

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Family Adjustment of Deployed and Nondeployed Mothers in Families with A Parent Deployed To Iraq or Afghanistan

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SUMMARY: There is limited research on the family and individual adjustment of military mothers who have deployed to conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan (OIF, OEF, OND). An analysis of baseline data on maternal, child, parenting, and couple adjustment for mothers in 181 families in which a parent deployed to OIF/OEF/OND was conducted. Overall, differences were found between deployed and non-deployed mothers on individual and family dimensions.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Deployed mothers reported more often having difficulty finding a job, troubles and changes in responsibilities at work, and problems in school than non-deployed mothers.
- Deployed mothers reported more conflicts with partners around parenting than non-deployed mothers.
- Mothers who had deployed reported greater distress (higher scores on measures of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression symptoms) than non-deployed mothers.
- No differences were found between the deployed and non-deployed mothers on measures of couple adjustment, parenting, or child functioning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer military couples' education training that focus on unique military family stressors, such as deployments and relocations
- Offer pre- and post-deployment support groups for deployed mothers and their families
- Provide support for deployed mothers that focuses on relationship building during reintegration

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for programs that specifically addresses deployed mothers and their relationships with their partners and children
- Facilitate awareness among professionals working with military families around the importance of supporting resiliency in Service members, their partners, and children
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families (e.g., child caregivers, mental health, education professionals) on the possible effects of mothers' deployment on their mental health and wellbeing

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METHODS

- Participants that were already in After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools prevention study were recruited through outreach to military organizations and media coverage.
- Mothers completed questionnaires assessing past-year adverse life events, PTSD and depression symptoms, couple adjustment, and child functioning.
- Analysis examined pre-deployment recent life stressors among deployed and non-deployed women, and compared individual and family adjustment: maternal and child adjustment, couple adjustment, and parenting.

PARTICIPANTS

- Eligibility criteria included having a child between age four to twelve years, and one parent who had deployed to OIF, OEF, or OND.
- Participants included deployed (19%) and never deployed mothers who were married or partnered with deployed men (81%) with most identifying as White (91%).
- Participants were in the Army National Guard (65%), Army Reserves (15%), Air National Guard (9%), Active Duty Army (6%), Air Force Reserves (3%), and the rest unknown (3%).

LIMITATIONS

- The deployment status of the women's partner could not be controlled for, which poses unique circumstances that may have influenced the study outcomes.
- The sample was limited to Nation Guard and Reserve families with school-age children; therefore, not representative of the entire military population.
- The analysis method chosen to analyze the data did not fit the data patterns correctly; therefore, results should be interpreted with caution.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore challenges for deployed mothers around separation from children and the implications for relationships (especially with young children ages zero to five years old)
- Investigate the effects of dual deployment on military families and their relationships with their children and partner
- Evaluate what supports military families need most in the reintegration stage of deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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