, Collins and Kennedy (2008) recommended adopting intensive rehabilitation to eliminate the exposure of noncombatants and families to secondary traumatization. Collins and Kennedy advanced the need to understand the polytraumatic scope of the primary patients, the risk within their social networks, and the provision of family therapy to the polytrauma patients and their families as a way of serving the families of veterans and combatants.

Furthermore, the need to serve military families surpasses postdeployment family therapies (Collins & Kennedy, 2008). It extends to the general welfare, physical health, and well-being of children and families of actively deployed military individuals (Cozza et al., 2005). Apart from secondary traumatization, studies have shown that military families and children risk traumas and stresses of contemplation (arising from self-inquiry and the future) as their parents

are actively serving in the military. Various social support systems and networks that are offered have strengthened these families; however, different waves of challenges have emerged, leading to unrelated psychological injuries in this population, which demands further scientific examination and intervention.

According to Cozza et al. (2005), the psychological injuries that military families, especially children, face are caused by parental deployment, detachment, parental injury, or death. The aftermath of parental service often affects families and children (Cozza et al., 2005). Thus, there is a need to heighten the service to families of military combatants. Secondary traumatization is an overwhelming issue among military populations' families (Cozza et al., 2005). Dekel (2007) reported a wide range of emotional distress symptoms among the wives of prisoners of war. The study involved confronting trauma among populations exposed to combat stress indirectly through their husbands. Confronting such traumatic events is often preceded by screening and diagnosis for secondary traumatization and prescription of appropriate therapy. Dekel showed the progression of posttraumatic experiences motivated by the wives' attachment styles. The repercussions of the secondary traumatization were far-reaching. This denotes that combat-related trauma has overwhelming consequences for family members, including children and spouses, in almost the same way it affects combatants (Cozza et al., 2005; Dekel, 2007).

In a different study, Dekel et al. (2005) explored what it entails to be a wife of a veteran with posttraumatic stress disorder while qualitatively examining secondary traumatization among this population. Distinctively, the study took a phenomenological approach in examining the importance of companionship (i.e., wives) for veterans battling posttraumatic stress disorder. In this study, Dekel et al. highlighted ambiguity in relationship boundaries as a significant player in contributing to the secondary traumatization of the wives of veterans with posttraumatic stress

disorder. Dekel et al. showed how the women led conflicted lives as they struggled to respond to their husbands' needs and live independent lives. However, Dekel et al. established some positive aspects of such relationships that enhanced coping and strength amid marital strain. Such positive marital aspects included the struggle to cohabit, the women's caregiving roles, and the solitary responsibility of maintaining partnerships and their marriages (Dekel et al., 2005).

Psychiatric Care, Spiritual Care, and Their Integration for Military Populations

As established, most military organizations have overemphasized the psychiatric response to the negative psychological health outcomes among military combatants. However, spiritual care has been extensively ignored in response to the spiritual injuries experienced during the war. Peeters (2020) believed there is a need to integrate spiritual care and psychiatric care within the military populations. At the same time, Waggoner (2014) highlighted that chaplains often lead programs that promote strong military marriages and spiritual support that strengthens the unions. The concept of spirituality in the clinical environment has received scholarly attention in recent years. However, the most detrimental factor to this integration is clinical professionals' poor understanding of spiritual care (Peeters, 2020). Spirituality has been neglected in healthcare, but chaplains have proven vital in managing psychological issues.

Bormann et al. (2012) engaged the view of different healthcare service providers, users, and mental health clinical professionals in a series of focus groups to establish their perception of the provision of spiritual care as part of the clinical response to mental health challenges.

According to Black et al. (2004), spiritual care influences the healing of mental and spiritual health challenges depending on the environment in which it is applied. Black et al. demonstrated that certain cognitive elements of spirituality (e.g., a person's sense of purpose in life) can be expressed within clinical environments and confronted through various clinical toolkits.

Furthermore, the quality of interpersonal care can be defined within spiritual care's constructs in expressing compassion, care, love, and concern toward the patients. The increased emphasis on the mechanics of clinical response to mental and spiritual injuries was addressed in a study by Morgan et al. (2016). The failure of mental health care service providers to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of such trauma can be attributed to the lack of adequate and competent links between these approaches. The psychiatric response has assumed prominence over measurable elements of the spiritual practice. Harris et al. (2011) argued clinicians could only acknowledge the significance of spirituality in practice when the spiritual care designers acknowledged holistic elements that entail multidisciplinary integration mechanisms to ensure compatibility. In other words, as these approaches differ in nature, it is important to create a point of similarity to ensure they can be integrated into the treatment plan. Therefore, integrating spiritual care in the clinical confrontation of the negative mental health outcomes among military populations involves understanding the different elements and the nature of health outcomes and the shared connections between spirituality and clinical elements.

According to Peeters (2020), the clinical integration of spiritual care is often jeopardized by the imbalance between clinical values and spiritual doctrines, a power imbalance that distorts boundaries. This can make the integration less effective in relation to various religious beliefs. Therefore, Peeters recommended that chaplains sensitively approach the differences in beliefs, perspectives, and interests of the military individuals they counsel. While clinical treatment of trauma and other negative mental health outcomes involves prioritizing the need of the patients, studies have shown that in many cases, spiritual care focuses instead on the need of the chaplains and what they believe is good for their patients; and this might lead to abuse of privileges and misdiagnosis (Lipski & Ubani, 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2010). Help-seeking behavior among

military personnel also determines the clinical integration of spiritual care among military populations.

McLaughlin et al. (2010) highlighted how soldiers seek mental health services at a lower rate than their engagement with military chaplains. In fact, only 1 out of 6 soldiers will seek mental health services. This is attributed to the inaccessibility of mental health service providers in military settings. The researchers emphasized the importance and significance of the roles played by chaplains within the military domains as vital resources to military personnel. McLaughlin et al. showed that chaplains are the most sought-after source of help by combatants. Therefore, as chaplains also act as mental health professionals, they must be formally included in the clinical practice and acknowledged as significant figures in the service environment (McLaughlin et al., 2010).

Additionally, integrating spirituality into psychotherapy has a significant history, specifically in African American care. The focus on cultural competence among African Americans falls within three-dimensional community exposure to trauma, womanism, and spirituality (Abernethy et al., 2006). Additionally, Abernethy et al. (2006) described prayers as a culturally competent intervention in treating African American families. Therefore, Sue's (1998) cultural competence framework could be referenced when investigating the involvement and integration of prayer and other spiritual components in psychiatric or clinical environments. In establishing such subtle links, Abernethy et al. (2006) noted the fundamentals of culturally competent care: cross-cultural relations, adaptation of services, cultural strength, language, and linguistic differences. Their research defined prayers and spirituality as cultural competencies integrable into psychiatric care.

Because Abernethy et al. (2006) isolated prayer as an element of cultural competence applicable to spiritual care, it is necessary to understand its effectiveness in alleviating symptoms linked to emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression. Boelens et al. (2009) investigated the effectiveness of direct contact person-to-person prayer in neutralizing adverse emotional outcomes such as salivary cortisol levels, anxiety, negative emotions, and depression. The study demonstrated how prayers as a religious practice had been used to cope with mental, behavioral, and other adverse psychological outcomes among populations exposed to such risks. The clinical integration of prayer in the psychiatric confrontation of trauma, anxiety, and stress should be quantifiable (Boelens et al., 2009; Mailey et al., 2018). In a randomized trial, Boelens et al. (2009) established the effectiveness of prayer within the framework of a hypothesized clinical trial. The study showed that prayers eliminated the hurtful emotions attributed to the traumatic memories and replaced them with positive emotions such as tranquility and optimism (Boelens et al., 2009).

The prayer approach Boelens et al. (2009) advanced is a proponent of a belief system; normalization of such systems within military populations can significantly combat trauma and other related symptoms. Recovery from traumatic experiences requires a personal discovery of the meaning of life (Decker, 2007) defined within such belief systems. Decker (2007) claimed that veterans confronted with psychological trauma during war struggle with such experiences because they cannot find meaning in civil life or the war. The struggle with psychological recovery elicits the need for a belief system that would integrate spirituality within clinical approaches to trauma. Decker proposed a rationale for the clinical integration of spirituality in treating adverse traumatic outcomes among combatants and veterans from a mystical perspective. Although Boelens et al. (2009) argued that prayer and spirituality eliminate the

painful and traumatic emotions attributed to combat experiences, Decker complemented this by proving how mystical integration of spirituality in the clinical treatment of trauma reduces psychological difficulties arising from combat trauma.

In a different study, Fontana and Rosenheck (2004) examined an integrated model linking the elements of veterans' posttraumatic stress disorder and change in religious faith as a consideration when providing mental health services to this population. Existential studies have established that traumatic experiences alter veterans' social perceptions and religious faith even as they seek mental health services (Black et al., 2004; Fontana & Rosenheck, 2004). Such alteration affects the veterans' belief in the purpose and meaning of life, and their religious faith especially weakens because of moral injury (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2004). Evaluating a model integrating the interrelationship of combatants' exposure to trauma and the resultant posttraumatic stress disorder provides a clinical framework for the Veterans Affairs mental health programs. According to Fontana and Rosenheck, veterans who experience guilt, posttraumatic stress disorder, and moral injury seek religious redemption and mental health services to answer their existential questions about life's purpose and meaning. Therefore, mental health facilities should develop models that address spiritual losses within the clinical regimen (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2004).

Apart from the clinical model Fontana and Rosenheck (2004) advanced, embracing religious beliefs and practices as part of spiritually motivated coping is prevalent, especially among veterans. Religious coping can be regarded as spiritual care, especially where military veterans lack adequate social support to heal from postwar trauma and physical injuries. Hassankhani et al. (2010) illustrated how chronic illnesses and physical injuries incurred in war cause stress and psychological unease. Therefore, adapting to such challenges requires

embracing self-healing processes, including acceptance and moving ahead with life (Hassankhani et al., 2010). Arguing from the perspective of Iranian war poisoning survivors, the study revealed that religious values, beliefs, and practices the veterans held and the available religious support significantly affected healing among the participants (Hassankhani et al., 2010). Participation in religious, social activities among veterans and military populations can help such populations deal with the traumatic physical and psychological outcomes of war.

Notably, understanding spirituality as a coping tool in clinical and social contexts requires understanding its application facets. Various studies emphasized different facets of this subject. While Hassankhani et al. (2010) investigated the religious beliefs and support systems to facilitate healing, Hourani et al. (2012) explored the influence of spirituality on depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicide ideation among actively deployed military personnel. The researchers examined the levels of adverse psychological health outcomes from combat exposure. Most significantly, Hourani et al. established that high levels of spirituality have protective effects for posttraumatic stress disorder and depression among low-moderate combat exposure military populations. Thus, the study recommends evaluating and implementing spiritual resilience among threatened military populations.

Furthermore, the theme of coping outside a psychiatric context arises while examining spiritual care. Sterner and Jackson-Cherry (2015) highlighted the influence of religion and spirituality on combat-deployed military personnel's coping. Unlike Fontana and Rosenheck (2004), who studied the integration of spiritual and moral injuries after the wars, Sterner and Jackson-Cherry explored the integration of spirituality and religion among military service members during deployment to avoid the moderate adverse mental and psychological health outcomes of combat operations. The study hypothesized and confirmed that spirituality and

religion mediated combat stress while enhancing personnel's ability to cope with service-related stressors. In this context, building resilience is significant to help military personnel cope. Clinicians can also administer treatment effectively when individuals are resilient. Weiss et al. (2010) recommended the military genogram (i.e., a tool that elaborates events that have occurred across generations in the military context) as an effective way of integrating spirituality and culture into clinical practice for assessment and intervention for adverse psychological outcomes. The authors emphasized the spiritual genogram, highlighting its effectiveness in enhancing coping and preceding clinical confrontation of the various psychosocial challenges within military populations (Weiss et al., 2010). Therefore, spirituality should be integrated with various military processes and phases, such as before deployment, during operations, and postdeployment reintegration when military personnel reunite with families and civilian life (Sterner & Jackson-Cherry, 2015).

Military Marriage Sustainability, Strengthening, and Reconstruction

The nature of military services has threatened military marriages for many years. The frequent and demanding deployments mean that married couples stay away from each other for a long time, negatively affecting their marital relationships (McLaughlin et al., 2010). These families are often forced to move and relocate to different geographical locations when their partners are redeployed, and this often becomes traumatic. According to Moon (2019), the traumatic nature of military life threatens even the strongest marriages. Therefore, there is a need to integrate various actors and stakeholders in ensuring marriage sustainability among military populations. Snyder et al. (2011) noted that these challenges do not necessarily need to destroy these marriages. A sustainable military marriage does not involve the couple alone; various service providers and professionals within the military environment often support the marriage

institution. Various resources exist at the dispensation of military couples to enable them to uphold their marriages, strengthen their weakening marriages, and reconstruct their already broken marriages. These resources include military chaplains, military counselors, and marriage guidance professionals.

