Psychologist studies ways to improve soldiers' work-life relationship
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The U.S. military provides its members with policies to help balance their work and family commitments. But a researcher at Kansas State University has found that simply providing programs might not be enough to maintain a supreme equilibrium.

Satoris Culbertson, assistant professor of psychology at K-State, and colleagues have been studying how soldiers' perceptions of a family-friendly environment relates to their physical fitness, confidence in task performance and intentions to remain in the military.

"Given the especially difficult circumstances surrounding military obligations for U.S. soldiers -- for example, an increased threat of deployment due to the current wartime context -- a better understanding of how family-friendly perceptions can benefit soldiers is increasingly important," Culbertson said.

The study's results indicated that a perceived family-friendly environment benefited both the individual and the organization. It increased the individuals' intent to remain in the military once they completed their obligation, and it increased the soldiers' feelings of their unit's capability of successful performance.

To better create a family-friendly culture, Culbertson concludes that the military's local leadership needs to foster and support the policies.

Culbertson worked in collaboration for the project with Ann Huffman, assistant professor of psychology at Northern Arizona University, and Col. Carl Castro, chief of military psychiatry at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

"Family-Friendly Environments and U.S. Army Soldier Performance and Work Outcomes" was published in the October 2008 issue of Military Psychology and details the researchers' findings.

Culbertson has performed numerous studies focusing on individuals' work-life conflicts. She said studies show that individuals who report higher levels of work-life conflict also report lower levels of general well-being, lower levels of job satisfaction, higher levels of burnout, more alcohol use and lower levels of performance. They also are more likely to leave an organization.

"Ideally, we can balance these responsibilities so that we are effective in each of these roles," Culbertson said. "Or, even better, we can somehow make the participation in one role benefit another role."
Source: Kansas State University