



Revista Científica General José María Córdova

(Colombian Journal of Military and Strategic Studies)

Bogotá D.C., Colombia

ISSN 1900-6586 (print), 2500-7645 (online)

Journal homepage: <https://www.revistacientificaesmic.com>

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How to cite: Cabrera García, V. E., Rodríguez Casallas, M. C., Velásquez Ladino, L. D., & Garzón Cruz, Y. T. (2021). Marital stability in marriages estranged due to commissions of the Colombian Armed Forces. *Revista Científica General José María Córdova*, 19(33), 159-177. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21830/19006586.710>

Published online: January 1, 2021

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Revista Científica General José María Córdova
(Colombian Journal of Military and Strategic Studies)
Bogotá D.C., Colombia

Volume 19, Number 33, January-March 2021, pp. 159-177
<http://dx.doi.org/10.21830/19006586.710>

Marital stability in marriages estranged due to commissions of the Colombian Armed Forces

Estabilidad marital en matrimonios distanciados por la misionalidad de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia

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ABSTRACT. This research examines family functionality, coping strategies, and social support to expound on marital stability in the Military Forces, challenged by the commissions that affect marital relationships. To this end, a survey was conducted with 255 physically separated maritally joined military men and women. Various instruments were used to measure the variables according to command, type of union, and marriage length. The results indicate a correlation between marital stability and family functionality, social support attainment, and spiritual support. The variable with the most significant impact on marital stability is family functionality. The military members with a de facto marital union reported greater stability than those with a religious or civil union. Thus, the family functionality of military personnel should be strengthened to support their marital stability.

KEYWORDS: coping strategies; family; family functionality; marital stability; military forces; social well-being

RESUMEN. Esta investigación busca explicar la estabilidad marital en las Fuerzas Militares a partir de la funcionalidad familiar, las estrategias de afrontamiento y el apoyo social, ante los desafíos de la misionalidad que afectan las relaciones maritales. Para ello se hizo una encuesta a 255 hombres y mujeres militares con una relación marital y separados físicamente. Se midieron las variables, según mando, el tipo de unión y los años de matrimonio, mediante varios instrumentos. Los resultados indican una correlación entre la estabilidad marital y la funcionalidad familiar, la obtención de apoyo social y el apoyo espiritual. La variable que más incide en la estabilidad marital es la funcionalidad familiar. Los militares con unión marital de hecho reportaron mayor estabilidad que los de unión religiosa o civil. Así, se debe fortalecer la funcionalidad familiar de los militares para apoyar su estabilidad marital.

PALABRAS CLAVE: bienestar social; estabilidad marital; estrategias de afrontamiento; familia; Fuerzas Militares; funcionalidad familiar

Section: ARMED FORCES AND SOCIETY • Scientific and technological research article

Received: September 6, 2020 • Accepted: December 9, 2020

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Introduction

Due to the mission demands and characteristics of the work they perform in the line of duty, military personnel are subject to different changes that may affect their family dynamics and the stability of their relationship with their partner. One of the frequent problems affecting Colombian military families is the estrangement between soldiers and their families, resulting from transfers that occur approximately every two years, according to the service needs (Dirección de Familia y Bienestar, 2019). Sometimes marital relationships deteriorate because of this condition, opting for separation or divorce. However, some marriages have coped with the estrangement through different individual and family strategies, preserving their marital relationship over the years.

According to data from the Family and Social Assistance Directorate, 60.26% of military personnel currently live with their families, while the percentage who do not live with their families is 38.68%; 56.16% are married or living in a common-law marriage, 4.17% are divorced or separated, and 29.82% are single (Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2019). Based on these figures, this entity has sought to develop strategies and lines of action that allow the integral development of the military family and sensitive populations to strengthen military persons' commitment and professional performance in Colombia.