Some factors that weaken military marriages include infidelity and distance, which can be confronted by providing marriage education to military families during deployment. However, a detailed empirical study by Allen et al. (2012) argued that existing cases of infidelity among military couples significantly affected the outcome of the marriage education given to these families before deployment. In most cases, military members are often confronted with the infidelity problem as they are separated from their families to serve their respective countries. As a result of the distant relationships, military personnel often lack faithfulness in their partners, which is a major detriment to a healthy marriage. Unfaithfulness among spouses leads to divorce and separation among military members, resulting in mental health issues that impact productivity and coexistence within the work setting and at home. Although marriage education aims to strengthen the marriage institution in the military context, its efficacy is influenced by several factors that the couple may be unable to control. Nevertheless, infidelity is not the only stressor for the effectiveness of marriage education. Some of the factors highlighted in marriage education as preventive and therapeutic remedies that strengthen military marriages have been contended or omitted in various studies (Allen et al., 2012). Besides marriage education, other strategies to enhance marriage longevity should be employed to sustain military marriages.

Malinen (2018) proposed marriage guidance as the best approach to alleviating negative psychological health outcomes such as posttraumatic stress disorder, which further affects military marriages. Malinen stated the negative spiritual and mental health challenges could

significantly reduce the chances of survival in military marriages. This study also showed how veteran soldiers often find it challenging to reintegrate into society (including their families), negatively affecting their marriages. Several studies have shown how services such as chaplaincy help reduce the negative impacts on mental health among military personnel; this leads to stabilized marriages (Mahoney, 2010; Malinen, 2018). Malinen emphasized the rising need for safeguarding and strengthening military marriages by applying the various resources available to military populations.

On the other hand, Stanley et al. (2010) contended that marriage education based on spirituality significantly alleviates the risks of dysfunctional marriages and divorce among military couples. Therefore, the historical integration of military chaplains in educating military couples can be an effective mechanism. Mahoney (2010) also demonstrated the effectiveness of religion while reviewing factors supporting the survival of military families and marital relationships. In this case, the spiritual intervention provided by military chaplains can be a tool to settle disputes and offer support and encouragement.

In addition, military marriages are confronted by service-motivated deployment, notwithstanding the psychiatric outcomes of the spouses. Several studies have combined the effect of deployment on military marriage while recommending approaches to such difficulties. Basham (2008) used attachment and detachment theories to address the impact of deployment stress on the relationship between combatants and their partners. The postdeployment transition is often challenging, causing dysfunctionality among military spouses. However, Basham argued that attachment and detachment theories could effectively confront these families' challenges.

Similarly, systemic analyses have shown the effectiveness of psychosocial practice models integrating psychological and social theories to assist military personnel and their

partners in navigating service-oriented challenges (Basham, 2008; Snyder et al., 2011). Such theories are developed based on social support as mediation to the combat trauma and attachment disruptions causing relationship failures among military couples.

Moreover, the social support systems Basham (2008) introduced with the attachment theory extends to integrating with the military community. According to Burrell et al. (2003), the aspect of military community integration significantly fosters marital well-being and retention among actively deployed and undeployed combatants. Several factors have been explored in establishing military marriage sustainability; however, integration into a community has supported improvement in the spousal health and retention of such marriages. The study argued that integration gives military spouses a haven and a sense of belonging while emphasizing their general well-being. Burrell et al. argued that integrating military families into communities has led to healthy marital outcomes, retention of marriages, and sustainability. The study demonstrated how integration breeds support networks and social contacts, giving the families and individuals a psychological sense of community and belonging, thus mediating the adverse mental and psychological stressors that often disintegrate military marriages.

The social support systems explored under military integration in Burrell et al. (2003) were supported by Charuvastra and Cloitre (2008) while also linking posttraumatic stress disorder with social bonds. Like Burrell et al. (2003), Charuvastra and Cloitre argued posttraumatic experiences are psychosocial health outcomes that must be confronted within similar frameworks. The clinical examination of trauma and related adverse psychiatric phenomena proves they can be regulated by attachment organization, social cognition, and social support (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008). The study emphasized the emotional aspects of posttraumatic stress disorder while showing how this human-generated event could be examined

within the social matrix. Posttraumatic stress disorder, especially attributed to military operations, is often associative. Soldiers are situated within social and military communities; therefore, building such communities to alleviate could lead to better psychological outcomes. Social networks can effectively treat posttraumatic stress disorders (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008).

Apart from the deployment stress studied by Basham (2008), Cook et al. (2004) asserted that posttraumatic stress disorder caused by war significantly affects the quality of intimate relationships between veterans and their marital partners. An evaluation of the relationship between World War II ex-prisoners of war (POWs) and their spouses showed that the sample diagnosed with postdeployment posttraumatic stress disorder was confronted with marital distress. The World War II POWs were less likely to be in intimate relationships; however, the few in marriages exhibited high levels of family dysfunction. Traumatic exposure adversely impacts social bonds (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008); this was argued by Cook et al., who noted that combatants who had suffered PTSD could not sustain an intimate relationship because of poor communication, misunderstanding, emotional numbing, and poor adjustment.

Marriage sustainability among military couples is a multifaceted responsibility bestowed on the couple and other support institutions like spiritual establishments. Studies have shown how religious training and sensitization of military couples before deployment strengthen their marriages, reduce the risks of infidelity, and enhance marital resilience (Lipski & Ubani, 2020; Mahoney, 2010; Malinen, 2018). However, this argument needs empirical and qualitative support within and outside the study population. According to Dollahite and Lambert (2007), religious involvement has promoted marital fidelity among couples with marriages founded on the Abrahamic faiths—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The study involved interviews and

conceptual models describing how religious couples learn to stay faithful to their spiritual and religious establishments. Accordingly, Dollahite and Lambert reported that religious spouses embrace a set of values and beliefs that ensure they sanctify their marriages and uphold fidelity. The study revealed these values emphasized consecration, improving marriage quality, and promoting fidelity. Again, religious involvement emphasizes morality, relationship with God, and commitment to fidelity which all significantly foster resilience and marriage function. Therefore, involving religious elements in military marriages is a way of enhancing the sustainability of such institutions.

Additionally, prayer is an aspect of the religious establishment that enhances marriage satisfaction, thus the sustainability of this partnership institution. Fincham et al. (2008) argued that young adult relationships are confronted by marriage satisfaction which can be enhanced by prayer. The study revealed that prayer primes long-term relationships among young adults, thus influencing commitment and satisfaction. Fincham et al. noted that prayer precedes a satisfaction change when used as a marriage sustainability tool. The spiritual denominators appealing to marriage are defined within prayers. Again, not all prayers enhance marital satisfaction. Fincham et al. stated that for prayers to augment marital satisfaction, they must be intrinsic, spiritually relevant, and specific to the couple seeking spiritual intervention (Fincham et al., 2008).

Military Families

Military reservists and their families are a minimally studied population in the psychological exploration of the impacts of war on combatants. As reservists are studied under overall military populations, their families' challenges are studied as the effects of war on military families overall. Faber et al. (2008) conducted a qualitative analysis of reservist families' ambiguities when these service people are deployed. As this is a military faction that is

not actively deployed to wars, the effects of such deployment on their family stability are far-reaching because the families have not built the resilience required of other military families. According to Faber et al., spouses of military reservists have reported that the deployment causes loneliness, loss of emotional support, family dysfunction, and role overload. The study indicated the psychosocial confusion these families face, leading to falling apart, which is a family structure detriment. Apart from the spouses, children of the deployed military personnel are a minimally studied segment, yet are also a fragile part of the military family threatened with deployment trauma. According to Gorman et al. (2010), military deployment influences military children's behavior. This population's increased behavioral and mental health complaints determine such behavioral changes. The study established an increase in the relative rate of outpatient visits for mental and behavioral health disorders due to parental military deployment. Such establishments are significant for actionable plans by pediatricians to isolate and address such psychological outcomes among these children clinically.

Although military families are confronted with challenges caused by deployment, the various social support systems available could significantly help them cope. Recent research has focused on military families' stress and stressors, coping mechanisms, and the contribution of spirituality as a mitigating factor. Hamlin-Glover (2009) explored the relationship between religion, spirituality, and family resilience among military families and spouses. The study revealed that religious orientations and spirituality are significant coping resources military families and spouses use when confronted with trauma and psychological turmoil (Hamlin-Glover, 2009). In addition, spirituality strengthens the family system, enforcing the necessary resilience to withstand challenges. According to Hamlin-Glover, spirituality helps individuals cope by making sense of their marital relationship and professing their religious experiences.

Understanding the functional crises in military families during deployment involves understanding the families' perception of dysfunctionality and spirituality's role in supporting their families. The study revealed that fairly religious couples and families engaged in religious interventions, which played a significant role in their family functioning (Hamlin-Glover, 2009).

Families of military personnel who sustain various physical and psychological injuries react differently to these outcomes. Military personnel with financial and medical challenges are confronted with conflicting experiences to various degrees depending on their attachment to families (Verhaeghe et al., 2005). A special group within this study was the families of veterans suffering from traumatic brain injuries attributed to the war (Verhaeghe et al., 2005). As the variety of family experiences expose them to the dangers of secondary traumatization, interventions should be developed based on their priority for attention. Traumatic brain injury is a unique aspect to focus on because it results in communicative, emotional, and cognitive injuries (Verhaeghe et al., 2005). This causes psychological unrest within families as they watch their loved ones suffer.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed existing literature on spirituality, chaplaincy, marriage, and family within the military context. While reviewing this literature, several themes emerged: pastoral care and chaplaincy among military personnel; psychological challenges facing the military population; psychiatric care and spiritual care, along with their integration for military populations; military marriage sustainability, strengthening, and reconstruction; and military families. Various journal articles were explored to delve into these themes. Significantly, the chapter highlighted how military personnel and their families face various challenges attributed to their deployment. The literature was synthesized to show that deployment often threatens

military marriages because the disturbance caused by the service further affects the combatants' relationship with their loved ones after deployment. This chapter emphasized literature on helping military personnel navigate these marital and psychological challenges through various multidisciplinary approaches. Integrating spiritual care and religion is one of these approaches, and it provides immense support within military settings. The various studies reviewed in this chapter have established the workability of this approach. Thus, it is vital to consider the needs of the military population and their families so that clinicians and counselors may respond efficiently to military families' needs.

Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

My research investigated the relationship between the role of chaplains in supporting the marriages of actively serving military personnel. This chapter explores the phenomenological research design and methodology used to investigate the topic. This involves the participants and recruitment methods, the procedure used for the study, measures used, interview questions, and data analysis procedures. This chapter also identifies the methodological procedures to analyze and interpret data solicited from the research participants. Finally, this chapter addresses internal and external validity issues and prevailing threats that affected the validity and limitations.

Design

The phenomenological research design entails a qualitative research approach that mainly focuses on the common aspects of different people's experiences within a particular group. The primary objective of the approach involves concluding the exact nature of a particular situation (Neubauer et al., 2019). The approach is the primary mode of data collection among groups of individuals directly involved in the phenomenon or experiencing the situation firsthand. In the current research, the primary participants involved active deployed military personnel. Although the servicemen and women are involved in the marriage, chaplains are directly involved in counseling the couples. The interview questions were primarily meant to answer the topic questions revolving around the participants' experiences with the phenomenon. In this case, the main issue under investigation is the impact of military chaplains in strengthening marriages among military couples in active deployment. The main reason for choosing phenomenological design is that it is quite descriptive and explicit in showing the participants' experiences. Besides, its element of interpretation makes the research meaningful in connection to underlying

social structures and personal perspectives (Qutoshi, 2018). Also, phenomenological studies mainly focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of a given phenomenon based on the views and perspectives of the research participants makes it the best fit for my study.

Setting

The study was conducted via phone interviews with Ellsworth Air Force Base members in South Dakota, United States. Therefore, the participants took part in the study from the comfort of their homes. The targeted groups within the study population were married service members and those counseled by military chaplains on psychological and marital health. The study also involved military chaplains who had served for at least 1 year to give insight into spiritual care. The military base commander and the Judge Advocate General (i.e., the base's legal lead) consented to the research. Additionally, the Wing Chaplain reviewed the interview questions to ensure their fitness within the military context and compliance with the base's military doctrines. The interviews were conducted on the weekend according to the availability of the participants to allow ample time for the data collection process.

Participants

Participants included married individuals actively serving in the military and military chaplains. These participants were obtained through referrals from base commanders and the Family Readiness Program. Other targeted participants were sought through Ellsworth Air Force Base's social media outlets, including its official Twitter handle and Facebook pages: Ellsworth Air Force Base's Field-grade officers (FGO) and Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC). Actively deployed combatants were sought through Ellsworth Air Force Base's Field-grade officers (FGO) Facebook page. The military chaplains were sought through the base's Military and Family Life Counselling (MFLC) Facebook page and Twitter. The military personnel who

participated were involved in marriage counseling with a chaplain at one point. This criterion helped increase the accuracy of answers given to the interview participants. After their identification, the military personnel were then provided with information regarding the topic of study and asked for their voluntary participation. They were also required to review the informed consent letter, ask any questions they might have, and sign and return this form prior to beginning the research.

