

# Contextualizing the Psychosocial Well-being of Military Members and Their Partners: The Importance of Community and Relationship Provisions

Catherine Walker O’Neal, Jay A. Mancini, and Alysia DeGraff

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**Abstract** Evidence of the impact of communities has been documented for a variety of individual and relational outcomes, including mental and physical health as well as the quality of romantic and parent–child relationships. The military represents a rather unique work context; in that, it is generally considered a lifestyle with a distinct culture and community. Yet, military families are also members of their broader, comprehensive community. Drawing from the social organizational theory of action and change (SOC) (Mancini & Bowen, 2013), and relationship provisions theory (Weiss, 1969) and utilizing a sample of 266 active duty military families, this study examined connectedness with the military community *and* the broader, comprehensive community. A dyadic model was evaluated whereby each partner’s perspective of their comprehensive and military community was hypothesized to influence their own psychosocial well-being as well as their partner’s psychosocial well-being. The role of relationship provisions (that is, having relationship needs met) as a mechanism linking community connections to psychosocial well-being was also examined. Overall, the findings supported the hypothesized model, particularly for intra-individual effects and military members. Findings emphasize the importance of considering what is gained from connections within a community rather than a focus solely on the connections themselves.

**Keywords** Anxiety · Depression · Formal systems · Informal networks · Military · Self-efficacy

## Introduction

Individuals are affected by the communities in which they reside, socialize, and carry out other daily activities (e.g., Levula, Wilson & Harré, 2016; Mancini & Bowen, 2013). Likely due to this notable influence of community, there has been a call for research incorporating community in work–family studies (Voydanoff, 2001). This is a particularly relevant avenue of research for work domains where the work role generally comprises a key identity for the employee and his/her family. One example is military families where the job of military member is generally considered a lifestyle, especially for active duty (AD) service members, with a distinct culture and community (Murray, 2000). This community likely develops, in part, because AD service members and their families spend much of their time within the military culture. For instance, many military families live in contiguity to other military families, sometimes on the installation itself but more commonly in the surrounding community. Regardless of residence location (on or off the installation), the majority of AD military families access health care services at an installation infirmary or hospital and often socialize at gathering places on the installation where they are surrounded by other AD military families who can relate to the unique military lifestyle, which often includes deployment, extended work absences, and frequent relocations (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen & Orthner, 2009). However, membership in these work-specific communities, such as the military community, does not take the place

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✉ Catherine Walker O’Neal  
cwalker1@uga.edu

of connections military family members have with the broader, more comprehensive, community comprised of *both* military members *and* civilians. For example, Wadsworth et al. (2016) findings on risk and promotive factors among children in military families, show that civilian community vulnerabilities affect individuals in military families.

Although research has established that, overall, communities impact their individual members, less research has examined the relative impact of distinct communities. For instance, perhaps for these specific populations where community and work are highly intertwined, work communities (e.g., a community of military families) and comprehensive communities (e.g., the broader community of military and civilian families) are *uniquely* associated with individuals' psychosocial well-being (Mancini, Arnold, Martin & Bowen, 2014). Of course, the military and comprehensive communities are not entirely independent, and analyses of the association between communities and individuals' outcomes must account for this non-independence. Findings indicating the relative impact of various communities have important theoretical and clinical implications, such as shedding light on the most effective point(s) of intervention for community members experiencing difficulty and prevention work aiming to enhance well-being through community-oriented programs.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Social Organizational Theory of Action and Change*

The social organizational theory of action and change (SOC) can inform community intervention efforts in both the military and civilian sectors (Mancini & Bowen, 2013). The SOC emphasizes the value of *informal* networks of friends, neighbors, work associates, and extended family members, and *formal* systems of agencies, organizations, and professionals that comprise communities and surround individuals and families (Bowen, Martin, Mancini & Nelson, 2000; Mancini & Bowen, 2013). A core concept in this theory is community capacity, which includes (a) the *shared responsibility* among and between community members and (b) community members' *collective competence* in meeting the community's goals and challenges (Bowen et al., 2000). From this approach, community members' interactions with each other are thought to build *social capital*, which is the reciprocal exchange of information and trust that develops from these successful exchanges (Bowen et al., 2000; Mancini & Bowen, 2013; Putnam, 2001). Recently, Bowen, Jensen, Martin and Mancini (2016) employed this social organizational framework to examine the willingness of military members to seek help, and report that

trust in formal systems (the military support system particularly) is a major bridge between community involvement and help-seeking behaviors.