Carro-Abdala and Gamiño-Muñoz (2018) assert that family and couple decisions made around the military career affect the family trajectory and the spouses' personal life course. Compared to other families in society, the military family has particular characteristics, and in it, the execution of educational styles guided by the mother figure prevails (Cabrera et al., 2016). Military families are also frequently exposed to stressful situations, often due to factors related to the constant deployments of the uniformed personnel. They, therefore, endure changes in family dynamics (Russo & Fallon, 2015).

For their part, Maheshwari and Kumar (2016) found that work commitment is related to marital stability; thus, marital conflict is associated with a high level of dissatisfaction with the uniformed lifestyle. In the military context, separation from a spouse is perceived as a stressful event. When this estrangement occurs, the couple usually idealizes when the family will reunite. However, the meetings may not be true to expectations; this can generate conflicts between the couple as they adapt to change. Moreover, re-encounters lead to changes in intra-family relationships, roles, and expectations. These conditions may lead to consequences such as domestic violence and risk factors such as parental stress, depression, and difficulties in emotional expression (Lawhorne-Scott & Philpott, 2013).

According to Arévalo et al. (2019), a lack of cohesion and adaptability can affect military families' functionality, and therefore be a risk factor for marital stability. Likewise,

the lack of coping strategies in conflicts that may arise from physical distancing is also related to the instability of marriages. According to Zanella and Wagner (2018), the occurrence of various stressful situations influences marital dissatisfaction. In this sense, as mentioned by O'Neal et al. (2019), the social support that couples can receive from people close to them during this stage can be construed as a protective factor for marriages and families. Thus, satisfying the need for support from others, whether formal or informal, contributes to individual psychological well-being and marital stability.

In this order of ideas, this research aimed to explain marital stability based on family functionality, coping strategies, and social support in military marriages that are physically distanced due to military work. This study is justified insofar as it seeks to explain marital stability, specifically in military marriages. Although the literature on marital stability is extensive, little has focused on the marital relationships of people with military careers in Colombia.

The relational turbulence model, explained by Knobloch (2015), provides insight into how military couples react cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally to the post-deployment encounter experience, a progression marked by changes in roles, identities, and environments. These changes become turbulent, leading to family restructuring and reorganization, driving people to question their relationship, feel uncertainty, and causing a disruption in family members' goals. As a result, couples report feeling that their relationship is chaotic, tumultuous, and stressful.

Marital stability

Aya and Cabrera (2014) state that a marriage is considered stable when it ends with one of the spouses' natural death; it is unstable when the relationship ends based on the decision of one of the partners. Cabrera et al. (2019) define this instability as the couple's intention to dissolve their relationship, evidenced by actions at the affective and cognitive levels of the relationship. Factors such as lack of social support and job relocation are detrimental to marital stability; they are stressful events. However, they can be seen as a challenge for the couple's growth (Vangelisti et al., 2002).

In turn, Ross et al. (2019) note that marital stability is significantly related to financial satisfaction; if this is met, divorce is less likely to be considered. Other determining factors are spirituality, religion, commitment, sexual relationships, and communication (Karimi et al., 2019). Olafsson & Steingrimsdottir (2020) include equal sharing of household chores, including shopping and childcare, in the factors contributing to marital stability. Alvarez and Garcia (2017) state that although both partners must receive the support they require from their partners, this is especially significant for women.

In their study, Margelisch et al. (2017) found that marital stability is conditional on marital quality, associated with the couple's long-term health and well-being. On the other hand, intrapersonal factors such as psychological resilience also explain marital stability. According to studies by Domínguez (2015) and Sánchez (2009), legal and religious practices play an important role in the amorous relationships' continuance and duration. In this sense, highly stable couples tend to be highly religious in their marital relationship, compared to those who do not demonstrate religiosity. In contrast, Cabrera et al. (2019) found no differences in the marital stability of marriages with religious and civil bonds compared to those without them.

Karney and Crown (2007) mention that when military marriages are entered into at an older age, there are lower risks of separation because younger couples have fewer relationship resources to cope with the stresses of military life. Mackintosh et al. (2018) studied the effect of military service on aspects of marital stability in war veterans. They found that deployments, combat exposure, and the military personnel's poor mental health affect family functioning.

