

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

A Randomized Clinical Trial of a Postdeployment Parenting Intervention for Service Members and Their Families with Very Young Children

DeVoe, E. R., Paris, R., Emmert-Aronson, B., Ross, A., & Acker, M. (2016). A randomized clinical trial of a postdeployment parenting intervention for service members and their families with very young children. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. doi:10.1037/tra0000196

SUMMARY: Deployment may have a unique impact on very young children (i.e., birth to six years old) in military families. This study evaluated the efficacy of an eight-module home-visiting program directed at increasing postdeployment parenting functioning in military families with very young children. Results indicated that the program was effective.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents who participated in the program experienced decreases in parenting stress and improved parenting functioning compared to those who were assigned to a waitlist.
- Participation in the program lessened the association between higher posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD symptoms) and lower parenting confidence.
- Service members participating in the program experienced significant decreases in PTSD, depression, and anxiety symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop curricula targeted specifically toward military families with very young children
- Offer reintegration support groups for Service member parents based on children's age so that Service members can find support from peers with similar homecoming experiences
- Provide classes in which Service members and their partners are taught parenting skills in order to decrease parenting stress and increase parenting confidence

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the use of parent education programs for military families that take into account the developmental age of children in the household
- Continue to support programs that aim to enhance parenting in military families, particularly during transitions such as reintegration
- Promote evaluation of the effectiveness of programs aimed at supporting military families with children of different ages

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METHODS

- Potential participants were recruited during reintegration events in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.
- Families were randomly assigned to receive an eight-module home-visiting program or to a waiting list.
- Participants completed questionnaires regarding deployment characteristics, parenting, and mental health at baseline, after completion of the program, and 14 weeks later.
- Data were compared between those who completed the program and those who were on the waitlist to determine the effect the program had on parents.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 115 Service members, their children, and 103 non-deployed at-home parents.
- The Service members were White (76%), Latino (11%), Black (9%), multiracial (2%), or another race/ethnicity (2%), with an average age of 33.7 years (SD = 7.3).
- Families had, on average, two children, at least one of whom was under six during the Service member's deployment. Demographic information about the children was not reported.
- Almost all (97%) of the Service members were members of the National Guard or Reserves, including affiliation with the Army (86%), Air Force (10%), Marines (3%), and Navy (1%).

LIMITATIONS

- The sample consisted almost entirely of Guard or Reserve Service members, so results may not extend to an Active Duty population.
- Participants were recruited from a limited geographic area of the country; this type of program may have different results for military families in other parts of the country.
- Families chose to participate in the program. These families may differ from families who did not choose to participate in ways that may affect the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the use of a similar program in families of Active Duty Service members
- Examine the effectiveness of this type of program if all Service members with children under six must participate
- Obtain reports of children's behavior to determine the effect of such a program on the children

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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