We invoke the SOC in two primary ways. First, we examine the associations between psychosocial well-being and both military-specific and more comprehensive formal system and informal network integration (termed community connections hereafter) employing an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006) to assess intra- and inter-individual associations for AD and civilian partners. We incorporate the APIM to ascertain dyadic influences *between* couple members (e.g., inter-individual effects) in addition to community-level associations. Second, we assess "relationship provisions," a type of social capital, as a mechanism linking community connections to psychosocial well-being. We assume that the accumulation of social capital (particularly relationship provisions for our purposes) through community connections is of consequence for psychosocial outcomes, including higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms, which we discuss in the paragraphs that follow. We make a primary assumption about why the experiences and perceptions of one partner may spill-over into important psychosocial factors of the partner. At the core of an APIM approach is the expectation that a couple relationship is interdependent. As an example, it is reasonable to assume that connections one partner establishes may also become an aspect of the other partner's social network, that is, relationships may form that stemmed from the other partner's connections. Similarly, one's sense of relationship provisions may include connections that stem from the partner's community connections. This is particularly true in the military community, in which the military member is the point of contact and the person that connects the civilian partner with the military community.

### *Relationship Provisions Theory*

People have relationship needs met in a variety of ways by a variety of individuals; the important matter being the aggregate amount of what is gained from interpersonal relationships (Weiss, 1969). Weiss (1969) identified six relationship provisions: (a) knowing that one can count on another person as a *reliable alliance*; (b) a feeling of *attachment*; (c) relationships with persons who can provide *guidance*; (d) sharing common interests and social activities via *social integration*; (e) providing *reassurance of worth* by reinforcing one's sense of competence and esteem; and (f) *opportunities to nurture* others. These are the relationship provisions that we assess as a form of social capital. Weiss (1974) posited that the absence of these relationship provisions leads to distress, and his

hypothesis has been empirically validated with various groups across the human lifespan, including adults (Mancini & Blieszner, 1992), both healthy and health-challenged individuals (Cutrona & Russell, 1987), and adolescents (Mancini, Bowen, O'Neal & Arnold, 2015).

### The Importance of Community Connections

Research on community connections, social engagement, and neighborhood characteristics has consistently noted the value of relationships with surrounding individuals and the larger collective (e.g., Cacioppo & Hughes, 2006). Findings have also consistently indicated the importance of military-specific community, with informal community support and sense of community having a sizeable impact on family adaptation (Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware & Nelson, 2003), which, in turn, is relevant for the well-being of individual family members, including AD, civilian, and adolescent offspring (Oshri et al., 2015). Welsh, Olson, Perkins, Travis, and Ormsby (2015) demonstrate the power of community connections with their finding that regardless of negative deployment experiences, the post-deployment of AD military personnel is positively affected by natural social support systems.

Nevertheless, study findings suggest that military-specific communities do not replace the need for connections with, and support from, the more comprehensive community, including the civilian community. Davis, Ward and Storm (2011) concluded that the comprehensive community appears to be of particular importance for civilian spouses/partners who are connected to the military somewhat indirectly through their partner. They concluded it is important for military partners' well-being that they feel heard and supported by this more comprehensive community.

### The Importance of Relationship Provisions

In addition to the direct impact of community connections on individuals' well-being, communities may also indirectly impact well-being through their effect on what relationships provide to individuals. That is, as discussed previously, healthy community connections are thought to enhance the social benefits an individual receives from relationships, which, in turn, are implicated in various well-being indicators, including psychosocial well-being. For example, research with military youth has shown that those with closer and more intense relationships have better outcomes across a variety of domains, including higher levels of self-efficacy, less anxiety, fewer depressive symptoms, greater life satisfaction, and higher grades (Mancini et al., 2015). Although this research focused on adolescents in military families, such associations do not

appear to be life stage-specific. Reviews of predictors of well-being show a clear association between components of social capital and psychosocial well-being, namely mental illness and mental well-being (Almedom, 2005).

Furthermore, self-efficacy is closely tied to what people receive from relationships (relationship provisions). Self-efficacy, by definition, refers to people's beliefs about their ability to influence events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994), and relationships with others comprise a sizeable portion of the events that affect one's life.

### The Importance of Military Context

We feel that it is important to take into consideration certain aspects of the military culture that make it a rather unique context. For instance, research suggests that rank is related to both community ties and social connections (Lucier-Greer, Arnold et al., 2014) because it illustrates the impact of social factors, particularly socioeconomic status.

Research with non-military samples has shown that residential mobility has important ramifications both for the relocating individual(s) and the larger community, or society, with individuals who move more frequently being less focused on the larger collective (Oishi, 2010). Similarly, frequent relocations have been linked to decreased well-being, including poorer physical health and less satisfying friendships (Larson, Bell & Young, 2004; Oishi, Whitchurch, Miao, Kurtz & Park, 2009). Perhaps this is less of a problem for military families for whom frequent relocations are the norm. However, it is also possible that frequent relocations are more problematic for military families because those around them (i.e., other military families) also move frequently creating relationships that are constantly in flux and often lack the advantage of geographic proximity. Nevertheless, research indicates that military relocations and time away from home (via extended deployments) are related to family support and well-being (Drummet, Coleman & Cable, 2003; Steel-Fisher, Zaslavsky & Blendon, 2008).