Family functionality

Family functionality is defined as the capacity of the family system to face the different stages of the life cycle and its crises (Vélez & Betancurth, 2016). Arévalo et al. (2019) highlight that family functionality depends on cohesion and adaptability, understood as the degree of intimacy, the quality of feelings, and the possibility of sharing space. Aguilar et al. (2018) relate family functionality with the response to in the family and culture; therefore, there is a link between family dynamics and its functionality, favored through a communication predicated on the respect for the relationships between family members.

On the other hand, O'Neal et al. (2018) found that deployment and reintegration create systemic family changes and challenges that can generate opportunities for growth among family members and strengthen their bonds. Similarly, communication and management help cushion adversity, depending on the family's flexibility to withstand change. Along the same lines, each family member creates his or her own perceptions of family functionality. These may not coincide with those of others because they are determined by family satisfaction, cohesion, and flexibility.

Similarly, Fuentes and Merino (2016) explain that a functional family is characterized by the levels of flexibility it develops to adapt and respond to daily difficulties. In turn, functional families are able to create an environment that facilitates the personal development of their members, circumventing crises or serious psychological disorders.

Coping strategies

Coping strategies are cognitive or behavioral modifications that emerge when a difficulty arises. These strategies, which reflect the individual's psychological resources, are implemented to mitigate the effects of crisis situations. Coping can occur individually and as a family. Family coping is considered the potential to jointly mobilize and act on stressful events that influence the family (Macías et al., 2013).

In military couples, the most commonly used coping strategies are the consolidation of social support with family, children, co-workers, and social support groups and promoting the soldiers' resilience, aimed at work-life balance (Maheshwari & Kumar, 2016). It should be noted that the occurrence of conflicts or various stressors in the couple is linked to marital dissatisfaction (Zanella & Wagner, 2018).

A study by Rossetto (2015a) sought to understand how a wife copes with spousal deployment. Their results indicate that, at the individual level, the women's strategies were activities that keep their minds occupied and generated personal satisfaction, but, above all, that strengthened them emotionally. At the family and social level, seeking social connections and maintaining constant and open communication with the spouse allows the relationship to function during deployment and later in reintegration.

In a study probing how women experience leisure during their partners' deployment, Werner and Shannon (2013) indicated that they shifted their focus from individual leisure to family leisure. Women find spending their free time sharing with their relatives more satisfying. Caring for and interacting with their children after work, in the evenings, or on weekends was their main motivation.

A study by Bóia et al. (2018) analyzed how new challenges are created for marital relationships, parenting, and other responsibilities before, during, and after the service person's deployment, given that the mother or the children must assume new roles, responsibilities, and functions in the household. However, this phase allows relationships to be strengthened to generate a closer bond between parents and children and between spouses. The reintegration phase presents new challenges, such as the reorganization of roles and family structure.

Carro-Abdala and Gamiño-Muñoz (2018) studied seven cases of Mexican military wives. Their results indicate that during the separation, a sense of ambiguity is generated regarding the role played by each family member, and the marital relationship becomes a distant relationship. However, the stress caused by the separation was reduced in relationships consolidated through a religious bond.

Another study highlighted active coping strategies, followed by positive reframing and planning (Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017). It found that when the marital relation-

ship had a religious attachment, more self-distraction, religion, and positive reframing were used. Regarding socioeconomic status, women with lower socioeconomic status used emotional coping strategies such as denial and behavioral disengagement.

Pincus et al. (2001) proposed the “Emotional Cycle of Deployment” model as a coping strategy to overcome obstacles. Before military deployment, families enter the anticipation of absence and denial phase; they share their intimacy and prepare physically and psychologically for the separation. The first month after the departure, the family enters the deployment stage, when they may feel both relieved and overwhelmed by the responsibilities they face. In the sustainment phase, routines are created, and new support networks emerge. In the re-deployment phase, there is anticipation for the military person’s homecoming; there is also fear and anxiety about reconnecting and readjusting as a family. Finally, in the post-deployment stage, families experience a honeymoon phase and, at the same time, work to regain emotional closeness by establishing routines and roles.