Inclusion Criteria

The main inclusion criteria for active military personnel involved being married and having previously used chaplains' services. Inclusion criteria involved actively serving military chaplains because they were closely connected to this topic. Additionally, chaplains were best positioned to correctly explore the research questions because they directly engage with active military personnel.

Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria for research participants were either the status of a participant's marriage (including those pursuing divorce), those with one partner deceased, or those in open types of relationship. Including personnel in close relationships reduced bias that comes with open marriages, such as having other intimate partners outside the marriage. This criterion was determined using the question, "Are you currently involved in several relationships with other more than one person?" Finally, another exclusion criterion was the participants' perceptions regarding the study. The exclusion criteria involved retired chaplains who had been assigned other roles and those who had only been in service for 6 months or less. This strategy ensured the participants had enough experience with various elements of the military population. The sampling methodology applied was stratified sampling, where the military population was

divided into homogeneous groups relating to the desired population traits. Although participants were not compensated, their engagement was solicited by sharing information regarding the importance, procedures, and any risk in the research.

Sample Size

The study involved a relatively small but homogeneous sample size of approximately 15 participants. I obtained information from at least 12 married and actively deployed members and three military chaplains via phone interviews. The sample was solely sourced from the premeditated study setting, Ellsworth Air Force Base. However, interviewees had to meet various criteria to participate in the study. Participants had to be married and actively serving in the U.S. Armed Forces for at least 1 year when they responded to the survey questions and had been in the military installation long enough. The military spouse participating in the survey should have been deployed at least once in their military career. On the other hand, the military chaplains must have served for at least 1 year, long enough to understand the military problems and have experience in providing spiritual care.

Study Procedure

The research began by obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which ensures that the rights and welfare of human participants are adhered to effectively. Thus, as the research involved acquiring some private information about individuals, securing IRB approval was crucial in eliciting support from participants regarding the safety of the data provided and increasing the study's credibility. After confirming the approval from IRB, I then obtained approval from Ellsworth Air Force Base institutions. This process involved obtaining consent and review from the base commander, the legal team, and the wing chaplain. After each party agreed to the research, I obtained information regarding the potential participants. Before

collecting the data, I briefed the participants about the study to give them an idea of what it entailed. I then used phone interviews to collect data from the research participants. According to Block and Erskine (2012), mobile phones are a beneficial medium of data collection as they provide researchers with varied experiences and resourceful data without necessarily having to incur expenses and spend time traveling to different locations for the interviews. Additionally, there are issues with availability and accessibility, which impact the viability of other methods, such as physical surveys in data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The calls were recorded, after which the transcripts were reviewed during the actual analysis of the data. Military chaplains are typically obligated to ensure the moral and spiritual well-being of military personnel and their families. I ensured I gathered the required data from the phone calls by developing a rapport with the research participants. However, the interview questions were structured according to the participants, whereby I produced two interview protocols for the chaplains and the military personnel. The interview protocol contained a detailed procedure on how the interviews were to be conducted. The different questions were structured to address the concerns of the topic according to participants' contexts, thus improving the quality of the interviews.

Interview Strategy

The phenomenological study used semistructured interviews. The questions were directed toward identifying the relationship between chaplains and their role in supporting the marriage of actively deployed military personnel. The main reason for using semistructured interviews was their effectiveness in exploring the research participants' thoughts, beliefs, and feelings (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Semistructured interviews also offer a flexible interview protocol supported by probes, follow-up questions, and comments, which increases the credibility of data provided by

the research participants (DeJonckheere & Vaugh, 2019). However, the interview was conducted over the phone, and I worked to enhance the depth of the information. An example involves creating rapport through greetings and creating a welcoming environment for the participants by reading them their rights about the research and assuring them of privacy.

The approximate number of questions for the study was eight open-ended questions conducted over 20–30 minutes per phone conversation. The questions were significant as they helped achieve optimal use of the interview time. This method helped analyze more respondents through a more systematic approach that ensured the interview remained focused on the researched topic (Jamshed, 2014). In order to capture the interview more effectively, the discussions were audio recorded with consent from the participants.

Working Interview Questions

Interview Questions to the Military Personnel

1. What would you describe as the importance of the chaplain in your marriage?
2. How often do you consult the chaplain for marital advice if you are not on good terms with a spouse?
3. What role does spiritual care play in your marriage?
4. How does spiritual care help maintain your relationship?
5. What is the perception of your spouse at home regarding spiritual care and its role in your relationship?
6. What are some of the spiritual aspects that you perceive as directly related to marriage?
7. What are some of the key areas that the chaplains provide assistance?
8. How does psychological wellbeing affect the stability of your marriage?

9. Have you had any psychological issues since you got deployed?
10. What factors contribute to some of the psychological problems you might be facing?

Interview Questions to the Chaplains

1. What would you describe as the role of chaplaincy in military marriages?
2. How often do military couples consult you for marital advice, and what is their success rate?
3. What role does spiritual care play in marriage?
4. What is the connection between spiritual care and chaplaincy?
5. How does spiritual care interact with marital relationships?
6. What is the spouses' perception regarding spiritual care and its role in their relationship?
7. What are some of the spiritual aspects that you perceive as directly related to marriage?
8. What are some of the key areas that the chaplains provide support in?
9. How often do members present with psychological issues triggered by unstable marriages?
10. What interventions do you take when couples present with psychological issues relating to unstable marriages.
11. What is your take on the importance of psychological wellbeing in building a strong union?

Data Interpretation Strategy (Data Analysis)

The most significant step in analyzing data collected in phenomenological data involves transcription. According to Alase (2017), abstract information obtained from research needs transcription to be considered usable data during qualitative studies. This process entails repeatedly listening to responses from recorded phone conversations (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Additionally, the process facilitates fact-checking, whereby the researchers listen to the records. The transcription process was followed by coding, which entails manually reading the transcripts to identify common themes related to the investigated issue (Alase, 2017). The themes were then used to interpret the data related to the topic being explored. Theoretical aspects were used to interpret the results whereby a correlation between the identifiable themes based on transcripts of the two classifications of participants was analyzed.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in the research addresses various issues, including confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability. Some methods used in the study to ensure high credibility levels included prolonged engagement, peer/expert review, member checks, and external audits.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the research findings effectively describe the investigated topic and its correlation with reality (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Credibility primarily depends on the richness of information collected from participants and the analytical skills of the ones conducting the research. Establishing credibility is significant in ensuring that the results from the study represent the most feasible information from research participants' original data and that the interpretation represents the correct overview of the ordinal views of

research participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Thus, ensuring credibility will enhance the application of the research in real life.

Prolonged engagement involves investing sufficient time in collecting and generating qualitative information from participants. Prolonged engagement helps in ensuring that the researcher attains an in-depth understanding of the data provided by participants and any existing misinformation or manipulation of the information (Earnest, 2020). Thus, participants were constantly engaged throughout the research to identify any patterns in inconsistencies with the data provided. For instance, the participants were asked about their marital status to ensure that the information they provided was consistent with the study context.

Member check involves sharing feedback, interpretations, analytical decisions, and conclusions with the research participants from whom information for the research was attained. This strategy improves the study's trustworthiness since participants might be able to identify biases and shortcomings of the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Thus, the member check verifies the research results by submitting them for scrutiny using the outsider view. In this case, a member check was performed right after the study to ensure its trustworthiness.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability specifically address the reliability of qualitative studies by analyzing the consistency of information and processes used in attaining the final results in a research intervention. Accessing dependability and confirmability are achieved by providing sufficient details regarding the context and setting of the study. Ensuring the dependability and confirmability of research involves conducting an audit trail. An audit trail clearly describes the steps undertaken throughout the research study from the beginning to the end in a transparent method (Carcary, 2009). This strategy is essential because it enables the audience to follow

through with the researchers' process of evaluating the research problem and determine whether the final results can be relied upon. In this case, all procedures undertaken were clearly outlined to ascertain their dependability and confirmability.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which qualitative research results can be applied within different contexts and settings, entailing different research participants. Within the current research, a thick description was used in evaluating the transferability of the research. Thick description involves describing the experiences and behaviors of research participants within their context so that readers can apply the research results to outsiders not engaged in the research (Shenton, 2004). Thus, a thick description enables the audience to determine if they can transfer the research results within their contexts by providing sufficient information to make this decision.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality

Confidentiality in research involves acknowledging the identity of the research participants and undertaking the necessary steps to ensure that they maintain the ethical standards of protecting their data. Maintaining participant privacy is vital in research as it is an essential medium for building trust and rapport with the chosen participants and upholds the integrity of the research process (Kaiser, 2009). Thus, maintaining confidentiality in the research helped improve the quality of the research undertaken by improving the quality of the information obtained from research participants.

I maintained the confidentiality of research participants by ensuring the information collected did not directly identify the participants and the data were also stored in a secure place

accessible by only research personnel. Thus, I used pseudonyms to identify the participants throughout the study. Furthermore, information gathered is protected by being stored in a secure, password-protected computer with access to only me. However, as the data collected can be shared with other researchers for future research, any information that can personally identify the participants was eliminated from the information transmitted. The records stored in the computer will also be erased after 3 years, ensuring further confidentiality of the research participants.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is one of the building blocks for any ethical research involving human participants since it describes the level at which individuals can voluntarily participate and provide complete information to aid in the study. Informed consent is an essential ethical issue as it ensures that individuals choose whether to participate in a research study based on factual and credible information (Manti & Licari, 2018). Thus, the provision of informed consent is essential in the research process as it also enhances participant engagement and the credibility of the information provided by human subjects. Participants were provided with informed consent forms before the beginning of the research to ensure I acquired consent from research participants. Some of the components included in the consent form included the option to leave or cease participation in the study and information regarding the investigation, including the study's importance, purpose, and implications. This information was instrumental in ensuring the research attained informed consent from research participants. Furthermore, informed consent also ensured voluntary participation from the sample participants.

Role of Investigator Biases

Within any research, bias is commonly identified as the major undermining factor to the final results attained from the studies. Bias negatively impacts research results by causing

distortion, leading to wrong conclusions (Simundic, 2013). Although some confounding elements in research cannot be avoided completely, researchers are commonly obligated to share limitations to their studies with readers to avoid deviation from the main objective. Additionally, as the research involves the human population, it is imperative that an investigator tries and attain the correct sample that can be used to create a generalizable conclusion regarding the research topic. Failure to attain the correct representation of the sample population reduces the external validity of the research (Khorsan & Crawford, 2014). However, sometimes the investigator might create a bias by obtaining certain results, hence reducing the study's overall validity.

Evidence of Quality in Research Data

One of the most effective ways to ensure quality data is using an adequate sample size to explore the study in depth. Additionally, phenomenological research enhanced the validity as the primary objective is to provide the most accurate results by understanding the phenomenon instead of using prevailing facts regarding the phenomenon. Accuracy in the research was enhanced by using the participants' lived experiences to understand the social phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenological research design was significant as the research involved the experiences of chaplains over time and the experiences of military personnel who have previously sought the services of chaplains. It is noteworthy that the main essence of phenomenological research is to investigate individuals' lived experiences while providing adequate evidence regarding the situation as described in the topic (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Thus, the phenomenological research design established the most informative conclusions regarding the impacts of chaplains in stabilizing and strengthening marriages among those involved with the military. The analysis of the outcomes promoted the conclusions through the

lens of other analysis methods, such as theoretical analysis of related concepts identified from thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter highlighted the steps taken to obtain, organize, and interpret the data. This involved gathering information I then developed and arranged in patterns to give an insight into common themes. The chapter revealed the phenomenological nature of the research, which emphasizes the significance and applicability of religion and spirituality in relationships and military marriages and how it may enhance family resilience. The interviews explored the impacts of deployment. The chapter also addressed ethical considerations, including autonomy and confidentiality and the issue of informed consent within the research. Cumulatively, the study findings provide future direction for research using face-to-face interviews to add to the relationship between spirituality, chaplaincy, and military marriages.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

This chapter focuses on the findings after a thorough data compilation and analysis. The main aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of spiritual care on increasing resilience and psychological moderation, as demonstrated by military marriages. Spiritual care within the military is usually disseminated by military chaplains, who are central to delivering care services. Therefore, this study focused on understanding the impact spiritual care, given through the military chaplains, has on increasing mental health coping and marriage stability among military couples. It had three main research questions that contributed to structuring the interview questions and compounding the study's findings. The first research question was "How do spirituality and chaplains play a role in supporting couples and their marriages?," the second one was "How does psychological well-being strengthen military marriages?," and the third one was "What support systems, resources, and interventions are available to help couples cope with their experiences during deployment?"