Consequently, we incorporated the presence of *military-related transitions* experienced by the family as well as AD members' *rank* as we anticipate that these are relevant for relationship development and maintenance, as well as the psychosocial outcomes of military partners. Frequent transition and change for military families comes in the form of deployment, member and family moves from one installation to another (permanent change of station [PCS] moves), and separation due to short-term training required of a military member (temporary duty [TDY]). Such transition and change can negatively impact relationships and the associated benefits of these relationships for both AD military members and civilian partners

if the transitions cause them to be physically, emotionally, or socially distanced from their family, friends, and other community members. Moreover, these transitions may be directly associated with individual psychosocial well-being.

### Current Study

This empirical analysis of military families, including AD military personnel and their civilian partners, examines partners' reports of their connectedness with the military community and the comprehensive community. We examine a model where these experiences are thought to impact psychosocial well-being both directly as well as indirectly through the association between community and how relationships function (i.e., relationship provisions). Furthermore, our examination of a dyadic model enables us to address the ways that couple members influence one another's well-being. Although previous work has supported the importance of community for various individual outcomes, identifying the role of connections within context-specific communities (i.e., the military community) as well as comprehensive communities (i.e., the larger community comprised of military and civilian community members) will provide insight into the relative importance of multiple community settings. Addressing the mediational role of relationship provisions can inform intervention and prevention work by identifying a specific, modifiable mechanism linking communities to well-being.

## Method

### Respondents and Procedure

Data were examined from 266 military families on an AD Army installation in the continental United States. Surveys were administered at three on-installation computer labs to provide easier access for families. Families had one AD service member and at least one adolescent between the ages of 11 and 18. All eligible family members came to the youth center on the installation to take the survey at the same time. (Note that only data from the two adult partners were utilized in the current study.) Most AD and civilian partners were between the ages of 31 and 40 (64.8% and 70.8% respectively). As expected with a military sample, military service and gender were highly related as most AD partners were men (85.7%).

Participation was voluntary, and consent was obtained from all family members. For adolescents under the age of 18, a parent also provided assent for adolescent participation. Family members took the survey in separate locations concurrently to avoid responses being influenced by

other family members. Participants were compensated for their time. The research protocol was executed as approved by the university Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects and the U.S. Army Research Institute.

### Measures

#### *Indicators of Community*

*Comprehensive community connections.* The 14-item Community Connections Index (Mancini, Bowen, Martin & Ware, 2003) captured respondents' feelings about their integration in formal systems and informal networks at the community level in the past year. The scale purposely did not direct respondents to distinguish between their military or non-military community, as we wanted respondents to self-identify what (and who) "community" means to them. While seven of the items reflect formal system integration through community engagement, the remaining seven items reflect informal network integration, or the respondents' perceptions of sense of community. Sample *community engagement* items include how often the respondent, "joined with people in the community to solve community problems," "felt like you could make a positive difference in the community," and "attended club or organization meetings in the community." Sample *sense of community* items include how often the respondent, "spent time with people in the community when you needed a little company," "felt your circumstances were similar to others in the community," and "made new friends with someone in the community." The 14 items utilized a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = never to 4 = always. Item responses were averaged with higher scores indicating greater community connections. The scale had high internal reliability ( $\alpha = .902$  and  $.932$  for AD and civilian partners, respectively).

*Military-Specific community connections.* Seven items from the Air Force Community Needs Survey were used to assess AD respondents' perceptions of community connections within the military (Spera, Kunz, Meiman, Jones & Whitworth, 2003). Sample items include, "Active duty members feel a sense of connection with one another," "Active duty members look after and show concern for members and families assigned to this post," and "Active duty members are active in post-sponsored community events and activities." These items were also adapted to assess their civilian partners' perceptions of military community support by replacing "active duty members" in the items with "family members (civilians)." The items were rated on a 4-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Mean scores were computed with higher scores indicating greater military community connections. The scale had strong internal

consistency ( $\alpha = .907$  and  $.910$  for AD and civilian partners, respectively).

### *Military Rank and Transitions*

In assessing the context surrounding these military families, we also accounted for the rank of the AD military member. Rank is an indicator of socioeconomic status as well as the family's relative standing in the military community because rank/pay grade is, in effect, the social address of a military member and family. AD respondents' rank was coded on a 4-point scale capturing E1-E4 (1), E5-E9 (2), O1-O4 including W01-CW5 (3), and O5-O9 (4), respectively.

We also considered the frequency of various transitions experienced by the family directly related to their military service using four, single-item transition indicators. *Length of time since last deployment* was reported on a 4-point scale from 1 (less than a month ago) to 4 (more than a year ago). *Total number of deployments since 2001* ranged from 1 (none) to 6 (five or more), AD members indicated how much *time they spent away from home for work in the past year* on a 5-point scale from 1 (no time away) to 5 (10 to 12 months), and *family relocation mobility* was assessed by the reported number of permanent change of station [PCS] moves since joining the military with a range from 1 (no moves) to 6 (five or more moves).