According to Cuervo (2013), when couples have skills at the individual level and implement them in coping with critical situations, this is evidenced in positive conflict resolution styles that contribute to the relationship’s stability.

Social support

Social support is understood as an interactive process where instrumental, emotional, and affective help is obtained from the social network. It is considered a protective stress-buffering factor (Arteaga et al., 2017). In turn, it is characterized by expressions of affection, affirmation, or endorsement of another person’s behaviors, in addition to symbolic or material help that favors the construction of a more positive perception of the environment, promotes self-care and the better use of an individual’s personal and social resources (García et al., 2016).

The support of others is a necessity for military families, given the need for positive adaptation concerning the many changes they face. According to O’Neal et al. (2019), formal social supports from agencies, organizations, and institutions, and informal social support, provided by neighbors, friends, and family, influence individual psychological well-being and marital stability, especially if the partner in uniform is satisfied and committed to military life. Similarly, Rossetto (2015b) mentions that military families are subject to mental health stressors and risk factors, requiring a high degree of social support to cope with the challenges of family estrangement. This support allows coping with stressful events, contributes to psychological well-being and the strengthening of resilience. Some types of support are instrumental, informational, emotional, esteem, and social network support.

In a study of how communication between spouses develops and the changes, challenges, benefits, and advice that arise during and after estrangement, Knobloch et al. (2016) found changes in communication, which strengthened in some cases, and weakened in others. In a couple's relationship, it is also necessary to revive the connection in intimacy and affectivity. Similarly, Cafferky and Shi (2015) found that social support from family, civilian friends, and partners are significant for better psychological health, as they help reduce levels of depression among spouses. On the one hand, the family promotes a sense of self-efficacy, helps reevaluate stressors, and enhances resilience. On the other, friends provide companionship and make the spouse feel less lonely. Finally, the partner's support helps cope with the challenges of the home and makes military life more bearable.

In line with the above, the following research objectives are proposed to accomplish the initial objective: 1) examine whether there are significant differences in marital stability, coping strategies, family functionality, and social support according to the type of command and union; 2) determine if there is an interaction effect between these two factors; 3) analyze the correlation between coping strategies, family functionality, and social support with marital stability, according to the type of command, union, and years of marriage; 4) examine which variable contributes most to the explanation of marital stability.

Methodology

Type of study

This is a quantitative, descriptive, correlational, and explanatory study seeking to describe and verify the relationship between two or more variables and explain why a phenomenon occurs or under what conditions (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018).

Participants

The inclusion criteria for the participants in the study were that they had been in a marital relationship for more than two years and were physically separated from their partner due to military duties. Thus, there were 255 military participants, 241 (94.5 %) men and 14 (5.5 %) women, with an average age of 34.57 years, ranging from 23 to 48 years.

In terms of rank, 129 (50.59 %) of them were commanding military personnel and 126 (49.41 %) were non-commanding. The following characteristics were considered: commanding military persons belong to a hierarchy and have risen through the profession tiers at specific times, subjecting them to specific rights and obligations (Ley 1405, 2010). The non-commanding military persons are professional soldiers without leadership or managerial roles and not promoted within their career; their mission is focused

on technical and tactical procedures in combat maneuvers, highlighting values such as obedience and discipline (Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2019).

Regarding the type of union, 81 (31.8%) participants were in marital unions with a religious bond, 93 (36.5%) were in civil unions, and 81 (31.8%) participants were in de facto marital relationships. Regarding the years of relationship, 136 (53.3%) military personnel had been married for less than ten years, and 119 (46.7%) participants had been married for more than ten years.