The findings showed spirituality, furthered by chaplains, was essential in building mutual trust and understanding among spouses. Chaplains guide couples in maneuvering tough times in marriages through advice dispensation, conflict resolution, and encouragement during separation. Spirituality also equips couples with the right attitudes and virtues necessary for a union's stability. Data analysis revealed that psychological well-being was essential for good communication patterns and a healthy understanding of the other party's experiences. It creates room for empathy. Psychological well-being also facilitates handling adverse emotions to avoid escalations that may spill over. It also allows couples to live in the present, which is essential when handling the day-to-day struggles in marriage. The findings revealed that military couples

have access to military counseling given by the army chaplains stationed on deployment and those left at home to care for the families left behind. Educational programs also helped couples cope and address significant issues either personally or as a couple. Couples were also advised to use available spiritual resources like reading spiritual books, praying, and fellowship.

Participants

All the names outlined in this list are pseudonyms. Twelve actively deployed service members and three military chaplains were interviewed. Of the 12 military personnel recruited for the study, three were female and nine were male. Only one of the three chaplains was female. The youngest participant in the study was 24 years, and the oldest was 44 years. One participant served for 3 years, and the rest served at least 5 years in the military. The majority of the military personnel were married for over 10 years.

Military Personnel

Tom

Tom was a 44-year-old Caucasian man who worked in the military. He was married for 20 years and served in the forces. He has also been a member of the Catholic Church since childhood. He did not have children. He reported having experienced severe posttraumatic stress disorder. He suffered psychological distress due to deployment, which affected his marriage. Tom agreed that spirituality played a significant role in maintaining his marriage as it helped them understand their spouse's needs and communicate effectively. He also mentioned spirituality's impact on upholding fidelity, forgiveness, and companionship. He further stated that chaplains helped him maneuver through tough times in their marriage and provided hope, advice, and encouragement.

Joseph

Joseph was a 36-year-old White man. He was married and has been a member of the Pentecostal church since he was 27, the same year he had his wedding, marking 9 years. He served in the military for 12 years, having been deployed to some volatile war zones. He struggled with anxiety and depression. He had three children. Joseph expressed difficulty in seeking out a chaplain's services. He agreed that spirituality was essential for building understanding, good communication patterns, forgiveness, and compassion between couples. He expressed difficulty seeking help and mentioned the importance of faith and prayer for marital strength. Joseph also highlighted that chaplains guided his marriage through difficult times. He also experienced psychological distress during and as a result of deployment, which affected his marriage.

John

John was a Latin American, 40-year-old soldier. He was married for 15 years and had two children from the union. He experienced severe complications in his marriage due to his posttraumatic stress disorder and grief after deployment. He had not been an active member of any church since childhood. John stated that spirituality strengthens his marriage by making it resilient against worldly turmoil. He mentioned spirituality's importance in preventing unfaithfulness and agreed that chaplains are the best guides during marital conflict or strain as they helped him and his spouse understand each other's feelings, communicate, and work together. He experienced psychological distress due to deployment, which affected his marriage.

Rose

Rose was a 42-year-old White soldier who served in the military for 13 years. She was married for 15 years. Her husband was an entrepreneur. She did not have children and was not

looking to have any soon. She mentioned struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder and anxiety after her first deployment. Rose agreed spirituality was critical in keeping her marriage alive as it promotes oneness. She maintained that chaplains helped her and her spouse deal with complex issues by assisting them in understanding each other and communicating respectfully, alongside building compassion. She also mentioned the importance of faith for hope in one's partner's well-being and loyalty and highlighted holding off from seeking help. She experienced psychological distress during and after deployment, which affected her marriage.

Beth

Beth was a 24-year-old Latino soldier who was in service for 3 years. She was married for 2 years. She had one child from before she was married. Her husband ran a store in their neighborhood and cared for the children. She mentioned being away from her family as her most significant issue. Beth stated that spiritual care helps model the ideal marriage through the relationships in the Bible and its focus on love. She agreed that chaplains provided counseling, advice, support, and encouragement during challenging times in their marriage. Beth also mentioned the importance of self-awareness and emotional intelligence in maintaining a good marriage and expressed difficulties in seeking help. She experienced psychological distress during and after deployment, which affected her marriage.

Peter

Peter was a 43-year-old Caucasian man who served in the army for 20 years. He was married for 19 years and had four sons. He hailed from a Catholic background. He was an army leader. He recounted struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder, grief management, and anxiety. Peter stated that spirituality enabled them to serve a higher purpose in their marriage. He maintained that chaplains helped them deal with complex issues by assisting them in

understanding each other and communicating respectfully, alongside building compassion. Peter further mentioned chaplains also served as counselors to process his psychological distress. He held off from seeking help and experienced psychological distress during and after deployment, which affected his marriage.

Paul

Paul was a 38-year-old military man. He was of Latino origin, identified as a member of the LGBTQ community, and was married for 10 years. He was in service for 15 years and struggled with mental health. Paul agreed spirituality is essential for building understanding, good communication patterns, forgiveness, and compassion between couples. He supported marriage counseling as an addition to spiritual guidance and chaplain guidance and maintained that chaplains help deal with complex issues. He experienced psychological distress during and after deployment, which affected his marriage.

Phillip

Phillip was a 35-year-old White soldier with a mixture of Caucasian and Asian heritage. He was in the army for 10 years and married for 15 years. He had two daughters. He was raised within the Pentecostal church and practices his faith to date. He recounted struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder and other mental conditions. Philip maintained that chaplains helped in dealing with complex issues by assisting them in understanding each other, communicating respectfully, building compassion, learn how to love, and empower each other. He mentioned that chaplains have served as counselors to process his psychological distress, but he sometimes held off from seeking help. Philip highlighted prayer as essential in maintaining relationships and experienced psychological distress during deployment, which affected his marriage.

Joe

Joe was a 37-year-old White soldier. He was in service for 15 years and fought in numerous wars. He had one wife and one child and attended a Catholic church. Joe agreed spirituality is critical in keeping their marriage alive as it promotes oneness and trust. He mentioned that a chaplain helped with advice, guidance, support, and encouragement in their marital struggles. He also acknowledged the importance of prayer in controlling negative emotions and experienced psychological distress during and after deployment, which affected his marriage.

Ken

Ken was 40 years old and in service for 17 years. He was Latin-American and married to a Japanese woman for 20 years. He had four children, and his wife lived at his parent's home. He suffered posttraumatic stress disorder and anxiety after deployment. Ken agreed that spirituality is essential in maintaining a stable marriage and proper mental health and well-being among individuals through building oneness and a higher purpose. He supported applying spiritual practices (i.e., faith and reflection) to control negative emotions. He also mentioned the chaplain helped their marital struggles with advice, guidance, support, and encouragement. However, he highlighted difficulty in getting his wife to join the sessions and consistently asking for help. Ken experienced psychological distress during deployment, which affected his marriage.

Jane

Jane was 35 years old and married for 13 years. She was in service for 10 years and deployed to several camps. She was White and had no children but was looking forward to getting one soon. Her husband was also a soldier. Jane stated chaplains double up as counselors and spiritual guides. She expressed her husband was reluctant to seek services. However, she

acknowledged spiritual practices (i.e., faith) for strengthening faithfulness and love. Jane experienced psychological distress during deployment, which affected her marriage.

Allan

Allan was 41 years old and an Army leader. He served in the Army for 20 years and was married for 17 years. Allan had one wife and two children and could not describe himself as a spiritual person. He suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder and anxiety. He was White. Allan stated that spirituality strengthened his mental health and marriage by promoting intimacy, compassion, kindness, understanding, and faith in God. He agreed that chaplains provided guidance, understanding, advice, encouragement, and hope to military personnel and their spouses. However, he sometimes found it hard to reach out for help but mentioned that chaplains served as spiritual guides and mental health counselors. Allan experienced psychological distress during deployment, which affected his marriage.

Military Chaplains

Ryan

Ryan was a 33-year-old White man who served as a military chaplain at Ellsworth Air Force Base. He served as an Air Force Chaplain for 1 year and had 12 years of prior service. He was married with children. Ryan agreed spirituality is essential for a stable marriage as it helps military couples value the marriage institution and help each other through difficult times. He stated the chaplain's role is to provide guidance and insight into God's word and perceive and solve issues. He further mentioned the effects of psychological trauma on marriage quality. Ryan recommended deployed spouse events, marital counseling services, five languages of love seminars, and the Strong Bonds Program as further interventions' for sustaining military marriages.

Mary

Mary worked as a military chaplain at Ellsworth Air Force Base. She was American, 42 years old, and served in the position for 12 years. She was not married. She worked as a military chaplain on numerous bases, including those on deployment, and thus had rich exposure. She was trained in clinical pastoral education. Mary agreed that spirituality is essential for a stable military marriage as it gives spouses hope and guides them in processing their emotions and understanding the other person's struggles. She also believed that chaplains guide these couples in understanding, interpreting, and communicating their emotions alongside giving advice and hope. Finally, she recommended couples therapy as a supplement to spiritual guidance and highlighted that men are reluctant to seek services in some states. She also recommended the Strong Bonds Program, Military and Family Life Counselling (MFLC) support, and reintegration counseling as further interventions for marriage strengthening.

Edwin

Edwin was a White man. He was 40 years old and worked as a military chaplain at Ellsworth Air Force Base. He served in the chaplaincy position for 3 years and had 17 years of prior service. He had never married. Edwin believed spirituality is essential for keeping marriages alive, especially during struggles and problems. He stated that chaplains help couples communicate and understand each other while helping them appreciate marriage's sanctity. He also mentioned the need for counseling, couples therapy, and workshops to maintain marriage stability. He also recommended the Strong Bonds program.

Results: Thematic Analysis Table

Please see Table 1 for the thematic analysis.

Table 1*Thematic Analysis*

Interviewee	Emerging themes
Mary (Chaplain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality as an essential for stable military marriage • Chaplains maintain psychological well-being • Recommends other interventions including the Strong Bonds Program, Military and Family Life Counselling (MFLC) support, and reintegration counseling
Ryan (Chaplain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality as an essential for a stable marriage • Chaplain's maintain psychological well-being • Recommends further interventions including deployed spouse events, marital counselling services, five languages of love seminars, and the Strong Bonds Program
Edwin (Chaplain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality as an essential for keeping marriages • Chaplains help appreciate marriage's sanctity • Other interventions include counseling, couples therapy, and workshops to maintain marriage stability as well as strong bonds program
Tom (Military Personnel termed MP henceforth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality plays a significant role in maintaining marriage • Spirituality's helps upholding fidelity, forgiveness, and companionship • Chaplains help maneuver tough times • Psychological distress due to deployment affected marriage
Joseph (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality is essential in strengthening marriage • Faith and prayer are important in marital strength • Chaplains guide marriage through difficult times • Psychological distress affects marriage
John (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality strengthens marriage • Spirituality prevents unfaithfulness • Chaplains offer support during marital conflict or strain • Psychological distress affects marriage
Rose (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality promotes oneness • Chaplains provide support in dealing with complex marital issues • Faith promotes marriage well-being and loyalty • Holds off from seeking help • Psychological distress affects marriage
Beth (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual care models an ideal marriage • Chaplains provide counseling, advice, support, and encouragement during challenging times • Self-awareness and emotional maintain a good marriage • Expressed difficulties seeking help • Psychological distress affects marriage

Interviewee	Emerging themes
Peter (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States spirituality maintains a strong marriage • Chaplains offer spiritual support during marital conflicts • Chaplains serve as counselors to process psychological distress • Holds off from seeking help • Psychological distress affects marriage
Paul (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality is essential for sustaining marriage • Spirituality is a coping method • Chaplains help in dealing with complex issues • Psychological distress affects marriage
Phillip (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaplains help in dealing with marital conflict • Chaplains served as counselors during psychological distress • Holds off from seeking help • Prayer is an essential element in maintaining relationships • Psychological distress affects marriage
Joe (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality is critical in promoting oneness and trust • Chaplain offer advice, guidance, support, and encouragement in marital struggles • Prayer is critical in controlling negative emotions • Psychological distress affects marriage
Ken (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality is essential in maintaining a stable marriage • Spiritual practices (i.e., faith and reflection) control negative emotions • Chaplains offer help in solving marital struggles • Psychological distress affects marriage
Jane (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaplains double up as counselors and spiritual guides • Reluctance to seeking chaplain services. • Spiritual practices (i.e., faith) strengthen love and loyalty • Psychological distress affects marriage
Allan (MP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality strengthens mental health and marriage • Chaplains provide marital guidance • Chaplains serve as mental health counselors • Psychological distress affects marriage

Research Questions

The study applied a phenomenological design with a qualitative approach. Thus, data were mainly collected to focus on understanding the individual experience of the involved military personnel and chaplains with spirituality's impact on the military personnel's marriage

and mental health stability. Once collected, I looked for similar patterns in thought and perspective to establish themes related to the topic under discussion.

RQ1: How Does Psychological Well-Being Strengthen Military Marriages?