### *Relationship Provisions*

The provision of resources gained from interpersonal relationships (termed relationship provisions), including those with friends, families, and community members, were assessed using the 24-item Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Cutrona & Russell, 1987). The scale assesses six distinct resources gleaned from interpersonal relationships, including: reliable alliance, sense of attachment, guidance, social integration, reassurance of worth, and opportunity for nurturance. AD and civilian respondents reported their agreement to each item on a 4-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The scale had high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .924$  and  $.939$  for AD and civilian partners, respectively).

Although the measure can be used to assess individual resources, it is also appropriate to utilize the full scale as an overarching measure of relationship provisions (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). *Reliable alliance* refers to the individual's beliefs about the availability of help from others (e.g., "There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it"). *Sense of attachment* assesses feelings of intimacy and security with others (e.g., "I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional safety and well-being [e.g., comfort, happiness, and safety]"). Other provisions capture the presence of

*guidance* (e.g., "There is someone I could talk to about important decisions in my life") and a sense of belonging and connection, or *social integration*, (e.g., "I feel part of a group of people who share my attitudes and beliefs"). *Reassurance of worth* refers to the sense of competence and esteem that is generated from one's relationships with others (e.g., "I have relationships where my abilities and skills are recognized"), and the final relationship function captures *opportunity for nurturance* toward others (e.g., "There are people who depend on me for help"). A mean score was computed with higher scores reflecting gaining more from these relationships along the six dimensions.

### *Well-Being*

In order to capture AD and civilian respondents' outcomes across a variety of psychosocial markers of well-being, depressive symptoms, anxiety, and self-efficacy of both AD and civilian partners were modeled as endogenous variables in this study.

*Depressive symptoms.* Depressive symptoms were measured using the 7-item Abbreviated Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD7; Radloff, 1977). Participants were asked to think about the previous week and respond on a 3-point scale from 1 = *none of the time* to 3 = *most of the time* to items such as, "I felt sad" and "I felt everything I did was an effort." Mean scores were computed, and higher scores indicate more depressive symptoms. The measure had high internal reliability ( $\alpha = .834$  and  $.850$  for AD and civilian partners, respectively).

*Anxiety.* Both AD personnel and civilian partners completed the Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS; Zung, 1971), consisting of 20 items assessing frequency of psycho-emotional and behavioral symptoms of anxiety during the previous week on a scale from 1 = *none of the time* to 3 = *most of the time*. Sample items include, "I felt more nervous and anxious than usual," "I got upset easily and felt panicky," and "I had fainting spells or felt like fainting." Mean scores were computed with higher scores indicating more anxiety. The internal consistency within our sample was high ( $\alpha = .844$  and  $.828$  for AD and civilian partners, respectively).

*Self-efficacy.* Self-efficacy was measured using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer et al., 1982). The scale includes 12 items on a 3-point scale and assesses the individual's positive perceptions of their personal abilities. Respondents were asked to rate how true a statement is about themselves from 1 (not like me) to 3 (a lot like me) over the previous 2 weeks. Sample statements include: "When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work," "If something looks too complicated, I will not even bother to try it," and "I feel insecure (not sure)

about my ability to do things.” Mean scores were computed and higher scores indicated greater self-efficacy. The measure had high internal reliability ( $\alpha = .825$  and  $.857$  for AD and civilian partners, respectively).

### Analytic Strategy

Results from a path analysis were examined assessing the influences of community connections (both comprehensive community connections and military-specific community connections) and other indicators of military context (namely rank and service-related transitions) on their well-being (depressive symptoms, anxiety, and self-efficacy). We also assessed the role of relationship provisions as a linking mechanism between community connections and well-being. Due to the presence of dyadic, couple data, both intra-individual (actor) associations, and inter-individual (partner) associations were estimated. Such a model, often referred to as an actor–partner interdependence model (APIM), is the most appropriate way to analyze such data and provides unique information compared to individual-centered data analysis techniques. Because we were unable to collect data from 30 civilian partners (i.e., the service member was single or the partner was not available), our sample size for testing inter-individual paths was 236 for both AD and civilian respondents, while the sample for intra-individual paths was 236 civilians and 266 AD service members. Rates of attrition/missing data were minimal, averaging <1% for most variables. AMOS 20.0 (Arbuckle, 2011) was used to obtain estimates. Full information maximum likelihood (FIML) was used to account for missing data. FIML is preferable to other methods because it allows all available data to be utilized when estimating model parameters and standard errors (Enders, 2001). The Sobel test was used to test the statistical significance of the indirect effect of community and military context on well-being. A range of fit indices were used to assess the goodness-of-fit, including the chi-square statistic/degrees of freedom ratio, comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). CFI values nearing .95 and RMSEA values less than .08 are thought to indicate acceptable model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). A  $\chi^2/df$  ratio below 3.0 indicates acceptable model fit (Carmines & McIver, 1981).

