

Researcher debunks myths that play into soldiers' financial readiness

October 8 2013, by Stephanie Jacques

Marking the 12th anniversary of the war in Afghanistan, Oct. 7 should be a day dedicated to honoring our soldiers and veterans. One way to do this is by ensuring they are financially secure, according to a 2013 Kansas State University personal financial planning doctoral graduate.

Mary Bell, advised by Sonya Britt, assistant professor of family studies and human services, and Briana Nelson Goff, professor of family studies and human services, conducted her dissertation research on the financial behaviors of more than 1,300 soldiers before and after deployment. She has presented her research to Department of Defense staff, all service branches, military service providers, military partners and financial planners, counselors and therapists.

Bell's research found several factors that predict a soldier's [financial behavior](#). One of the key findings debunked the myth that a higher rank and higher income increased positive financial behaviors.

"Having more money does not lead to better financial behaviors," Bell said. "You could not tell according to a soldier's ranks who has better or worse financial behaviors."

According to Bell, personal financial behaviors should be key factors in making sure soldiers are personally prepared for deployment. Otherwise, it can potentially threaten the soldiers' mission and their future well-being.

"The Department of Defense has put a lot of time, energy and resources into making sure soldiers have the proper training prior to deployment," Bell said. "There are five factors that play into what the Army calls personal readiness which directly effects mission readiness. Currently, none of those five factors are financial."

Using social learning theory, Bell investigated personal factors, past behaviors and environmental factors to better predict a soldier's future financial behaviors. She found four principles that lead to better financial behaviors, which include having better past financial behaviors, feeling more financially knowledgeable, believing they can control their own life—having control of the world around them—and less financial anxiety.

"This research shows that we need to help lower financial anxiety, increase [financial knowledge](#), and teach personal responsibility and accountability to improve the future financial behaviors of [soldiers](#) throughout the deployment cycle," Bell said. "At each of those life stages there are different factors and different financial matters."

Bell recommends training on financial matters at the appropriate life stage. Otherwise, they may start to tune out the message.

"They will say, 'I've heard this before,' but if you teach it in a way that is applicable to their life stages, you are talking about a whole new opportunity to reach out," Bell said.

Bell also recommends financial education standards be set to track whether a financial training program is working.

"We want to be able to track the behavioral changes that take place," Bell said. We need to find out if this education is making the behavioral change that we are looking for and if not, how to change that."

According to Bell's research, the factors that predicted better financial behaviors are important to improving past behaviors. Encouraging lower credit card debt, more emergency savings, higher financial knowledge and less financial anxiety are important to having positive financial behaviors. Factors that did not affect financial behaviors included age, rank, ethnicity, having dependents, education level and gender.

Provided by Kansas State University

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