

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

If You Build It, Will They Come? Patterns of Internet-Based and Face-to-Face Participation in a Parenting Program for Military Families

Doty, J. L., Rudi, J. H., Pinna, K. L., Hanson, S. K., & Gewirtz, A. H. (2016). If you build it, will they come? Patterns of internet-based and face-to-face participation in a parenting program for military families. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 18(6), e169. doi:10.2196/jmir.4445

SUMMARY: Understanding who engages in parenting education programs and by which modes of delivery (e.g., in-person, online) allows providers to tailor programs to have the greatest impact on families. This study examined the associations between military parent demographics and both online and in-person engagement in the After Deployment, Adaptive Parenting Tools (ADAPT) program. Results suggest parent demographic characteristics may be related to different preferred modes of delivery.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents tended to have either very high or very low levels of engagement, with highly-engaged parents accessing 41 of 56 online components and attending 9.8 of 14 sessions on average.
- Parents who were female, incentivized, more educated, and never deployed were more likely to engage online, and parents with younger children and higher education attended more sessions.
- Low levels of engagement were associated with having older children and being employed.
- The longer parents had been deployed, the less likely they were to be highly engaged.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer military parents childcare during parent education sessions to promote more engagement
- Provide online options and supplementary information for existing military parenting programs
- Disseminate information to military parents, especially those with low education levels, history of deployment, or older children, about the benefits of parent education programs

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support military parenting education programs that utilize multiple delivery modes
- Recommend professional development courses for providers working with military families regarding factors that may influence engagement in parenting programs
- Encourage existing in-person military programs to develop online modules and materials

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METHODS

- Parents were included from seven cohorts of an ADAPT program treatment trial, which recruited military families from the Midwest via military event presentations, referrals, word-of-mouth, and media ads.
- Parents were invited to participate in the ADAPT program (14 in-person sessions and online modules); frequency of attendance and module use were calculated and incentivized for cohorts 3-7.
- Associations between self-reported military parent demographics and use of online modules and attendance at sessions for the ADAPT parenting program were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 370 parents from 207 National Guard or Reserve families with at least one parent deployed in OEF/OIF/OND since 2001 and a child between the ages of 4-12 years.
- Of the 370 parents, 292 (79%) participated at least once, with 73% participating online and 52% in-person; parents were 51% mothers and primarily White (91%) and married (88%).
- Parents were military spouses (39%) or belonged to the Army National Guard or Reserve (44%), Air Force National Guard of Reserve (8%), or Navy National Guard or Reserve (2%).

LIMITATIONS

- Parents were offered in-person sessions with supplementary online modules post-session, not allowing for an equal comparison of engagement in randomly-assigned modes of delivery.
- Engagement in online modules was measured by whether a parent clicked on the module, which does not capture completion of the module or time spent on the material.
- Parents were categorized into five groups by high and low online and in-person engagement, resulting in somewhat muddled interpretations of results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the effects of parental psychological factors (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy) on engagement
- Determine whether online-only options increase participation of military parents who may not otherwise participate due to accessibility concerns (e.g., transportation, childcare)
- Examine military parent program engagement both when parents are randomly-assigned to delivery modes and when parents choose their preferred delivery mode

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