### Results

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are reported in Table 1. Results from the path analysis model are presented in Fig. 1. Indicators of community and military context were evaluated, including both partners’ perspectives of comprehensive community connections and military-specific community connections, in addition to

capturing the active duty partner’s military rank and four service-related transitions experienced by the family. While each partners’ perceptions of military-specific community connections were associated with their own relationship provisions ( $\beta = .329$ ,  $SE = .052$ ,  $z = 5.428$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .255$  for AD partners and  $\beta = .147$ ,  $SE = .057$ ,  $z = 2.241$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .128$  for civilian partners), only the civilian partners’ perceptions of comprehensive community connections were related to their relationship provisions ( $\beta = .357$ ,  $SE = .052$ ,  $z = 5.478$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .285$ ). Whereas service members’ rank was related to both partners’ relationship provisions with higher ranking service members and their partners experiencing more relationship provisions compared to lower ranking service members and their partners ( $\beta = .195$ ,  $SE = .051$ ,  $z = 2.977$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .153$  for military members and  $\beta = .128$ ,  $SE = .056$ ,  $z = 1.892$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .106$  for their partners), most transition-related indicators of military context were not related to relationship provisions or psychosocial well-being. The one exception was total number of deployments since 2001, which was associated with fewer relationship provisions of both partners ( $\beta = -.154$ ,  $SE = .023$ ,  $z = -2.571$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.059$  for military members and  $\beta = -.111$ ,  $SE = .025$ ,  $z = -1.788$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.045$  for their partners).

In turn, all of the intra-individual associations examined between relationship provisions and psychosocial well-being were statistically significant. More specifically, AD partners’ with greater relationship provisions experienced fewer depressive symptoms ( $\beta = -.363$ ,  $SE = .058$ ,  $z = -6.129$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.353$ ), less anxiety ( $\beta = -.398$ ,  $SE = .039$ ,  $z = -6.713$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.264$ ), and more self-efficacy ( $\beta = .351$ ,  $SE = .044$ ,  $z = 5.721$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .255$ ) compared to those with few available relationship provisions. Similarly, civilian partners’ relationship provisions were related to fewer depressive symptoms ( $\beta = -.194$ ,  $SE = .068$ ,  $z = -2.696$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.184$ ), less anxiety ( $\beta = -.309$ ,  $SE = .042$ ,  $z = -4.339$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.181$ ), and greater self-efficacy ( $\beta = .344$ ,  $SE = .053$ ,  $z = 4.971$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .262$ ). Interestingly, only one statistically significant inter-individual (i.e. partner) effect was found within the model, and it was not in the direction we initially expected. Civilian partners tended to report a lower sense of self-efficacy when their AD partners had high levels of relationship provisions ( $\beta = -.140$ ,  $SE = .054$ ,  $z = -2.079$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.113$ ). In other words, if a military member scored higher on having their interpersonal needs met through relationships with others, their partners generally reported lower confidence in their ability to make things happen and to act on their own wishes and their own behalf.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for all study variables

Variable Name	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range
Indicators of community and context					
Comprehensive community connections (AD)	1.86	0.50	0.50	0.13	1.00–3.57
Comprehensive community connections (CIV)	2.06	0.61	0.75	0.71	1.00–4.00
Mil.-Specific community connections (AD)	2.81	0.60	−0.36	0.59	1.00–4.00
Mil.-Specific community connections (CIV)	2.72	0.56	−0.86	1.57	1.00–4.00
Rank	1.97	0.59	0.57	1.94	1–4
Military-Related transitions					
Length of time since last deployment	3.60	0.70	−1.90	2.39	1–4
Number of deployments	3.68	1.21	.127	−.74	1–6
Length of work travel in past year	2.67	1.43	.504	−1.08	1–5
Number of PCS moves	4.08	1.83	−.39	−1.31	1–6
Relationship provisions					
AD	3.07	0.46	−0.38	0.80	1.13–3.96
CIV	3.21	0.49	−0.49	0.45	1.38–4.00
Well-Being					
Depressive symptoms (AD)	1.54	0.45	0.80	−0.09	1.00–3.00
Depressive symptoms (CIV)	1.58	0.47	0.83	0.05	1.00–3.00
Anxiety (AD)	1.49	0.31	1.00	1.36	1.00–2.70
Anxiety (CIV)	1.47	0.29	0.80	0.42	1.00–2.45
Self-Efficacy (AD)	2.65	0.34	−1.20	1.29	1.25–3.00
Self-Efficacy (CIV)	2.58	0.37	−0.87	0.17	1.33–3.00

AD, Active duty respondent; CIV, Civilian respondent.

