

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Marines

## Effect of Parents' Wartime Deployment on the Behavior of Young Children in Military Families

Chartrand, M. M., Frank, D. A., White, L. F., & Shope, T. R. (2008). Effect of parents' wartime deployment on the behavior of young children in military families. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 162(11), 1009-1014.  
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**SUMMARY:** Deployment can be a stressful time for children, particularly young children who may not understand what is happening. For this study, parents and childcare providers of children ages 18 months to five years old were surveyed regarding their child's behavior during a parental deployment. Results showed that children ages three to five who experienced the deployment of a parent had significantly more behavior problems.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Children ages three to five had significant behavioral responses to parental deployment, including increased internalizing and externalizing behaviors, independent of the stress and depression levels of their non-deployed parent.
- Those children who were between 18 months and three years old at the time of parental deployment actually exhibited fewer externalizing behaviors than children whose parent was not deployed.
- The findings regarding children ages three to five occurred when examining reports from childcare providers as well as from parents, while findings for the younger children were limited to parents' reports.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes for families during the pre-deployment phase to support them in discussing and planning for upcoming changes
- Offer peer support programs for families to foster the use of social networks during deployment
- Provide workshops for non-deployed parents during the deployment phase to help them learn how to respond to possible behavior changes among children

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development of programs for children in military families during deployment
- Recommend behavioral screening for children in military families to identify those who might most benefit from participating in supportive programming or intervention
- Encourage the development of parenting support programs that assist partners of deployed Service members

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## METHODS

- Parent and childcare providers of children aged 18 months to five years were selected from an on-base military childcare center on a large Marine base with high deployment rates.
- Parent participants completed the questionnaires regarding child behavior, parenting stress, and depression while childcare providers completed questionnaires only regarding child behavior.
- Statistical analyses were used to compare the internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems of children with and without a deployed parent.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 169 families with a Marine parent. Of the deployed parents, 92% were fathers.
- Children were excluded if they had a known behavioral disorder or developmental disability.
- Most of the parent respondents were the child's mother (91%).
- Of the mothers, 66% were White, 16% were Black, 14% were Latino, 2% were Asian-American, and 2% were other races.

## LIMITATIONS

- All respondents lived within a military community, which offers resources to support military families during times of deployment. Results may not generalize to families living outside of military bases.
- Lengths of deployment on average at the time of measurement were relatively brief, with a mean of 3.9 months, so findings may be different in a group of children experiencing longer deployments.
- The study screened out children of parents in the Reserve Component; those families may have different experiences with deployment.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize longitudinal designs to determine whether there are changes in children's behavior over the deployment cycle
- Investigate behaviors of the children of deployed parents in the National Guard and Reserves
- Explore possible explanations for the decrease in externalizing behaviors in the youngest children of deployed Service members

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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