

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Children on the Homefront: The Experience of Children From Military Families

Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Jaycox, L. H., Tanielian, T., Burns, R. M., Ruder, T., & Han, B. (2010). Children on the homefront: The experience of children from military families. *Pediatrics*, 125(1), 16-25. doi:10.1542/peds.2009-1180

**SUMMARY:** The well being of children and caregivers during a parent's deployment was examined through interviews with the at-home parent (i.e., caregiver) and the child. Quantitative analyses using the interview data assessed the impact of parental deployment, including length of deployment, on children's and caregivers' experiences.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Caregiver perceptions of negative impact on children's behavior during deployment and reintegration increased in proportion to the total number of months the military parent was away from the family in the previous three years. More severe emotional and behavioral problems when compared to the national average were reported both by children, regardless of age and gender, and by caretakers.
- Caregiver mental health was significantly associated with caregiver reports of child difficulties.
- Girls had a tendency to express greater problems with reintegration than boys. During adolescence, girls and boys experienced greater problems with deployment and reintegration, yet, these effects appeared to be lessened by residence on a military base.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop social activities for youth who are at elevated risk of emotional and behavioral difficulties during parental deployment
- Educate parents about normative versus problematic adolescents' responses to parental deployment and on strategies to cope with the deployment-related distress that directly impacts the caregiver's own mental health
- Offer workshops to military parents about strategies to cope with the deployment-related distress that directly impacts caregivers' mental health

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can promote resilience during deployments for military families, especially children
- Continue to provide support for programs that work to increase family readiness
- Promote reintegration programs that assist Service members' families in adjusting to Service members' return

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

- Phone interviews were conducted with 1,507 households (one parent and one child) of Service members and were selected from attendants at the Operation Purple camp for children.
- The parent surveys lasted about 30 minutes, while the child surveys lasted about 20 minutes. Of note, some surveys were completed over multiple calls.
- Parents and children were asked questions related to Service members' deployment history, children's difficulty with deployment and reintegration, and each of the respondents' well-being.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The average age of the children in the sample was 12.8 years (SD = 1.5) and the average age of the parents was 38.4 years (SD = 6.0). About half of the children were male (53%) and most of the parents were female (95%).
- A majority of children were White (72%), followed by Black (11%), Multiracial/other (10%), Latino (5%), and Asian-American (1%). No data were provided on the parents' racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- A Service member was deployed in 38% of the families at the time of the study.

## LIMITATIONS

- A selection bias should be considered in this study since the sample consisted of only families applying to the Operation Purple camp. Families who apply to that camp may differ from other military families that was not considered in this study.
- As several of the measures were created specifically for this study, they should be further examined to determine how well they measure the desirable variables.
- Child well-being reports, as reported by caregivers, may have been confounded by caregiver's own mental health status.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Expand to include a wider variety of military children across a number of dimensions including maternal deployment, paternal caregivers, diversity, rank, and financial resources
- Replicate this study in more current data as the deployments studied here were during peacetime
- Utilize a longitudinal design of coping skills and adjustment prior to deployment paired with measures of the entire course of deployment and reintegration

## 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>