

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Developmental Issues Impacting Military Families With Young Children During Single and Multiple Deployments

Barker, L. H., & Berry, K. D. (2009). Developmental issues impacting military families with young children during single and multiple deployments. *Military Medicine*, 174(10), 1033-1040. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-04-1108

**SUMMARY:** This study investigated how young children have been affected by single and multiple OIF/OEF deployments. Families were surveyed at two separate times assessing child behavior problems, along with individual and family characteristics. The first survey was administered at least three to four months into the deployment, and the second survey was administered roughly four to six weeks after the Service member returned home from deployment.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Children with a deployed parent showed increased behavior problems soon after deployment and increased attachment behaviors at reunion compared with children whose parents had not recently deployed. Toddlers and preschoolers were more prone to behavior problems than were infants.
- Other factors significantly correlated with behavioral problems were child temperament (“anxious” and “difficult” as opposed to “easy”), duration of recent deployment, total time deployed, number of permanent change of station (PCS) moves, and number of parent stressors experienced during deployment.
- Child attachment behaviors (e.g., clinginess, needing attention, asking questions about the parent's absence) were related to the length of the deployment, number of deployments, and the number of stressors faced by the parent.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops for families to explore practical strategies to caregiving issues and collaborate in designing tools to overcome them
- Offer family-centered services and community partnerships that are linked to other families with similar experiences, demands, and resources
- Disseminate information regarding normative versus problematic children's responses to deployment and strategies to address deployment-related distress

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that provide Service members who deploy with supports to help buffer the negative impact of deployment on young children
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can promote resilience in Service members, their partners, and children
- Recommend education for professionals working with military families about the impact of deployment on children and family functioning

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## METHODS

- Army families were surveyed at two separate time points (three-four months into the deployment and four-six weeks after the Soldier returned home from deployment).
- Participants were recruited from family readiness group (FRG) meetings and participation was voluntary.
- Statistical analyses examined children's symptoms and functioning across the no-deployment, single deployment, and multiple deployment groups.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Parents from 57 military families with at least one young child provided survey data. On average, parents were 29 years old and children were between 0 and 47 months.
- Families were divided into three groups: no-deployment group (n = 14 families), single deployment group (n = 21 families), and multiple deployment group (n = 22 families) to compare children's symptoms across the groups.
- The gender and racial/ethnic composition of either the parents or children were not specified.

## LIMITATIONS

- Conclusions based on a non-random, self-selected sample may not be representative of the larger population. Those who participated may have been functioning better (or worse) than those who did not participate.
- Without control variables, it is not possible to determine whether the few effects that were found resulted from other causes.
- The study variables may not have been properly defined as the researchers used non-standardized scales; this may have caused some effects to appear as non-significant.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate individual, family, and community supports that buffer individuals against the effects of deployment-related stress
- Examine the effects of deployment on child attachment at developmentally critical milestones
- Explore the contribution of young children's responses during parental deployment to the retention decisions of their military parents

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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