



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

There and Back Again: How Parental Experiences Affect Children's Adjustments in the Course of Military Deployments

Andres, M.D. & Moelker, R. (2011). There and back again: How parental experiences affect children's adjustments in the course of military deployments. *Armed Forces & Society*, 37, 418-447.
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303 Dutch Soldiers and their partners participated in a study exploring the process of temporary father-child separation as a result of military deployment. Most of the children were doing quite well and adapted to the separation and reunion fairly rapidly.

Key Findings:

- 25% of mothers reported that the deployment was rather difficult for their children; nearly all reported that the children missed their fathers.
- Mothers reported that school-age children experienced anxiety and concerns about the safety of their absent parent.
- Adolescents generally seemed better equipped to adapt to the separation and reunion than younger children.
- 40% of mothers reported that the children were afraid that their father would leave again; this was primarily reported by mothers of children up to 5 years old, but it was also reported for children up to 10 years old.
- Regression analyses did not reveal a relationship between children's adjustment and duration of the separation and/or type of absence (more routine missions vs. more risky ones).

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could host informal social gatherings for families with deployed Service members.
- Programs could provide classes for nondeployed parents, offering skills in supporting their children during the Service member's deployment.
- Programs could offer activities for children whose parents are deployed, giving them opportunities to talk with other children in similar situations, exchange support, and learn ideas for coping with the challenges of parental deployment.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate funds to provide school-based supports for military children whose parent has deployed or recently returned from deployment.
- Policies could recommend that families are offered intervention services post-deployment to ease reintegration problems.
- Policies could recommend ongoing support of activities for the nondeployed parent and their children during deployment.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could follow these parents and children further into reunion to examine the long-term impact of deployment.
- Additional studies could collect information on children's gender in order to assess differences between boys' and girls' reactions.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- In 2006 Dutch Soldiers and their partners anticipating a deployment to either Bosnia or Afghanistan were invited; 50% of those approached chose to participate.
- Partners of Soldiers completed three semi-structured interviews in their homes before, during, and after deployment.
- Questions addressed how the separation and adjustment were going for their children, parent-parent relationship satisfaction, conflict between military job demands and family life, loneliness, parenting stress, and psychological distress.
- Soldiers completed measures of work-family conflict and general well-being before and after deployment.

Participants:

- 303 Dutch Soldiers and their partners participated in the initial interview; 37% of partners completed all three interviews.
- 57% of partners had children. Average age of children during deployment = 9.59 years (SD=7.45 years).
- 82% of mothers worked full or part-time.
- Fathers were 60% noncommissioned officers, 33% officers, 7% enlisted; 74% were sent to Afghanistan, and the average length of separation was 5 months.

Limitations:

- Description of the research methods and procedures were incomplete. For example, it appears that the Soldiers were all male, but the gender breakdown was not specified.
- No information on analytic procedures was presented.
- Measures of child adjustment were all based on mother reports, and thus may be biased.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	★★★★★
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★★★