

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Marines

Assisting Children and Families With Military-Related Disruptions: The United States Marine Corps School Liaison Program

Aronson, K. R., Caldwell, L. L., Perkins, D. F., & Pasch, K. W. (2011). Assisting children and families with military-related disruptions: The United States Marine Corps School Liaison Program. *Psychology in the Schools*, 48(10), 998-1015. doi:10.1002/pits.20608

SUMMARY: Military families face many transitions, including frequent relocations, which may make it difficult for military youth to cope. This study assessed the perceptions of U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) school liaison professionals regarding their work with families, schools, command and others in helping improve school transitions of military children due to family relocation. Generally, liaisons expressed positive collaboration experiences and reported good understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and goals.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Liaisons generally understood their roles, responsibilities, and goals; however, all liaisons reported fixing family problems as part of the liaison job, which is inconsistent with the mental health model and their mission.
- All liaisons found that their school contacts were highly sympathetic to issues faced by Marine families, yet many liaisons reported problems with schools not having adequate programming to support transitions (50%) or schools having complicated or confusing policies (40%).
- Most liaisons had positive experiences working with commanding officers (90%), but 25% reported a desire for additional training in how to work more effectively with command.
- The majority of liaisons felt their job was satisfying, meaningful, and appreciated (75%), but only 20% of liaisons were satisfied with their compensation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer standardized training procedures to clearly educate new liaisons about the school liaison program's mission and goals and how best to allocate time to reduce the risk of burnout and turnover
- Identify military families most at-risk for difficult school transitions to provide assistance proactively
- Offer workshops to provide training for liaisons to deal directly with family problems

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage school personnel to learn more about military family culture and to facilitate educational support for military school-aged children to help school transitions go more smoothly
- Continue to support liaisons and similar professionals in order to help military families and children with school transitions
- Recommend professional education for liaisons to learn skills important to their positions (e.g. activity prioritization, identifying potential crises, building family coping capacity, collaborating with school counselors)

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

- All 20 USMC school liaisons were told they would be contacted to complete a brief telephone survey (average length = 40 minutes), and there was a 100% response rate.
- Survey questions included eight domains: understanding of school liaison program mission and goals, understanding of liaison roles and responsibilities, organizing and prioritizing liaison activities, view on working with schools, view on working with commanders, hours per week of school liaison program activities, level of job satisfaction, and training needs.
- This study was purely descriptive and exploratory, and as such, had no specific hypotheses or predictions.

PARTICIPANTS

- All 20 USMC school liaisons, who were 85% female and had an average age of 43 years ($SD = 7.4$), were interviewed; no race or ethnicity data were reported.
- Among participants, 80% had graduate or professional degrees in education or social work.
- liaisons had been in the position for an average of 18 months ($SD = 14.4$).

LIMITATIONS

- The small sample, skewed gender distribution (85% female), and lack of race data make it impossible to test for demographic differences in the findings reported.
- Because interviews were not anonymous, participants may have answered survey questions in socially desirable ways.
- Results cannot be generalized across military branches because only liaisons from the USMC were interviewed.
- Without data from other sources, such as families or schools, it is impossible to assess how effective the program is and whether there are unmet needs in the target population for whom the program was created.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data on the needs and concerns of Marine children, families, and schools already participating in the school liaison program to assess how the program works from school and community perspectives
- Include liaisons from all branches of the military
- Investigate risk and resilience factors associated with military relocations in order to guide future assessments of the liaison program

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>