

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Psychosocial Screening in Children With Wartime-Deployed Parents

Aranda, M., Middleton, L. S., Flake, E., & Davis, B. (2011). Psychosocial screening in children with wartime-deployed parents. *Military Medicine*, 176(4), 402-407. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-10-00202

SUMMARY: Self-report data from parent and youth were utilized to investigate the effects of parental military deployment on adolescents' psychosocial difficulties (internalizing symptoms like depression and anxiety and externalizing symptoms like school and attention problems). Parents and youth reported more psychosocial issues when a parent Service members was currently deployed.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents of an adolescent with a deployed parent reported more child psychosocial difficulties than did parents of an adolescent without a currently deployed parent. There were no differences based on gender or age.
- Youth with a deployed parent reported significantly more psychosocial difficulties than did youth without a deployed parent, with the exception of attention problems. There was no difference between groups with respect to attention problems and no differences based on gender.
- Only one difference was found between parent and youth reports; parents indicated less school problems for their adolescents than the youth did for themselves.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Identify youth who might be at-risk during parental deployment and in need of additional supports or services
- Provide education to military youth about the impact of parental deployment and healthy coping strategies, focusing on evidence-based strategies that build youth coping skills
- Publicize information regarding normative versus problematic responses of youth to a parents deployment and strategies to address deployment-related distress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development to service providers regarding how parental deployment affects children
- Encourage primary care providers to screen military youth for possible psychosocial difficulties
- Continue to support programs that provide resources for military families and youth throughout the deployment cycle

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were approached during routine fall sports/school physical examinations at a large, northwest U.S. military treatment facility in 2007.
- Children were divided into two matched groups: those with a currently deployed parent and those without a currently deployed parent.
- This study focused on military families with parents serving in the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard.

PARTICIPANTS

- Military parents (n = 106) and their adolescents (n = 72; aged 11-16 years) participated.
- Children ranged in age from 11 to 16 years.
- No other demographic information (i.e., gender and race/ethnicity) were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- A small sample size may limit the generalizability to the larger population.
- Without longitudinal data, there is no clear evidence that military deployment caused deficits in psychosocial functioning.
- The use of self-report data means that results may be biased.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit youth from a more general population of military youth, not just those receiving sports physicals
- Conduct a longitudinal study with military families to more accurately assess the effects of deployment over time
- Conducted a similar study with Reserve and National Guard unit families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>