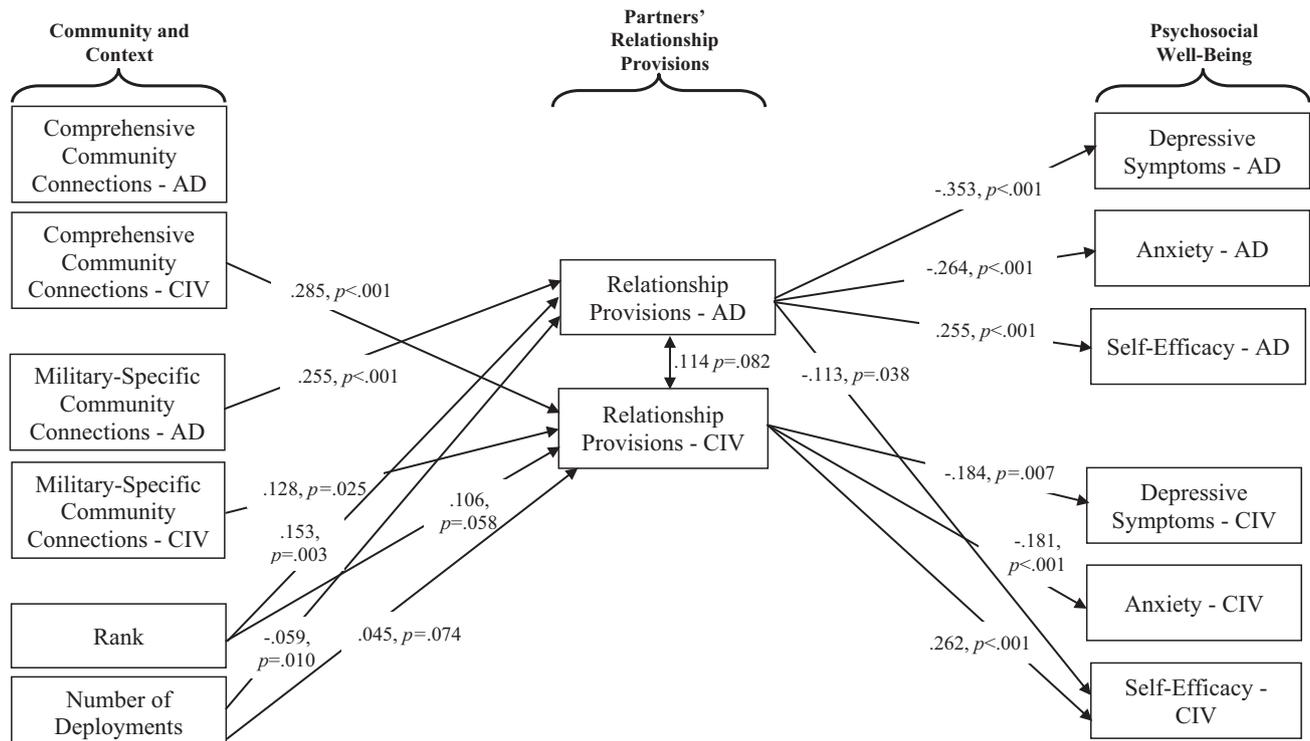
There were also several statistically significant “direct effect” paths from community and context variables to psychosocial well-being, particularly for AD partners, including both intra- and inter-individual associations. More specifically, compared to AD partners with a negative view of their surrounding military-specific community connections, those with a more positive perception of military-specific community connections experienced fewer depressive symptoms ( $\beta = -.226$ ,  $SE = .046$ ,  $z = -3.697$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.170$ ) and less anxiety ( $\beta = -.200$ ,  $SE = .031$ ,  $z = -3.268$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = -.103$ ). Moreover, AD partners with more positive perceptions of military-specific community connections also had more self-efficacious civilian partners than AD respondents with more negative perceptions of military-specific community connections ( $\beta = .128$ ,  $SE = .043$ ,  $z = 1.844$ ,  $\beta_{\text{Unstandardized}} = .080$ ).

Within the model, all community and context variables (the exogenous variables) were allowed to correlate as were partners’ relationship provisions. The lack of inter-individual significant correlations was somewhat unexpected. For instance, partners’ relationship provisions were only marginally significantly correlated ( $r = .114$ ,  $p = .082$ ), and partners’ perceptions of comprehensive community connections were not associated ( $r = .099$ ,  $p = .132$ ). One exception was AD and civilian partners’ perceptions of military-specific community connections ( $r = .198$ ,  $p = .003$ ). Although the intra-individual correlations between comprehensive and military-specific community connections measures were statistically significant, these values were indicative of small and medium effect

sizes ( $r = .309$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $r = .433$ ,  $p < .001$  for AD and civilian partners’ respectively), which supports our conceptualization of these measures as two separate, but related, constructs.

Overall, this model fit the data well ( $\chi^2/df = 2.565$ ,  $CFI = .999$ ,  $RMSEA = .077$ ). The model explained a reasonable amount of variation in relationship provisions and indicators of psychosocial well-being. For instance, the model accounted for 19.2% and 22.9% of the variation in relationship provisions for AD and civilian partners, respectively. While the model explained an adequate amount of variation in both partners’ psychosocial well-being, the amount of variance explained for AD partners ( $R^2 = .263$ ,  $.263$ , and  $.214$  for depressive symptoms, anxiety, and self-efficacy, respectively) was noticeably greater than the variation explained for civilian partners ( $R^2 = .080$ ,  $.095$ , and  $.148$  for depressive symptoms, anxiety, and self-efficacy, respectively). Of course, this is not entirely surprising given our examination of military context and the general presence of more statistically significant effects for AD partners.