From the generated answers, psychological well-being strengthens military marriages by allowing proper communication and coping mechanisms to keep their emotions in check. Psychological distress brings about depression, anxiety, and trauma that hinder one's functionality and perception of matters. When individuals are in such a state, they cannot communicate their issues seen in Joseph saying, "sometimes it is not easy to express my feelings." Poor communication and processing of psychological distress destroy understanding and tolerance, thus destroying marriages. However, when psychological distress is under control, individuals can relax, enjoy each other's company, communicate better, love genuinely, and find joy in their union. This reflects the argument by Johnson et al. (2001), who attributed ineffective communication as a major characteristic of relationship distress among married couples. However, when psychological distress is under control, individuals can relax, enjoy each other's company, communicate better, love genuinely, and find joy in their union.

Psychological Distress and Impact on Military Marriages

The most outstanding theme was that all participants reported having experienced psychological distress during and after deployment, which interfered with their relationships with their children and spouses. The participants cited different reasons for the development of this distress. For instance, Tom stated the distress developed from "having to experience long periods away from friends and family, as well as the constant worry that danger and harm is always a heartbeat away during deployment," creating loneliness and anxiety. A similar thought was seen in Jane's interview, where she explained her distress came from "being away from family and

not having the opportunity to experience important events such as children's birthdays and our marriage anniversary. Constant worry about my family's well-being also caused me great stress." This concern was also voiced by Ken, Phillip, Paul, Beth, and Joseph. These sentiments supported findings by Johnson (2007) that identified safe emotional connection as a critical element in the maintenance of stable relationships.

Additionally, participants cited battlefield experiences as a reason for the development of psychological issues. According to Riggs and Riggs (2011), the military environment exposes military personnel to a range of physical and emotional risk factors with adverse effects on their psychological well-being. Battlefield experiences have been found to adversely impact deployed military personnel's psychological well-being (Flipse Vargas et al., 2013; Pols & Oak, 2007). Allan stated, "Witnessing violent death, maimed colleagues and friends, dead bodies, refugees' suffering, and physical abuse of prisoners of war has been the major cause of my depression and, to some extent, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)." These sentiments were consistent with findings by Litz et al. (2009) and McNulty (2005) that linked moral and ethical challenges confronted by deployed military personnel to the development of psychological distress. Rose added, "There was also a continuous lack of sufficient sleep, especially when we were in enemy zones." Another common argument in connection with the battlefield was the fear of death and not returning home to loved ones, framed by Joe when he said, "Another crucial factor is the anxiety I live with; I fear that I may die in combat and live my wife and kids alone." The participants cited these reasons for the development of posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, trauma, and depression, which they found difficult to express but were working to get over with the help of a counselor and familial support.

Role of Chaplains in Maintaining the Psychological Well-Being of Military Couples

Following the psychological distress encountered in deployment, participants agreed that chaplains were essential in maintaining psychological and marriage well-being. Most of them said chaplains served as spiritual guides and mental health counselors. Ken stated, “Military chaplains provide significant assistance by offering confidential counseling and spiritual nourishment between my spouse and me either during or after deployment, which has become essential in strengthening my relationship.” Allan supported this idea by claiming that “chaplains take care of the spiritual well-being of military personnel and their families. They also conduct counseling sessions during a psychological crisis, for instance, grief, depression, and traumatic events.” Indeed, McLaughlin et al. (2010) and Nieuwsma et al. (2013) asserted that chaplains assist military personnel in overcoming psychological challenges through counseling sessions that foster their capacity to deal with psychological stressors effectively. As spiritual guides, the chaplains offer guidance, advice, hope, encouragement, and teachings on values. According to Herspring (2001), one of the primary roles of military chaplains is the provision of motivation and morale boosting to deployed military personnel. This element was seen in Phillip’s response that explained the chaplain’s role as assisting with “love and relationships where we are urged to love and value each other. Chaplains emphasize the importance of holding a family together . . . assist in teaching values such as integrity and honesty in relationships . . . guide us on life purpose by ensuring we accommodate each other as humans.” They cited that chaplains use their knowledge of the word to instill wisdom and insight in couples and help them appreciate life. Edwin corroborated this point by outlining his role as providing “religious education, confidential counseling sessions, and worship services to military personnel and their families.” The other two chaplains also voiced a similar aspect regarding their responsibility. Military

chaplains facilitate spiritual integration of moral stress, fostering resilience among deployed military personnel (Doehring, 2015; Seddon et al., 2011). As such, incorporating spirituality in the development of resilience through the support of chaplains enhances military personnel's psychological well-being, which strengthens their marriages.

RQ2: How Does Spirituality and Spiritual Care Provided by Chaplains Play a Role in Supporting Couples and Their Marriages?

The data collected from these interviews revealed that spirituality and spiritual care provided by chaplains help create understanding, oneness, and proper communication channels among individuals, which helps married couples develop patience for each other and express themselves effectively. Moreover, the themes identified also revealed that spirituality and chaplains help military couples process negative emotions, allowing them to deal with psychological distress that affects their marriages' stability. Therefore, chaplains provide spiritual and mental health guidance, bringing holistic wellness to individuals and their partners.

Role of Chaplains in Supporting Military Couples in Their Marriages

Chaplains help individuals establish healthy communication habits that promote understanding and cooperation among respondents and their spouses. This idea was correctly framed by John, who mentioned, "Chaplains assist in several areas, including conflict resolution, stress management, and alleviating emotional distress among individuals after deployment." These identified segments reflected areas of consideration in counseling sessions that function around recognizing one's emotions and finding workable ways to manage them effectively. Paul stated the chaplain's advice on managing marital issues helps maintain his relationship. At the same time, he argued that spiritual care "contributes to the healing process of mental and spiritual challenges and provides interpersonal care such as love, compassion, and care."

The conclusive patterns of response reflected that input from chaplains is essential in helping these military personnel process their emotions effectively and function better in society during and after deployment. This aligned with the observation by Brelsford and Friedberg (2011) and Grimell (2020b) that military chaplains are regularly sorted by deployed military personnel to assist with the management of deployment stressors. The chaplains' interview establishes that they consider counseling as part of their responsibility toward military couples, with Mary stating, "A chaplain's role is to ensure that the two partners understand each other and maintain the same level of trust, love, and confidence in their union as when they first married." Ryan highlighted that this is achieved by "offering to counsel in conflict situations where the chaplain provides individualized guidance to spouses," a point Edwin supported. Moreover, Mary and Edwin supported military couples seeking additional marriage and mental health counseling, a fact further supported by Paul.

Spirituality as a Coping Method

Another common theme was the significance of spirituality in helping these individuals cope with difficulties during deployment and in their marriages. Each individual mentions different impacts of spirituality in their lives and mental health stability. Tom argued that it helped them "address marital challenges and reminds them to always seek reconciliation through dialogue leading to understanding." This thought connected to Joseph's, who held that spirituality keeps them in contact with their true selves, thus enabling them "to practice patience, kindness, forgiveness, and tolerance for each other." These two views laid a foundation for the observed patterns of thought among the participants, establishing that spirituality leads them to a place of more understanding, compassion, love, and care for their spouses. It makes them view life and marriage from an elevated position of purpose and service to each other, alongside

modeling how to live as husband and wife. This position was consistent with findings by Bonelli and Koenig (2013) and Sterner and Jackson-Cherry (2015), who linked individuals' involvement with religious activities with a reduced disposition to depression that undermines the ability to communicate effectively. The chaplains' interviews corroborated that spirituality is essential in maintaining a couple's mental health and marital stability. Mary summarized this point by stating that "a couple that ensures to uphold spirituality can last worldly hurdles" as it "enables partners to evaluate themselves and process their feelings appropriately without harming others." Ryan supported this point by claiming that spirituality is "a source of viable solutions and reminding spouses to embrace communication and reconciliation through dialogue that brings about harmony." Edwin supported spirituality's impact in creating tolerance and understanding alongside establishing proper communication channels.

Some participants argued in favor of upholding spiritual practices for the ability to deal with negative presentations of emotions in their lives. The most prominent spiritual practice supported by these participants related to prayer and faith, with participants citing these two as crucial to maintaining one's sanity and calm when faced with emotionally straining situations. Indeed, findings by Park (2005) identified religion as vital to individuals facing stressful life experiences. In Joe's words, "Prayer has helped me process my negative emotions before addressing any issues with my partner, which has helped me retain my cool in the face of emotionally straining moments." Joseph further stated, "Praying for each other and together is very important since it strengthens the other party to hold the faith steadfast." The chaplain Edwin also supported this sentiment by emphasizing the importance of prayer couples to "communicate more effectively," which Mary supported. Phillip further supported this ideology by mentioning that besides providing emotional stability, prayer "also offers hope for the future,"

which is essential for dealing with anxiety. These sentiments echoed the findings by Boelens et al. (2009) and Puchalski (2013), who identified the efficacy of prayers in overcoming emotional disorders, including anxiety and depression. Similarly, Boelens et al. (2012) indicated that prayer replaced negative thought patterns with positive ways of thinking, enabling individuals to maintain their mental health. Besides prayer, many participants mentioned the importance of faith in keeping marriages intact. Jane noted “having a strong shared faith” is critical for cultivating “a meaningful sense of purpose and unity.” Rose built on this to explain that faith “gives one hope that their spouse is well and God has everything under control,” which helped her deal with her anxiety. Moreover, she stated that faith “helps in having faith in one’s partner to remain loyal even during deployment,” which is a significant problem for military marriages. Indeed, Feeney (2005) identified relational transgressions, including infidelity, as a threat to positive attachment among couples. The aspect of spirituality helping with fidelity was also a recurring theme among some participants who stated that being spiritual helped them maintain patience as they waited to be reunited with their spouses.

RQ3: What Support Systems, Resources, and Interventions Are Available to Help Couples Cope With Their Experiences During Deployment?

The discussion revealed chaplains as the best resource for individuals during deployment as they provide spiritual guidance and mental health counseling.

Military Chaplains as the Main Support System

All the interviews acknowledged that chaplains played a significant role in their marriages and served as a support system. For instance, Jane highlighted that the chaplains ease her marital distress, saying, “I value them because they help in tackling marital distress.” Similarly, Rose highlighted that chaplains play an important role in her marriage by acting as

arbitrators whenever there is conflict, saying, “Chaplains play a significant role in my marriage, especially in solving conflicts between my husband and me by enabling us to understand the situation from a religious perspective.” Other participants also acknowledged the role of the chaplains as a support system in their marriages. For instance, Peter highlighted that the chaplain helped him deal with difficult situations he cannot settle with his wife. He acknowledged the chaplain as an important resource in helping him solve his marital problems respectfully. He also mentioned that the chaplain advises him on ways to communicate and build compassion, saying, “Military chaplains are better placed at understanding the struggles that most military personnel face during deployment and, therefore, are better placed to provide guidance and counseling.”

Allan also highlighted chaplains’ critical role in strengthening military marriages. In this light, he mentioned that chaplains provide counsel and encouragement to military personnel, which aids in strengthening their marriages, saying, “Chaplains take care of the spiritual well-being of military personnel and their families. They also conduct counseling sessions during a psychological crisis, for instance, grief, depression, and traumatic events.” Therefore, chaplains are an important resource in military marriages, as all participants acknowledged their important role in strengthening the marriage institution. Kazman et al. (2020) and Weitzman (2021) observed that military chaplains are regularly consulted by deployed military personnel in regard to the provision of mental and spiritual guidance and care.

However, it is important to consider that some participants mentioned that they experienced some difficulty seeking assistance until the issue escalated. Peter, Rose, and Jane expressed that they did not seek the chaplain’s services until the issue escalated between them and their spouses. Some interviewees, like Peter, used the term “letting things escalate” before seeking chaplain service. In contrast, others like Phillip framed it as, “I consult the chaplain for

marital advice only after I have failed to solve a disagreement with my spouse.” Similarly, two participants, Jane and Ken, expressed that it was challenging to have their spouses agree to join the sessions; Ken stated, “she usually wants us to solve our issues without having to visit the chaplain.” The last group of participants under the theme of resistance was those who voiced difficulty in seeking services, limiting the number of times they interacted with the chaplain. This group’s sentiments were summed up by Beth, who stated, “Despite the numerous reminders that our chaplains are always available to offer assistance when we need it, my ego sometimes doesn’t allow me to seek help.” These thoughts related to Allan’s and Joseph’s. Additionally, Mary stated that in her practice, she has noticed that men usually hold off from seeking the chaplain’s services.

Other Resources and Interventions

Based on the previous sentiments, other support interventions come in handy for couples not comfortable with chaplains. For instance, Edwin mentioned that he usually enrolls couples exhibiting psychological distress into the “Strong Bonds Program, which provides couples with education regarding communication, problem solving, and conflict management.” Edwin also recommended marital counseling for couples with psychological problems. He said, “I also recommend marriage counseling services available at the military base.” Similarly, Ryan recommended other resources available at the military base when the deployed members demonstrate the need for further intervention. In this light, he mentioned,

If the couples demonstrate deep-seated issues, I recommend other programs to help them wade through their conflicts. For instance, we have deployed spouse events, marital counseling services, 5 love languages of love seminars, and the Strong Bonds Program, all aimed at strengthening marital institutions at the Ellsworth Airforce Base.

