

Strengthening Defence and veteran couple relationships through relationship education: supplementary review of Australian programs

DVA commissioned AIFS to assess evidence on the effectiveness of Australian relationship education programs as part of a broader project examining services and supports for military and veteran couples.

What we did

- a Rapid Evidence Assessment on the effectiveness of all Australian relationship education programs, evaluated with at least one experimental trial during the last 20 years.
- Evaluations assessed the effectiveness of programs in improving outcomes for couples in one or more of the following areas: relationship satisfaction, quality, strength, stability, communication, interaction, connection, conflict resolution or prevention of violence.
- We identified what factors moderated the effect of the program on couple outcomes, where possible and relevant to the military and veteran context.

RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION APPROACHES



CURRICULUM-BASED:
Focuses on training couples in key relationship skills



ASSESSMENT WITH FEEDBACK
Couple assessments followed by feedback sessions and coaching on strengths and weaknesses



HYBRID
Programs that combine both curriculum-based and assessment with feedback approaches

What we found

The review identified 8 evaluations of the efficacy or effectiveness of Australian relationship education programs.

The evaluations covered multiple versions of the Couple CARE program, including a version previously trialled with Australian Defence Force couples, the RELATE program, and a combined version of Couple CARE plus RELATE.

Couple CARE is a curriculum-based program, RELATE is an assessment with feedback approach, and RELATE plus Couple CARE combine both in a single intervention (HYBRID program).

The evaluations typically found these programs led to small to moderate improvements for couples on at least one measure, when compared to other programs or no intervention.

On balance, improvements were larger for the hybrid program; and were larger for couples facing minor issues in their relationship or at greater risk of relationship challenges due to personal characteristics.

Studies including longer term follow-ups show effects generally attenuate over time, suggesting that additional 'booster' sessions might be required to sustain positive effects.

Overall, Couple CARE is the Australian program with the largest evidence base. While the trial of Couple CARE with ADF couples found no significant additional benefit against an active comparison group, it found significant improvements over time for the military couples who participated, and high levels of program satisfaction, suggesting Couple CARE is worthy of further trial and investigation.

Next steps



These results can be used to inform selection and adaption of a relationship education program to trial with current and ex-serving members and their partners.



The results of our broader research, including focus groups and consultations with serving ADF members and their partners, suggests that programs should be adapted to include Australian military and veteran specific information, and examples relevant to the Australian military context.