The Sobel test examined the statistical significance of the indirect effects linking the community and context variables assessed to military partners’ psychosocial well-being (see Table 2). Most of the potential indirect effects were statistically significant. For instance, civilian partners’ comprehensive community connections were indirectly related to all three indicators of their well-being, and both partners’ perceptions of military-specific community connections were indirectly related to their own well-being.



**Fig. 1** Results from a path analyses model assessing the associations among community and military context, partners' relationship provisions, and their well-being (unstandardized coefficients). Note: Only statistically significant coefficients are shown. Statistically significant effects were also found between active duty respondents' military-specific community connections and their own depressive symptoms ( $B = -.170, p < .001$ ) and anxiety ( $B = -.103, p = .001$ ) as well as their civilian partners' self-efficacy ( $B = .080, p = .065$ ).  $\chi^2/df = 2.565$ , CFI = .999, RMSEA = .077

Two supplementary analyses were also carried out. First, we tested an alternative, more restrictive, model that did not estimate direct effects between community variables and psychosocial well-being ( $\chi^2 = 47.666, df = 25$ ). A chi-square difference test of these two nested models determined the larger (i.e., original) model presented above with direct effects fit the data better ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 45.101, \Delta df = 24; \chi^2_{crit} = 36.415, df = 24$ ). Second, we utilized multi-group analyses to examine if the hypothesized paths differed by military context (namely, rank and the four military transition variables). These analyses are not shown, but, in summary, neither the nested model comparisons nor the pairwise comparisons provided evidence indicating that the reported coefficients are dependent on rank or military transitions.

## Discussion

Comprehensive community connections were relevant to the relationship provisions of civilian partners, but not AD partners, whereas military-specific community connections were relevant for both civilian and AD partners. Thus, while civilian partners are "doubly impacted" by community connections and benefit from such connections

on two levels (comprehensive and military community), in this instance, AD adults appear to be insulated by their military community connections with the comprehensive community connections having little impact on AD members. While this insulation could be positive for AD members who lack comprehensive community connections, it also means that AD members with strong comprehensive community connections are not benefitted by such connections. Hence, the findings emphasize the need to not only strengthen weak military-specific community connections for AD members but also reinforce healthy military-specific community connections.

Notably, in comparing the effect sizes, the association between military-specific community connections and AD member's relationship provisions was comparable to the association between comprehensive community connections and civilian partner's relationship provisions. These effects appear to be stronger than the association between military-specific community connections and civilian partner's relationship provisions. Thus, at the end of the day, the military community is more important for AD members' relationships with others, and for the civilians' relationship provisions it is the comprehensive community. Although this was a somewhat expected finding, it raises the question of how much the military community

**Table 2** Results from the Sobel tests for indirect effects

Mediation paths	Sobel test value	p Value
Linking civilian partners' comprehensive community connections to well-being through <i>Civilian partners' relationship provisions</i>		
CIV comprehensive community connections → CIV depressive symptoms	−2.426	.015*
CIV comprehensive community connections → CIV anxiety	−3.388	<.001***
CIV comprehensive community connections → CIV self-efficacy	3.671	<.001***
Linking active duty partners' military-specific community connections to well-being through <i>Active duty partners' relationship provisions</i>		
AD military-specific community connections → AD depressive symptoms	−4.050	<.001***
AD military-specific community connections → AD anxiety	−4.233	<.001***
AD military-specific community connections → AD self-efficacy	3.961	<.001***
AD military-specific community connections → CIV self-efficacy	−1.952	.051 <sup>†</sup>
Linking civilian partners' military-specific community connections to well-being through <i>Civilian partners' relationship provisions</i>		
CIV military-specific community connections → CIV depressive symptoms	−1.728	.084 <sup>†</sup>
CIV military-specific community connections → CIV anxiety	−1.991	.046*
CIV military-specific community connections → CIV self-efficacy	2.045	.041*

AD, Active duty respondent; CIV, Civilian respondent; <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

intersects with the lives of the civilian partner, at least in meaningful and relationship-building ways. Also raised is the question of how integrated the AD partner is in the more comprehensive and non-military community, again with regard to meaningful relationships.

Regardless of their source (i.e., comprehensive or military-specific community connections), respondents who had more of their relationship needs met (that is, those with high levels of relationship provisions) reported notably better psychosocial outcomes, including fewer depressive symptoms, less anxiety, and more self-efficacy. What adults gain from relationships matters for how they experience everyday life, and, in particular, their psychological and emotional health.