Finally, Mary acknowledged the need for further intervention for members demonstrating psychological issues. She recommended “the Strong Bonds Program, Military and Family Life Counselling (MFLC) support, and reintegration counseling.” Provision of marriage education is identified as a crucial intervention among military couples experiencing challenges in their marriages (Mulligan et al., 2010; Stanley et al., 2005). Community-based interventions effectively support active military personnel experiencing marital challenges (Walsh, 2013).

Therefore, although chaplains play a critical role in strengthening marriage bonds, coupling their efforts with other resources yields better results. Particularly, Bliese et al. (2008) underscored the need for the application of screening to establish the actual psychological stressors and facilitate effective treatment approaches. Similarly, the need for additional support for deployed military personnel was supported by findings by Chevalier et al. (2015), where chaplains felt inadequate to assist military personnel suffering from traumatic brain injury.

This justifies the rationale for including specialized support for deployed military personnel to assist them in coping with the challenges from their deployment experiences. Enhancing family resilience through strengthening bonds between family members is essential in fostering stable family relationships (Walsh, 2003). Moreover, Russo and Fallon (2015) urged for increased accessibility to family-centered interventions to assist family members of deployed military personnel in navigating challenging experiences related to military personnel facing psychological distress. Gonsiorek et al. (2009) asserted that psychological treatments provided by psychologists should remain at the forefront of interventions available to military personnel as they are based on clear objectives and outcomes.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study, which attempted to understand the impact of spirituality and chaplaincy on military personnel's marriages and mental health. It began with an overview of the chapter's contents. This segment was followed by a detailed section containing all the study participants. The study involved 15 participants, 12 military personnel, and three military chaplains. These individuals came from different nationalities, including Caucasian, Latino, and Latin American. The military personnel had nine men and three women, and the chaplains consisted of one woman and two men. They were in service for more than 10 years and married for more than 5. The chaplains had 1–12 years of service. All chaplain participants' were above 30 years of age and the military personnel had a 24 year old as the youngest participant.

After participants, I analyzed the presented information and grouped it into themes used to respond to the study's research questions. Participants' answers were summarized in a table for a more straightforward thematic analysis. The table showed that most personnel suffer psychological distress from anxiety, trauma, or depression during and after deployment. The distress comes from the experiences and conditions of being in a war zone. This distress negatively affects how most individuals interact with their spouses resulting in failed marriages. However, most participants agreed that spirituality and chaplaincy helped individuals sort through their negative emotions and establish healthy communication patterns, oneness, understanding, empathy, and tolerance for one another.

Moreover, these two elements help military personnel gain stable mental health. Chaplains usually double up as spiritual guides and mental health counselors within military ranks. Similarly, most participants support applying spiritual practices of prayer and faith to help

alleviate negative emotions. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that many individuals or their spouses struggled to reach out for help or hold back until matters escalate. This was a crucial area of consideration for future research.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

The current study explored the impacts of chaplaincy and spirituality in supporting sustainable marriages among military populations during deployment. To achieve this objective, I investigated the role and effects of chaplaincy and spirituality in enhancing stable military marriages. Additionally, I examined the role of psychological well-being in strengthening military marriages and scrutinized available support systems, resources, and interventions for assisting couples during deployment.

This chapter provides an overall conclusion to the study and is organized into six sections, including a summary of the findings, discussion, implications, delimitations and limitations, recommendations, and summary. The summary of the findings section establishes connections between concepts by outlining the results of the current study in the preceding Chapter 4 and linking these findings to the three research questions on which this study is based. The discussion section discusses the study findings and establishes their relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This enables the identification of how the results collaborate with or oppose previous research. Notably, the discussion outlines how the Current study contributes to the information on the impacts and effects of spirituality and mental health among military marriages and reflects on how the findings extend knowledge on Bowen's (1971) family stress theory and Selye's (1956) stress theory.

The third section interprets the theoretical and empirical implications of the study findings on military personnel. The fourth section, delimitations and limitations, highlights the rationale for the boundaries defining the scope of the study and notes potential weaknesses of the study. The recommendations section offers proposals for directions on future research based on

the study findings. The last section summarizes the study and underscores the central point attributed to the study's findings.

Summary of Findings

This section outlines the study's findings deduced from themes generated from the responses gathered for the three research questions. The study findings were analyzed and grouped per the research questions. However, this segment discusses the main points. In this light, the findings indicated that spirituality and chaplaincy help military couples through hurdles in their relationships to establish better communication patterns, understanding, and trust and help them appropriately deal with negative emotions. The findings revealed that military marriages benefit from psychological well-being as it allows couples to develop healthy coping mechanisms that provide proper functionality within the marriage setting. Finally, the major support system for military personnel emerged as chaplains.

RQ1. How Does Psychological Well-Being Strengthen Military Marriages?

Analysis of the collected data showed that psychological well-being strengthened military marriages significantly. During deployment, psychological distress was a significant occurrence among military personnel that negatively impacted marriages. The major stressors on the psychological well-being of deployed military personnel included loneliness, anxiety, and battlefield experiences. Mainly, these stressors undermined proper communication between married couples leading to strife in their marriages.

The study showed that maintaining psychological well-being during and after deployment was critical in strengthening military marriages. Psychological well-being enables military personnel to remain relaxed, handle their emotions better, and appreciate their marriage partners. Similarly, the study found chaplains as critical pillars of maintaining the psychological

well-being of military couples by serving as spiritual guides and mental health counselors. In this regard, chaplains served as spiritual guides by emphasizing the importance of the family unit, which strengthened military marriages.

Concerning the role of chaplains as mental health counselors, it was found that chaplains supported military personnel's psychological well-being by offering confidential counseling sessions, which assisted in the processing of negative emotions developed from traumatic experiences.

RQ2. How Does Spirituality and Spiritual Care Provided by Chaplains Play a Role in Supporting Couples and Their Marriages?

Evaluation and analysis of the data showed that spirituality and spiritual care provided by chaplains supported military couples and their marriages by assisting individuals in developing understanding, transparency, and strong communication skills pertinent to solid marriages. The study established two recurring themes: (a) chaplains' participation in supporting military couples in their marriages and (b) spirituality as a coping method against stressors undermining strong marriages.

For the first theme, chaplains were found to support military marriages by providing spiritual care and assisting individuals in establishing and applying solid interpersonal skills, such as healthy communication pathways in their marriages. Similarly, chaplains were instrumental in helping military marriages through their participation in conflict resolution, managing stress, and alleviating emotional distress through counseling. The study found spirituality served as a coping mechanism in military marriages in various ways, such as peaceful reconciliation of marital differences and enhancing the ability to handle negative emotions

through prayer and faith. Also, spirituality was a vital coping mechanism in establishing faith that their spouses would uphold the commitment to their marriage during and after deployment.

RQ3. What Support Systems, Resources, and Interventions Are Available to Help Couples Cope With Their Experiences During Deployment?

The study identified a range of support systems, resources, and interventions available to couples to assist them in coping with their experiences during deployment. Military chaplains were the central support system for military personnel during deployment. Their contribution to enhancing military marriages developed from their role as spiritual guides and mental health counselors for deployed military individuals. Notably, the crucial role of military chaplains as the primary support system was attributed to their position as the best-placed individuals to understand the rigors and challenges of military life during deployment. As such, they were better placed to offer counseling services. However, the study found that although military chaplains were the major support system for deployed military personnel, their intervention was mostly sorted after an escalation of marital conflicts. Interpersonal differences were found to hinder deployed military personnel from seeking counseling from chaplains despite their availability. In addition to military chaplains, other resources and interventions identified are military-based personal and family-oriented counseling programs. These programs were found to supplement the role of chaplains in strengthening military marriages.

Discussion

RQ1. How Does Psychological Well-Being Strengthen Military Marriages?

Psychological Distress

The present study found that psychological distress was a shared experience among military personnel during and after deployment, negatively affecting their marriages. The main

stressors causing psychological distress identified include loneliness, anxiety, and battlefield experiences. These findings were consistent with previous studies (Dirkzwager et al., 2005; Mailey et al., 2018; Moon, 2019) asserting that high-stress levels among military personnel affect their families. However, in addition to the stressors identified in the present study, other psychological challenges affecting military personnel include substance abuse disorders and psychosocial injuries (Abernethy et al., 2006; Black et al., 2004; Bormann et al., 2012; Carey & Hodgson, 2018).

Like the present study, Mailey et al. (2018) noted that high-stress levels and anxiety as major causes of psychological distress among military personnel. Battlefield experiences identified as a cause of psychological distress in the current study were recognized by Riggs and Riggs (2011) as risk factors for psychological well-being as they expose military personnel to various physical and emotional injuries. The current study found that sights of seriously injured and dead colleagues on the battlefield led to the adverse psychological well-being of deployed military personnel. Additionally, loneliness, identified as a cause of psychological distress in the present study, confirmed the argument by Riggs and Riggs (2011) that the separation of military personnel from their families during deployment caused feelings of solitude in these individuals, leading to adverse mental health outcomes. When left unchecked, these negative mental health outcomes undermined the ability of affected military personnel to maintain healthy relationships with their spouses, leading to increased disputes in their marriages. In this regard, the current study illustrated the impact of battlefield experiences on military personnel's psychological well-being.

The present study's findings were consistent with Selye's (1956) stress theory, which attributed the development of stress to an individual's environment, making them susceptible to a

range of shortcomings. Therefore, the current study builds on Selye's (1956) stress theory and previous studies on the impact of psychological distress on military marriages by identifying a lack of proper communication as a shortcoming attributed to a stressful military environment during deployment. Moreover, the current findings indicated psychological well-being among military personnel enhances military marriages by promoting better pathways for handling challenging emotions. These findings reflected Moon's (2019) arguments on resolving mental health challenges among military personnel. Moon urged for implementing a multidimensional approach to tackle mental health challenges among this group that includes enhancement of communities of faith, availing mental health services, and high willingness of military personnel to seek spiritual guidance. Therefore, the interaction between the three facets promoted efficient mental health interventions.

Role of Chaplains in Maintaining the Psychological Well-Being of Military Couples

The current study found chaplains were instrumental in maintaining the psychological well-being of military couples by acting as spiritual guides and providing mental health counseling. Concerning their role as spiritual guides, the findings indicated chaplains emphasize to military personnel the value of upholding the family unit during and after deployment. Chaplains were found to offer confidential mental health counseling services to military personnel, thus, supporting the processing of negative emotions among their clients, agreeing with Besterman-Dahan et al.'s (2012) findings that indicated chaplains were a vital support system in helping actively deployed military members with mental distress. Similarly, findings from a study conducted to investigate the role of chaplains in the military identified the provision of psychiatric support to psychologically distressed military personnel as the primary responsibility of chaplains (Nieuwsma et al., 2013; Seddon et al., 2011). These findings were

consistent with those from the present study that indicated a growing scope of service for military chaplains.

The findings from the present study supported a previous study by Seddon et al. (2011), which underscored the role of chaplains in providing spiritual guidance and mental health services to military personnel. Seddon et al. argued that although a chaplain's role was previously confined to providing spiritual nourishment to military personnel, their responsibility has expanded to providing advice to distressed individuals serving in the military. However, the current study illustrated that chaplains are extensively consulted by deployed military personnel to provide mental health support and advice on managing disputes and challenges in their marriages. The central part of chaplains in maintaining the well-being of military couples, as reflected in the current study's findings, resonated with arguments from previous studies by Grimell (2020a) and Kazman et al. (2020) that emphasized the importance of chaplains in mental health management in military settings.

Furthermore, the present study affirmed findings from previous studies by Brelsford and Friedberg (2011) and Cafferky et al. (2017) that contended chaplains strengthen resilience among military personnel, thus, supporting their psychological well-being. The development of resilience in military service members builds their ability to overcome traumatic events experienced in their work, enhancing their ability to maintain healthy marriages. Importantly, resilience provides deployed military personnel with a life purpose that allows them to maintain positivity even when faced with challenging circumstances. As such, the current study's findings supported Kazman et al.'s (2020) call for increased training for military chaplains to enhance their capacity to effectively support the mental well-being of military personnel and their spouses.

RQ2. How Does Spirituality and Spiritual Care Provided by Chaplains Play a Role in Supporting Couples and Their Marriages?

Role of Chaplains in Supporting Military Couples in Their Marriages

The present study investigated the role chaplains played in supporting military marriages. The findings showed that chaplains assisted military personnel in developing strong interpersonal skills, particularly healthy communication strategies. Also, chaplains acted as arbitrators in couples experiencing marital conflict and managed military personnel's emotional distress through counseling. The findings indicated the presence of challenges within military marriages and the need for support systems to alleviate marital disputes noted in the study by Collins and Kennedy (2008). Previous findings by Moon (2019) supported the argument for challenges in military marriages due to the distressing nature of military work. The findings supported the assertion that military work is a major risk factor for the development of marital distress. These findings enrich the discourse on military marriages by pinpointing the impacts of the military work environment and establishing a framework for understanding pathways for strengthening military marriages.