Procedure

The information was disseminated virtually to officers, non-commissioned officers, and professional soldiers in the different jurisdictions of the country's Armed Forces. The information included an explanation of the study's objectives, the criteria for choosing the participants, and an invitation to participate in the research. The technique used in this selection was non-probabilistic sampling, called "snowball." It is based on the idea of social network and consists of progressively expanding the subjects of our field based on the contacts provided by other subjects (Espinoza et al., 2018). The individual's participation and armed force division remained anonymous and confidential. Subsequently, the instrument was applied using Google Docs. Analyses were performed using SPSS, version 26.

Instruments

Marital stability was assessed using the marital instability scale or "Marital Instability Index" (Booth et al., 1983) in its reduced version of five questions. This scale was reversed to assess marital stability. It measured on a scale of 0 = never, 1 = sometime, 2 = within the last three years, and 3 = now. An $\alpha = .91$ was obtained. As for the factorial analysis of variance (FAV), a KMO = .88 was obtained for the model's goodness of fit, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was $X^2(10) = 862.32$; $p = .000$. The questions of this scale accounted for 73.46% of the total variance explained.

Family functionality was measured using Alcalá and Suárez' (2014) family functionality test (Family Apgar), which probes five elements of family functionality: 1) adaptation (use of internal and external resources to face crisis situations); 2) participation or cooperation in decision making; 3) gradient of resources (physical and emotional maturation); 4) affectivity; and 5) resources or capacity for resolution. These were measured on a scale of 0 = never, 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = almost always, and 4 = always. In this test, an $\alpha = .90$ was obtained. In the factorial analysis of variance (FAV), we obtained a KMO = .88, which shows the model's goodness of fit, and Bartlett's test of sphericity

was of $X^2(10) = 862.32$; $p = .000$. The questions of this scale accounted for 73.46% of the total explained variance.

Coping strategies were measured using McCubbin et al.'s (1981) Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) coping strategies scale to identify the coping strategies used by the families in the face of difficulties. They included both external coping patterns (obtaining social support, seeking spiritual support, and mobilizing family members to obtain and accept assistance) and internal coping patterns such as restructuring and passive evaluation (Blanco-Larrioux & Cracco, 2015). These were measured on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

This instrument evaluates five factors; the following lists the factors and this study's results. The first factor is *obtaining social support*, with an $\alpha = .82$. The second is *search for spiritual support*, with an $\alpha = .77$. The third factor is *family mobilization*, with an $\alpha = .73$. The fourth is *restructuring*, with an $\alpha = .82$, and the fifth is *passive evaluation*, with $\alpha = .52$. Because this factor did not obtain a high-reliability level, it was grouped with the *restructuring* factor, which, as suggested by Blanco-Larrioux and Cracco (2015), is to be analyzed as an internal coping pattern. In the reliability analysis, the alpha increased if this factor's questions were eliminated. Therefore, they were not included in the analyses, and only the *restructuring* factor was kept. In terms of factorial analysis of variance (FAV), specifically, the model's goodness of fit obtained a KMO = .85, Bartlett's test of sphericity was $X^2(300) = 2445.42$; $p = .000$. The total variance explained by these questions was 57.34%.

Social support was assessed with the social support scale or Zimet's (1988) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which measures the social support received at formal and informal levels (Pinto et al., 2014). It was evaluated using a scale of 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently, and 4 = almost always. In the reliability analysis, an $\alpha = .92$ was obtained. Regarding the factorial analysis of variance (FAV), specifically, the model's goodness of fit obtained a KMO = .90, Bartlett's test of sphericity was of $X^2(66) = 2151.04$; $p = .000$. The questions of this scale accounted for 68.84% of the total variance explained.

Results

First, the variables' descriptive statistical analysis was performed; it was found that the highest score was obtained in the *family mobilization variable*, followed by the *search for spiritual support* and *family functionality* factor (Table 1).