There is also some support for how the “social address” of the military member, as indicated by rank/pay grade, plays into this examination of community and individual outcomes. In particular, higher ranking AD members and their partners generally indicated more relationship provisions than their lower ranking counterparts. What appear to be less important within the context of our study are the transitions that typify military life, such as deployment, PCS moves, or TDY assignments. While this was somewhat surprising given the tendency of researchers, along with the general public, to pathologize the lives of military families, the lack of notable effects for these transitions is in line with existing research indicating that overall military families are relatively high functioning on a number of well-being indicators (Card et al., 2011; Lucier-Greer, O’Neal, Arnold, Mancini & Wickrama, 2014). The one exception to this lack of effects was total number of deployments since 2001, which was related to fewer relationship provisions for both the AD and civilian partner, although the partner effect was only marginally significant.

Although our study is primarily a test of the impact of community *through* relationship provisions, there is also support for how community connections, particularly the AD partner’s connections within the military community, directly impact psychosocial well-being. Recall that, even after accounting for the link between relationship provisions and psychosocial well-being, the military-specific community connections of AD members were related to their own depressive and anxiety symptoms as well as their partners’ sense of self-efficacy. This is more evident in the importance of community connections *within* the military context, not only for AD members but also for their significant others.

Increasingly within the family science literature, there have been discussions of the transactional effects (i.e., inter-individual or “partner” effects) that exist within romantic relationships whereby one partner influences the other partner (e.g., O’Neal, Lucier-Greer, Mancini, Ferraro & Ross, 2016). In our analyses, there are two instances where this is evident. First, an interesting partner effect is seen in the association between relationship provisions of the military member and his/her partner’s self-efficacy. Although we are unable to establish causality for this association, the evidence suggests that what the military member gets from relationships with others may diminish their partner’s sense of efficacy. Or this association may reflect how these relationships were formed initially. That is, in the process of selecting a marriage or relationship partner, individuals, usually men in this sample, with strong relationship skills (evidenced by high levels of relationship provisions), may seek out, or be sought out by, individuals with lower levels of self-efficacy. It would be interesting to see if such an association is replicated in a non-military sample of couples. Second, there was a partner effect between military members’ military-specific

community connections and their partners' self-efficacy, which suggests that civilian partners benefited when AD individuals felt connected to others who share their military context.

What we did not find was a strong relationship between the military member's rank, which is a pivotal social address marker, and generally analogous to socioeconomic status, and most other variables in the model. We suspect that in the civilian world SES may have more pronounced effects because they do not have the benefits that the military system (called formal systems in our theory) provides to all its members and families, regardless of rank. In the military, many support systems are homogenous, consistent, and continuous regardless of rank. We also note that rank may be confounded with years of service in the military, consequently the attribution of effects to rank (the status in the military that reflects opportunities on the one hand, and constraints on the other hand, as well as level of responsibility and leadership tasks) may in fact at their core represent experience differences as well as maturation. In other words, rank/pay grade is a complex proxy, and, as such, it is a murky matter when setting expectations of what differences rank may make.

There are several suggestions for future research that will further uncover how dimensions of community connections serve individual and relationship well-being. Our suggestions are partly informed by the limitations in this current study. Assessing how relationships unfold over time is important for understanding the temporal quality of those relationships, including the changing contexts that influence them. Due to the absence of longitudinal data, the direction of effects between relationship provisions and well-being is not entirely clear; although our temporal ordering is consistent with past theoretical and empirical research. In light of this limitation, however, any recommendations for interventions that stem from these findings must be cautiously considered. In future studies, we recommend assessing both relationship provisions and community connections at multiple points in time. For example, researchers might examine military members and their partners as they initially relocate to a new geographic location. Another area ripe for future research involves an inspection of AD members' involvement in the larger community, outside of their military job, as well as how involved civilian partners are in activities that are largely within or sponsored by the military community. Civilian partners have a long history of volunteer involvement in military-sponsored activities, yet that involvement has decreased due to cost of living demands for military families and the subsequent need to have all adults in paid employment (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008). Future research should also consider the role gender plays, especially as it intersects with whether a person

is a military member or not. A limit in our study is that there were too few women military members to examine how gender effects may complicate our understanding of how military member status affects the primary variables in this study.

Our analyses have uncovered some of the nuances of interpersonal relationships that go beyond whether or not adults are satisfied with their relationships. In this study, we examined the relationship provisions (that is, having relationships that provide a reliable alliance, a sense of attachment, guidance, social integration, reassurance of worth, and opportunities for nurturance; Weiss, 1969). Higher scores on the measure we used (Social Provisions Scale; Cutrona & Russell, 1987) indicate that adults feel that these relationship "needs" are met from their relationships with others. In effect, this measure speaks to the intensity and meaningfulness of relationships as a whole. Our analyses indicate that how relationships function (or phrased differently, what relationships provide) make an important contribution to the psychosocial well-being of adults in military families. We anticipate that this pattern would generalize to studies of non-military families as well. Additionally, the importance of relationship provisions as a mechanism linking community connections to psychosocial well-being was also evident as Sobel's test indicated numerous statistically significant indirect effects between community and psychosocial well-being operating through relationship provisions. So, in conclusion, this study found that it is not only being connected to communities that is of importance, but of greater importance is what is gained from these connections.

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