

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Early Development of Delinquency Within Divorced Families: Evaluating a Randomized Preventive Intervention Trial

DeGarmo, D. S., & Forgatch, M. S. (2005). Early development of delinquency within divorced families: Evaluating a randomized preventive intervention trial. *Developmental Science*, 8(3), 229-239. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7687.2005.00412.x

SUMMARY: Divorce and separation may be linked to delinquency behaviors in children. To investigate the effects of parenting education on preventing delinquency behaviors in children of separated families, mothers and sons in families who recently experienced a marriage separation were randomly assigned to intervention and control groups. Results supported the effectiveness of the intervention program on preventing delinquency.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Compared with the control group, mothers in the intervention group showed improved parenting practices such as positive involvement, skill encouragement, problem solving, monitoring, reinforcement, positive reciprocity, and discipline.
- Boys in the intervention group showed greater reduction in delinquency and deviant peer affiliation.
- Improvements in parenting practices and reduction in deviant peer affiliation contributed to the decrease of delinquency behaviors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Educate military parents about parenting practices that may prevent the onset of delinquency behaviors
- Work with divorced military parents to help them determine specific strategies they could use to help children adjust to the new family structure

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Collaborate with civilian programs so that the parenting education services are more accessible for military families
- Offer workshops that help military parents to improve their parenting skills and foster healthy parent-child relationships

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families regarding the impact parenting practices can have on children's delinquency behaviors
- Raise awareness of the importance of preventing delinquency behaviors in children

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METHODS

- Data were part of the Oregon Divorce Study-II, and the sample was recruited through media ads, community fliers, and divorce court records.
- Families were randomly assigned to the intervention group (N = 153) and the no-intervention control group (N = 85); the intervention consisted of 14 weekly parent group meetings.
- All participants were assessed five times: at baseline and at 6, 12, 18, and 30 months; the retention rates for the experimental and control groups were 89% and 87%, respectively.
- Assessments included child delinquency behaviors (rated by teachers) and parenting practices (observed during mother-child interaction tasks).

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 238 single mothers who were recently separated and their sons.
- The average age of the mothers was 34.8 years (SD = 5.4), and the average age of the sons was 7.8 years (SD = 0.93).
- The majority of the boys were White (86%), followed by Latino (2%), Native American (2%), Black (1%), and other (9%).

LIMITATIONS

- The boys were followed until they were 11 years old, on average, whereas according to research, most early offending behaviors start at around 14 years old, thus the long-term effects of the intervention is unknown.
- Teachers' evaluation of boys' delinquency may not reflect boys' real performances; more informants are needed to accurately assess their delinquency behaviors.
- All the parents in the study were mothers who were recently separated, therefore the results of the study may not generalize to single-father or blended families.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include observation of peer interactions to measure boys' deviance behaviors
- Conduct long-term studies to examine the effects of intervention through adolescence
- Investigate if the intervention will be effective for single-father and two-parent families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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