Preliminary analysis

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables

Variable	Median	Standard deviation	Scale
Marital stability	.48	.50	0 to 3
Obtaining social support	20.93	.72	1 to 5
Search for spiritual support	3.74	.76	1 to 5
Family mobilization	3.10	.86	1 to 5
Restructuring	3.93	.60	1 to 5
Coping strategies	3.26	.51	1 to 5
Family functionality	3.32	.76	0 to 4
Social support	2.94	.67	1 to 4

Source: Created by the authors.

Analysis of differences in variables by command and type of union

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to respond to this research's first objective. Significant differences in marital stability were obtained according to the type of union. According to the analysis post hoc, the groups were organized as follows. In Group 1, participants were participants with religious and civil unions; in Group 2, participants with civil and de facto unions. Those showing the highest levels of marital stability were in the de facto unions, followed by the civil unions, and, then, in religious unions. No significant differences were found according to command (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean difference analysis according to the type of command and union

Variable	Command (C)		η^2	Type of union			η^2
	With C	Without C		Religious	Civil	CL	
Marital stability	$F(1.253) = 1.18; p = .28$		.008	$F(2.252) = 3.57; p = .03$			.029
	.51	.44		.36	.51	.56	
Obtaining social support	$F(1.253) = 1.22; p = .27$		.004	$F(2.252) = 1.38; p = .25$			.011
	2.88	2.98		2.90	2.86	3.04	
Search for spiritual support	$F(1.253) = .05; p = .82$		.000	$F(2.252) = 2.09; p = .13$			.013
	3.75	3.73		3.87	3.74	3.63	
Family mobilization to obtain and accept help	$F(1.253) = 1.94; p = .16$		.006	$F(2.252) = 0.13; p = .88$			.002
	3.02	3.17		3.06	3.13	3.09	
Restructuring	$F(1.253) = 2.09; p = .15$		.007	$F(2.252) = .32; p = .73$			.002
	2.88	3.99		3.91	3.97	3.91	
Family functionality	$F(1.253) = .03; p = .86$		.001	$F(2.252) = .70; p = .50$			.007
	3.32	3.34		3.93	3.41	3.28	
Social support	$F(1.253) = 1.16; p = .28$		.005	$F(2.252) = 1.29; p = .28$			.008
	2.99	2.90		3.00	2.86	2.99	

CL: Common-law marriage (*de facto*).

Source: Created by the authors.

Interaction effect between the command and type of union

Regarding the second objective, an interaction effect was found between command and union type in the coping strategy of family mobilization to obtain and accept help. In other words, those who used it as a coping strategy most were people in civil unions and without command positions. They were followed by those in *de facto* marital unions and without commanding positions; those using it the least were people in religious unions and without command positions (Table 3). Therefore, the comparison between command and union type indicates differences in using the mobilizing strategy to obtain and accept help between people in religious and civil unions and those with and without command positions (Figure 1).

Table 3. Interaction effect between command and union type

Variable	<i>F</i>	RU / with C	RU / without C	CU / with C	CU / without C	CL / with C	CL / without C	<i>p</i> ²
Family mobilization to obtain and accept help	$F(2.254) = 3.50;$ $p = .03$	3.01	2.89	2.95	3.28	2.91	3.24	.027

RU: Religious union; CU: Civil union; CL: Common-law marital union; C: Command.

Source: Created by the authors.