The intervention by chaplains of assisting military personnel in developing practical communication skills, evidenced by the current study, underlines the importance of chaplains in supporting military marriages. The active participation of chaplains through acting as arbitrators in disputing military couples reflects the practicality of the family stress theory by Bowen (1971). The theory postulates that families seek to establish stable pathways when faced with difficulties. Indeed, the present study confirmed the findings by Waggoner (2014), who noted that chaplains spearhead programs that encourage solid military marriages and offer spiritual guidance for supporting the same. Similarly, Cafferky et al. (2017) observed that chaplains play

a significant role in alleviating spiritual distress among veterans with depressive disorders leading to positive mental health and marital outcomes. Mainly, chaplains were instrumental in moderating spiritual distress among military personnel through various practices, including encouraging individuals to read spiritual books, leading spiritual services, and encouraging memorization of spiritual passages (Berg, 2011). These spiritual responses were found to influence military personnel's mental health positively and, by extension, promote stronger marriages.

As illustrated by the current study, the involvement of chaplains in supporting military marriages supports the findings by Brémault-Phillips et al. (2016). They explored the effects of military battle experiences on military personnel's social lives. According to Brémault-Phillips et al. (2016), battle experiences negatively affect military service members' mental and behavioral health, thus hampering their social lives. Such difficulties in their social lives may undermine their ability to communicate effectively with their spouses, leading to marital distress. Therefore, the present study contributes to a greater understanding of how chaplains can support military couples in their marriages by encouraging and teaching effective communication strategies. Importantly, the findings cement the significance of chaplains in supporting the psychological well-being of deployed military personnel and strengthening their marriages.

Spirituality as a Coping Method

The present study found strong evidence of the use of spirituality as an essential coping strategy in military marriages. However, this was enabled by the spiritual care sought from chaplains to address spiritual needs and marital challenges that the military personnel encountered. The chaplains strengthened members' spirituality through spiritual care, making them withstand the challenges they underwent. Specifically, spirituality was used to facilitate a

peaceful resolution of marital disputes and enhance a couple's ability to navigate negative emotions through prayer and faith. In this light, Ozcan et al. (2021) highlighted faith and spirituality as coping mechanisms during difficult times and mental instability. Additionally, spirituality was critical in establishing faith among military personnel and their spouses to remain committed to their marriage and shun infidelity during and after their deployment. The findings provide crucial linkages between previous studies that explored the use of spirituality as a coping mechanism among active and retired military personnel.

Firstly, the present study provided evidence to support the findings by Hourani et al. (2012) and Weitzman (2021), who identified constructive impacts of spirituality on alleviating adverse psychological health outcomes such as depression and posttraumatic stress disorder among deployed military personnel. In the studies, spirituality assisted military personnel by strengthening their belief that prayer could overcome challenges (Hourani et al., 2012; Weitzman, 2021). Similarly, the present study's findings were consistent with Sterner and Jackson-Cherry's (2015) conclusion that the use of spirituality among deployed military personnel enhanced their ability to cope with work-related stressors. As with the current study, spirituality was found to improve resilience in the present study, thus, more effectively dealing with the stress factors associated with military service during deployment. Specifically, Hassankhani et al. (2010) noted the vitality of spirituality as a coping mechanism through military personnel's involvement in religious and social activities, which facilitates overcoming traumatic psychological outcomes of war. Thus, the current findings supported the need for further investigation into the increased use of spirituality in supporting psychological well-being and marital harmony among deployed military personnel.

The current findings indicated the role of prayer among military personnel in reducing adverse emotional disorders such as anxiety, confirming previous results by Abernethy et al. (2006) and Boelens et al. (2009). Mounting evidence on the use of prayer among deployed military personnel to manage stressful and traumatic experiences indicated the need for closer reflection on the integration of spirituality in treating adverse mental health outcomes among active and retired military personnel. Identification of prayer as useful in upholding fidelity among military personnel, as indicated by the current research findings, supported the assertion by Dollahite and Lambert (2007) that prayer promotes marital fidelity among couples. Moreover, the current study identified fear of their spouse's infidelity as a major concern for deployed military, as discussed by Allen et al. (2012). The current study supported the argument by Allen et al. (2012), who note that spiritually-based marriage education to military personnel strengthens the bonds of military marriages, thus promoting the longevity of such unions. Importantly, spirituality underscores the value of morality and commitment to fidelity that positively contributes to the development of resilience that enhances the sustainability of military marriages.

RQ3. What Support Systems, Resources, and Interventions Are Available to Help Couples Cope With Their Experiences During Deployment?

Military Chaplains as the Main Support System

The present study identified military chaplains as the primary support system for deployed military personnel. This was attributed to their dual roles as spiritual guides and mental health counselors. Moreover, the findings showed that military personnel viewed chaplains as the best-placed support system due to their understanding of the stressful nature of the combat environment. These findings were consistent with conclusions from a previous study conducted

by McLaughlin et al. (2010) that demonstrated chaplains as the most consulted support systems by military personnel. However, Seddon et al. (2011) observed that the effectiveness of chaplains as coping support systems is regulated by the military personnel's marital satisfaction level and spiritual inclination. As such, a stronger inclination to spirituality was linked to increased ease of seeking marital advice from chaplains. This illustrated the importance and impact of military personnel's dispositions on their mental health and marital outcomes.

Kazman et al. (2020) and Weitzman (2021) highlighted that military chaplains are important in providing counsel for military personnel undergoing psychological problems. Although most studies identify an increasing role of chaplains as primary coping support systems, a survey conducted by Seddon et al. (2011) found their overreliance was due to a low number of psychiatrically trained professionals within the military. Similarly, findings from a study by Bormann et al. (2012) held that the role of chaplains as the main support system was due to rigid military protocols that inhibited the availability and provision of mental health care services by nonmilitary professionals. The present study identified that military chaplains offer mental health and marriage support through the provision of confidential counseling. Previous studies by Davie (2015) and Seddon et al. (2011) supported this finding by observing military chaplains' use of various approaches to support the mental health and marital well-being of military service members. These strategies include spiritual books and scientific models such as trauma risk management and decompression programs. Thus, the present study enriches information about the rationale for chaplains' role as the main support system for military service members during deployment by providing empirical evidence of their use in military contexts. Moreover, the study indicates positive impacts resulting from the infusion of clinical mental health strategies and spirituality in supporting military personnel's psychological well-being.

Although the present study identifies chaplains as the primary support system for coping by military personnel, the findings indicated their intervention was, in most instances, sort after the escalation of marital problems. The delay in seeking assistance was attributed to interpersonal issues such as embarrassment. This was found to hold back military personnel facing marital challenges from consulting the advice of chaplains, in spite of their availability and ability to assist in navigating the challenges. In this light, Morgan et al. (2016) highlighted reduced help-seeking behavior among actively deployed military personnel citing reasons such as confidentiality and embarrassment. This indicated the need for alternative support systems to facilitate the prompt resolution of psychological distress and marital problems as they emerge, as Black et al. (2004) proposed. Thus, the present study justifies the need for alternative and readily available support systems for military personnel during deployment to supplement the work of chaplains. Importantly, the findings highlight the need for establishing confidential channels for consulting on marital challenges by military personnel during deployment.

Other Resources and Interventions

The present study identified two additional resources and interventions, including personal and family-oriented military programs. These programs were available to military personnel during deployment to provide social support and network to assist individuals in navigating psychological distress and strengthening their marriages. The provision and role of these resources reflected findings conducted by Snyder et al. (2011) that highlighted the importance of support to promote and protect the institution of military marriages.

The present research findings regarding the existence of additional resources and intervention are consistent with arguments established by Burrell et al. (2003) that identified and justified the need for military community integration. Therefore, the availability of personal and

family-oriented programs for military personnel and their families connote the importance of regulating stressors associated with working in military environments during deployment to curb the escalation of psychological distress among military personnel to their families. These findings confirmed those of past studies by Charuvastra and Cloitre (2008) and Cook et al. (2004), which linked the experience of traumatic events to challenges in establishing and maintaining quality social relationships. As such, family-oriented interventions are necessary to assist families of military personnel in managing and overcoming psychological distress that may trickle down from their family members serving in the military. Similarly, Brelsford and Friedberg (2011) justified the need for integrating spirituality into family-based therapy for military families to alleviate the impacts of psychological distress during and after the deployment of their family members. This was based on the understanding that spirituality provides therapeutic effects critical in alleviating deployment stressors that severely undermine the sustainability of military marriages.

Although the present study highlighted the importance of personal and family-based interventions and resources, the findings do not indicate the impact of military personnel deployment on military children, which was investigated in a study by Gorman et al. (2010). That study showed increased mental and behavioral health disorders attributed to parental military deployment. However, the present study findings indicated the vitality of other support systems for military personnel and their families.

Contribution of the Present Study to the Field

The present study sheds more light on the impacts of chaplaincy and spiritual care in supporting sustainable marriages among military populations during deployment. One, the study confirmed that the prevalence of psychological distress among military personnel impacts their

mental well-being, thus affecting the quality of their marriages. Findings from the current study supported previous studies that attributed psychological distress among deployed military personnel to various stressors pertinent to the military work environment. Two, the present research asserted the notion that military chaplains offer spiritual and mental health support to military personnel and their partners during and after deployment. The findings from the study identified military chaplains as significant providers of spiritual guidance to military personnel. Similarly, the study identified military chaplains as central pillars of mental health support to deployed military personnel through counseling.

Third, the study identified and supported the impact of spiritual practices in managing negative emotions and experiences among military personnel. As military experiences during deployment may lead to the development of psychological distress, the current study confirmed spiritual practices positively contribute to easing negative emotions attributed to psychological distress. This creates a platform for future studies focusing on establishing specific spiritual practices that alleviate negative emotions and experiences among the military personnel cohort. Fourth, the current study expanded existing knowledge by illustrating the need for extending mental health service providers to military personnel from chaplains to ensure better mental health wellness and marriage outcomes. The present study provided evidence indicating the rationale for increasing available avenues for mental health services among military personnel during and after deployment.

Furthermore, the study enhances discourse on military personnel's propensity to seek chaplaincy and mental health services. The findings failed to demonstrate arguments by previous studies that pointed to most military personnel's difficulty in seeking mental health services and spiritual intervention (Morgan et al., 2016; Sharp et al., 2015). In contrast, the present study

showed only a minority proportion of military personnel have difficulty reaching out to chaplains and other available mental health services to manage psychological distress.

How the Present Study Extends Theory

Findings from the present study provide important insight to expand Bowen's (1971) family stressor theory. The theory calls for consideration of military personnel's structural and social contexts in understanding distress in military marriages. However, the present study prompts reflection on military personnel's perceptions, character traits, and beliefs in understating how they navigate marital and mental health issues. This rationale is based on the study's findings that spiritual practices alleviate negative emotions and, thus, reduce psychological distress. Moreover, the study provides evidence that individuals' interpersonal dispositions impact their inclination to seek mental health services. The failure to seek mental health assistance in time aggravates the complexity of the underlying mental health issue. Consequently, such unaddressed psychological distress undermines the strength of military marriages because affected individuals are unable to resolve their marital challenges effectively. This illustrates the need to expand the family stress theory to appreciate the role of an individual's personality and character traits as part of a family unit. This will broaden the theoretical framework for understanding individual factors that may undermine the use of mental health and marriage supports and interventions of military personnel during deployment.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, the present research prompts focus on the personality aspect of military personnel to comprehend further the scope of spiritual care and its impact on military personnel's mental health and their marriages. The existing theoretical foundation

focuses on the social aspects that drive individuals to seek mental health and marriage support. However, the present study illustrates the need for including personality factors in consideration of how spiritual care impacts military personnel's mental health and the strength of their marriages. Essentially, the findings indicated the need to enhance understanding of existing links between personal dispositions and spirituality and how the two combine to establish military service member's mental health and marriage outcomes. This is crucial in future research on the topic as it establishes a wider scope for understanding the links between the concepts.

Empirical Implications

Empirically, the present study urges focus on the specific demographics of military personnel who resist seeking mental health and marriage well-being despite readily available resources, interventions, and supports. This is because the findings showed that although a range of support resources and interventions are available to deployed military personnel, many factors limit their use. Specifically, the findings indicated that chaplains and other individual and family-oriented programs are available to military personnel during deployment. Therefore, the current findings underscored the need to investigate factors limiting the use of mental health and marriage support resources and interventions among deployed military personnel. Moreover, focusing on this particular category of individuals is vital as growing evidence indicates spirituality positively influences military personnel's mental health and marital well-being. This provides opportunities for developing strategies for infusing aspects of spirituality in a chaplain's participation in supporting and strengthening military personnel's mental and marital well-being.