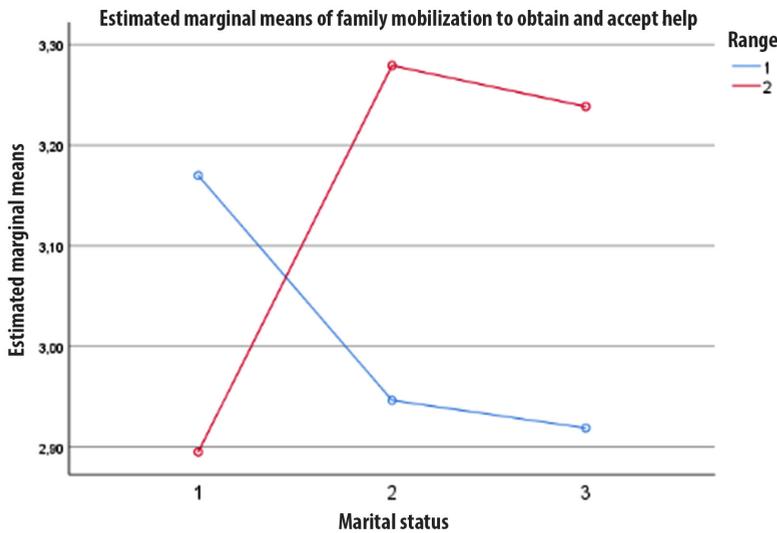


Figure 1. Effect of interaction between command and union type on family mobilization to obtain and accept help.

Source: Created by the authors.

A correlation analysis was carried out, responding to the third objective, between coping strategies, family functionality, and social support and marital stability, according to command, type of union, and years of marriage. Table 4 shows that people with command positions obtaining social support and family functionality were correlated with marital stability. In the case of participants without command positions, an association was found between obtaining social support, family functionality, and social support with marital stability.

Concerning the type of union, it was observed that marital stability was correlated with the search for spiritual support and family functionality in religious and civil unions. In de facto marital unions, family functionality was associated with marital stability. According to years of marriage, family functionality was associated with marital stability, both in military personnel with more than ten years of marriage and those with less than ten years of marital union (Table 4).

Table 4. Correlations between study variables and marital stability by type of command, type of union, and years of marriage

Variable	Marital stability						
	Command (C)		Type of union			Years of marriage	
	With C	Without C	Religious	Civil	CL	< 10 years	> 10 years
Obtaining social support	.22*	.20*	.11	.08	.09	.04	.07
Search for spiritual support	.12	.17	.30**	.22*	.07	.12	.17
Family mobilization to obtain and accept help	.07	.05	.17	.04	.08	.05	.06
Restructuring	.04	.14	.47	.16	.09	.08	.11
Coping strategies	.08	.16	.15	.12	.06	.01	.14
Family functionality	.41**	.39**	.48**	.34**	.37**	.43**	.37**
Social support	.03	.22*	.04	.13	.17	.07	.18

CL: Common-law marriage

Source: Created by the authors.

Analysis of the variables explaining marital stability

To respond to the fourth objective, that is, to know which variable contributes most to the explanation of marital stability, a multiple linear regression analysis was carried out. All the participants were included in this study without grouping them by command, type of union, or years of marriage. The model obtained was significant. The variable that weighed most heavily was family functionality, followed by family mobilization to obtain and accept help, and the search for spiritual support was in third place.

Table 5. Explanation of marital stability

Statistical model	<i>F</i>	Variable	β	<i>p</i>
(R ² = .18); <i>p</i> = .000	17.56	Obtaining social support	.06	.513
		Search for spiritual support	.11	.05
		Family mobilization to obtain and accept help	.12	.05
		Restructuring	.06	.394
		Family functionality	.42	.000
		Social support	.00	.951

Source: Created by the authors.

Discussion

This research aimed to explain marital stability in men and women belonging to the Colombian Military Forces, based on family functionality, coping strategies, and social support. In terms of differences by command, the military persons did not report different levels of family functionality. This outcome means that, possibly due to military training, regardless of command and the armed force division to which they belong, military personnel can develop the family skill to accept problematic issues, confront them, and seek functionality for their family. Maheshwari and Kumar (2016) explain that military personnel exhibit individual-driven coping strategies geared toward reconciling family and military life.

Concerning coping strategies, military members with religious and civil unions showed higher levels of seeking spiritual support. This result coincides with Carro-Abdala and Gamiño-Muñoz (2018). They point out that the religious bond is a determining aspect in military personnel in maintaining the relationship and decreasing the stress that leads to divorce. A higher level of commitment is implied when people establish a marital relationship through a religious or civil bond; in turn, this contributes to maintaining the relationship and gives it greater stability.

On the other hand, de facto marital unions showed a higher level of marital stability than religious and civil unions; this contradicts the literature. According to Dominguez (2015) and Sanchez (2009), religious bonding is related to high levels of marital stability, given that religious ideas on marriage promote people to stay in the relationship. For their part, Cabrera et al. (2019) found no differences in marital stability according to the type of bond. These findings question that, regardless of the type of bond, people maintain and preserve their stable relationship because of other factors that may weigh more heavily, such as commitment to the relationship, assertive styles of conflict resolution, or dyadic consensus.

In both command and non-command military members, obtaining social support and family functionality were correlated with marital stability. This result is in line with the theoretical postulates of Vangelisti et al. (2002), who explain that marriages that perceive social support tend to be more stable. Also, due to the constant changes faced by military families, which can lead to high levels of stress (O'Neal et al., 2018), family functionality plays an important role in the stability of the marriage. According to Arévalo et al. (2019), it is necessary to promote and contribute to family adaptation and flexibility in the face of changes to face these situations with greater family functionality.

It is worth noting that the marital stability of military personnel estranged from their families can be explained by family functionality, family mobilization to obtain and accept help, and the search for spiritual support. In this sense, seeking high family functioning and adaptation levels is not enough; support from others must be sought. These include family members, friends, neighbors, and people or institutions that can offer the families of military persons spiritual help and support. Aguilar et al. (2018) and Cabrera et al. (2016) highlight the importance of the military person's adaptation to stressor events associated with responding to different changes occurring at the social and cultural level.

Consistent with the above, Russo and Fallon (2015) and Zanella and Wagner (2018) note that military deployment-induced exposure to stress can affect marital stability and satisfaction. Therefore, sensitivity to the needs of these families is necessary. Supporting the parent remaining with the children is essential, as well as the military personnel performing their mission away from their families to contribute to their personal and family well-being.

It must be highlighted that behind every uniformed person, the family constitutes a source of stability and commitment, personally and for the development of the mission, as Maheshwari and Kumar (2016) state, relating work commitment to marital stability. In other words, working on strengthening adaptability, affection, and cooperation will improve adaptation for estranged marriages; this will consequently lead to military personnel deploying more effective actions in the fulfillment of their duty, such as the protection of national sovereignty. In this sense, just as the work of the military is underlined, it is vital to give their partners relevance, in most cases, women. In this regard, according to Braun-Lewensohn and Bar (2017), the strategies that predominate in military spouses are active coping, followed by positive reframing and planning.

This research is aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 3, "Health and well-being." It states that "ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all, at all ages, is fundamental to achieving sustaina-

ble development” (ONU, 2015). Human beings must maintain a balance between their mental health and well-being. Therefore, promoting the functioning of military families, working on developing coping strategies, and offering them social support contributes to the mental and psychological well-being of families and individuals. It provides them with tools to readjust their family dynamics and structure to remain stable.

Based on this research's results, it is suggested that future research considers institutional support. It is also important to work with other members of the family system, such as partners, children, or the soldier's parents, who may be affected by the deployment of the person in uniform. It would also be interesting to carry out similar studies making analyses according to academic level, socioeconomic level, and age, as people face their reality according to their experience, life cycle, and sociocultural context. Likewise, studies could be carried out to address the relationship between partners and their stability after retirement to analyze the factors explaining marital stability after retirement. It is also essential to analyze the role played by the spouse during the estrangement and the institutional support received.

Finally, although improving and promoting marital relationship stability is necessary, dissolving the relationship should also be considered, especially when events such as intra-marital violence or other circumstances threaten individuals' dignity and well-being.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the Colombian Armed Forces for their support and participation in this study.

Disclaimer

The authors declare that there is no potential conflict of interest related to the article.

Funding

The authors declare no source of funding for this article.

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