Practical Implications

From a practical point of view, the present study informs policymakers on the importance of providing mental health services to military personnel and their partners during

and after deployment. The findings indicated that military personnel face numerous stressors due to their work environment during deployment with adverse psychological and marital well-being. Moving forward, this would impact the roles of administrators in the recruitment and training of mental health care providers for posterity and active and retired military personnel. This is aimed at enhancing the capacity of mental health professionals dealing with military personnel to alleviate psychological distress within this population. Strengthening the capacity of mental health personnel involved with military service members is critical as this group of individuals faces numerous stress factors in their work environment that negatively affects their psychological well-being and, extension, their marriages. Additionally, enhancing the capacity of chaplains as mental health providers to military personnel during deployment through training would improve the quality of their input. This would also enable chaplains to identify pathways for encouraging resisting military personnel to seek assistance. This would expand the reach of available mental health and marriage supports to deployed military personnel.

Additionally, the current study links the role of chaplains and the concept of spirituality that promotes God's supremacy and individuals' submission to God's will with the understanding he will provide all solutions to any challenges encountered. Understanding these links is essential owing to the critical role of chaplains and spiritual care in fostering positive mental health and marriage outcomes. Particularly, the findings indicated spiritual aspects of faith and prayer as crucial in maintaining positive psychological well-being and strong marriages of military personnel during deployment. The study indicated that the two aspects support the development of resilience among military personnel, which fosters their ability to manage stressors that undermine their psychological well-being and marital strength. Consequently, the

present study provides evidence of the role of resilience in overcoming adverse mental impacts, which significantly strengthens their marriages.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations reflect the boundaries established to define the scope and focus of the study. Several delimitations were implemented in the study. One, the selected sample military personnel comprised individuals who had been married for a minimum of 5 years during which they served in the military. The military personnel were required to be older than 30 years old and have served in the military for more than 5 years. Similarly, age and period of active service threshold were used to recruit chaplains involved in the study. The boundaries regarding respondents' age and length of military service and marriage ensured the study participants had adequate experience to justify the subsequent findings. Moreover, the age threshold ensured the experience and maturity of the participants. This was necessary to enhance the validity and credibility of the responses gathered. It is essential to consider the limitations of the present study.

The major limitation was the relatively small sample size, limiting the application of an in-depth analysis of the concepts. The small sample size hindered closer evaluation of other existing links between the concepts and themes from enriching the study findings. Similarly, the presence of gender imbalance in the study sample undermined further data analysis. Of the 15 participants in the study, only four were female. It would be insightful to investigate similarities and differences in the role of spiritual care and chaplains in supporting military marriages between male and female military personnel. Importantly, in-depth analysis is desirable as it enhances credibility in extrapolating the findings to the general population.

Recommendations for Future Research

I propose several recommendations for consideration in future research. One, the study showed a need for further research to investigate the reasons causing some military personnel to resist seeking marriage and mental health support. Findings from such research would provide an additional push for diversifying marriage and mental health supports, resources and interventions available to military personnel during and after deployment. Understanding the characteristics of the group resisting mental health and marriage assistance would provide for the broadening of scholarly evidence of factors influencing the uptake of mental health services among active and retired military personnel. I recommend further research on the efficacy of other mental health resources and interventions in addition to military chaplains. This would increase the reach of mental health interventions, thus, reducing the negative impacts of psychological distress on military marriages.

Third, I propose providing mental health training to a section of military personnel to increase the number of available mental health resources and support deployed military personnel. Peer-to-peer support concerning mental health care would be instrumental in increasing the uptake of mental health care services among military personnel during and after deployment. This would facilitate better management of psychological distress among this cohort, thus reducing marital disputes among military personnel. Lastly, I recommend enhanced training of chaplains to improve their ability to effectively offer mental health support to military personnel and their spouses. This is because they are deployed military personnel's primary mental health support. Additionally, enhanced training of chaplains on the provision of mental health care would promote their understanding of more effective strategies for managing work-related stressors to avoid them affecting their marriages.

Summary

Chapter 5 reflected on the study by linking the findings to previously discussed theories and research and extrapolating the results to future theories, research, policy, and practice. Essentially, the chapter illustrated the importance of the present study to discourse on the role of chaplains and spiritual care in the mental health and marriage well-being of military personnel during deployment.

Chapter 5 began with an overview section that provides a layout of the chapter. This was followed by a summary of the findings, which provided a rundown of the study's results per the three research questions. As such, psychological well-being is critical in strengthening military marriages by promoting positive emotions that are core to stable marriages. Additionally, the section highlighted chaplains and spiritual care as essential coping mechanisms by alleviating psychological distress and fostering faith through prayer, respectively. Moreover, the section outlined military chaplains as the central support systems for military personnel and identified additional resources and interventions for strengthening military marriages.

The chapter discussed the research findings and made connections to the previously reviewed literature. In this section, the contribution of the study to the field and the theories previously discussed was highlighted. Subsequently, the following section outlined the present study's theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. A discussion of the delimitations and limitations of the study followed. Age, military service length, and marriage period were identified as the main delimitations. Moreover, the use of a small sample size and gender imbalance was outlined as limitations of the study. Lastly, the chapter provided a range of recommendations for future research.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Request

October 10, 2022

Carl Johnson

Carl Johnson, Mollie Boyd

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-162 The Role of Military Chaplains and Effective Spiritual Care for Strengthening Military Marriages during Deployments

Dear Carl Johnson, Carl Johnson, Mollie Boyd,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review.

This means you may begin your research with the data-safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants' research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found

under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Consent Form for Participants

Title of the Project: The role of military chaplains and effective spiritual care for strengthening military marriages during deployments

Principal Investigator: Carl Johnson, credentials, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, actively deployed military personnel or a chaplain, married, and must have previously used chaplains' services. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is research is to better understand the role of military chaplains and effective spiritual care for strengthening military marriages during deployments.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. To answer several interview questions on a phone call which might take 30-40 minutes. I will record the responses for analysis

How could you or others benefit from this study?

[Option 2: Indirect Benefits]

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include gaining a better understanding of the military Chaplain's role in providing spiritual care and strengthening marriages.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data are shared.

Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Ellsworth Airbase. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

[Option 2: All Other Research] If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Carl Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at xxxxx@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Mollie Boyd at xxxxx@liberty.edu

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

[Option 2: All Other Research] By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix C

Letter of Consent for the Base Commander

Col. Joseph L. Sheffield

Base Commander, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

RE: Request of Study Approval and Consent

Dear Colonel Sheffield,

My name is Carl Johnson, and I am a postgraduate Behavioral Science major at Liberty University in Virginia. I am conducting qualitative research for my senior thesis as part of my doctoral degree requirement. My work is supervised by Dr. Mollie Boyd, Professor of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University. I request permission to conduct my research at Ellsworth Air Force Base, where you are the base commander. My study seeks to understand the effectiveness of military chaplains and the spiritual care and support they provide to military marriages among the Ellsworth Air Force Base military population. Therefore, I am targeting two participant groups from your Air Force base, military chaplains, and military personnel. I understand the interaction of the military environment with the civilian population and promise to adhere to confidentiality codes and follow due processes as advised by your department. Upon your consent, I am writing to your legal team and the wing chaplain to obtain consent and review for my study.

This letter confirms that I have briefed you on the nature of my study, which will be based on the participants from your military base, and that you give your consent for me to contact the stated departments and participants and interview 12 of your officers. I will make all the necessary

efforts to ensure that my data collection respects the military code of operation, observes confidentiality, and does not interfere with your regular military schedule. I promise to treat your officers and chaplains with the utmost sensitivity, respect, and discretion. If you would like further clarity on my research, you may contact me at my email and phone number below. Further concerns can also be addressed to my research supervisor Dr. Mollie Boyd at (XXX) XXX-XXXX (phone number). You can also contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants at Liberty University through irb@liberty.edu (email) or by calling (434) 592-5530 (phone number). The IRB will review my study to ensure that it meets all required criteria in conducting research involving humans whilst observing all ethical dimensions. I will be glad to send you a summary of my research findings upon completing my project.

If my request to contact participants and different departments within your military establishment meets your approval, kindly sign and date this letter and send it back to me and keep a copy for yourself. Please feel free to contact me at any time concerning this research project. Thank you for your cooperation and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carl Johnson

1971 University Blvd,

Lynchburg, VA 24515, United States

Email address: xxxxx@liberty.edu

Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

I agree with and consent to the above request.

SHEFFIELD.JOSE
PH.L.1158180096

Digitally signed by
SHEFFIELD.JOSEPH.L.1158180
096
Date: 2022.06.13 17:24:59 -06'00'

JOSEPH L. SHEFFIELD, Colonel, USAF
Commander, 28th Bomb Wing

13 June 2022

Date

Appendix D

Letter of Consent for Judge Advocate General's Corps (Jag)/Legal Team

Staff Judge Advocate Team,

Judge Advocate General's Corps,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

RE: Request of Study Consent and Compliance

Sir/Ma'am,

I am writing with the permission of Col. Joseph L. Sheffield to request your consent as the head of legal affairs at Ellsworth Air Force Base to conduct my study on spirituality and chaplaincy within your base's military population. I am attaching a consent form and sample interview questions for your review and approval. I request the ability to contact participants that meet my study criteria from Ellsworth Air Force Base. I will use the information I retrieve from the participants for my postgraduate research project titled "**The Role of Military Chaplains and Effective Spiritual Care for Strengthening Military Marriages during Deployments.**" This project is quite important to me since it is a requirement for the conferment of a doctoral degree at Liberty University. I would appreciate receiving your review of the interview questions, written comment on the legal satisfaction of the study components, and consent for compliance. It would be ideal if you agree to being the link between the researcher and the research participants. My research is being supervised by Dr. Mollie Boyd, School of Behavioral Sciences, Liberty University who can be contacted through email at xxxxx@liberty.edu.

Kindly sign, date, and stamp this letter and return a copy to me if its request meets your approval. Feel free to contact me using the details provided below or to contact my supervisor in case of any concern. Thank you for your time and help.

Sincerely,

Carl Johnson

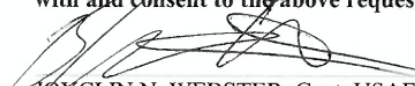
1971 University Blvd,

Lynchburg, VA 24515, United States

Email Address: xxxxx@liberty.edu

Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

In accordance with the terms outlined and accepted by Colonel Joseph Sheffield, 28 BW/CC, I agree with and consent to the above request.


JOYCLIN N. WEBSTER, Capt, USAF
Assistant Staff Judge Advocate

23 June 2022

Date

Appendix E**Letter of Approval for the Wing Chaplain**

Ch Jeffery Solhiem

Wing Chaplain,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

RE: Request of Study Consent

Dear Ch Jeffrey Solheim,

This letter confirms that you have been notified of a research project by your base's legal team. It also confirms that you have a brief idea of my study investigating the role of military chaplains and spiritual care in military marriages. I am a postgraduate Behavioral Science major at Liberty University, and I am investigating the summarized topic within your population. My study targets military personnel and military chaplains as primary participants. Therefore, as the wing chaplain at Ellsworth Air Force Base, I request your review of the interview question designed for this study. I am also requesting your cooperation and advice on the data within the targeted participants' population. This request letter confirms that I have your permission to contact and recruit my study participants from your military base at a date and time convenient to you. It also asserts that I have your support for outreach and coordination and that you will adequately link me with your department. I would only need one hour to interview each military participant via a phone call.

I would also like to notify you that I am writing to you with the permission of the base commander, Col. Joseph L. Sheffield, and the legal team. Attached to this letter is the consent

form to be sent to the participants and sample interview questions. This study's legitimacy can be confirmed by Dr. Mollie Boyd, School of Behavioral Sciences, Liberty University through their contact at xxxxx@liberty.edu. I am looking forward to working with you throughout my project. Therefore, this consent request meets your approval; please sign, date, stamp, and return me a copy of this letter as soon as possible. Again, do not hesitate to get in touch through the contact details provided. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Carl Johnson

1971 University Blvd,

Lynchburg, VA 24515, United States

Email address: xxxxx@liberty.edu

Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

I agree with and consent to the above request.

SOLHEIM.JEFFREY.C. Digitally signed by
1271595596 SOLHEIM.JEFFREY.C.1271595596
Date: 2022.07.07 10:44:34 -06'00'

Signature

7 July 2022

Date

Appendix F

Recruitment Template: Social Media

Facebook

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctor of education degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to better understand the role of military chaplains and effective spiritual care for strengthening military marriages during deployments. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, actively deployed military personnel or a chaplain, married, and must have previously used chaplains' services. Participants will be asked to answer several interview questions on a phone call which might take 30-40 minutes. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please direct message me for more information and schedule an interview. A consent document will be emailed to you a week before the interview.

Twitter

Are you an actively deployed and married military member or chaplain? Please direct message me for a study on the role of military chaplains and effective spiritual care for strengthening military marriages during deployments.