

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Parenting Practices and Emotion Regulation in National Guard and Reserve Families: Early Findings From the After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools/ADAPT Study

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SUMMARY: Exposure of one parent to combat, reintegration, and further deployment is hypothesized to impair parenting by influencing parents' emotion regulation capacities. Baseline data were collected from National Guard/Reserve and civilian parents and families participating in the After Deployment: Adaptive Parenting Tool (ADAPT) program. Results indicate that deployed parents reported more difficulty with emotional regulation and parenting than civilian parents, particularly deployed mothers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Deployed mothers had the most difficulties in emotion regulation and parenting.
- Civilian mothers demonstrated the fewest difficulties in emotion regulation and parenting.
- Deployment status was marginally associated with difficulties in emotion regulation and parenting challenges.
- Emotion regulation was a strong mediator of the link between deployment status and parenting.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop cost-effective, high quality short-term child care options for military families with a deployed family member
- Offer pre- and post-deployment support groups for deployed mothers and their families
- Provide workshops for deployed mothers that focus on emotion regulation and parenting

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for programs that address the unique challenges faced by deployed mothers
- Continue to take into consideration parenting needs that can promote resilience in Service members, their partners, and children
- Recommend education of professionals (e.g. child caregivers, mental health, education professionals) on the possible effects of parents' emotion regulation and parenting during deployment and post-deployment

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited during National Guard family event or via social media or media articles (TV, newspaper) about the study.
- Eligibility criteria included having a child between age 5-12 years, one parent who had deployed to current conflicts since 2001, and access to high-speed internet. In addition, parents had to be willing and able, if invited, to attend a weekly parenting group in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St Paul) metro area.
- Parents completed online self-report measures related to emotion regulation and parenting behaviors. Baseline data were analyzed for the current study.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 89 Reserve and civilian parents; 44% (n = 39) of participants were deployed men, 2% (n = 2) were civilian men, 15% (n = 13) were deployed women, and 39% (n = 35) were civilian women.
- Most participants (64%) were in the Army National Guard, 8% in the Army Reserves, 6% in the Navy Reserves, and 21% in the Air National Guard.
- The majority of participants were female (60%) and White (93%). Age was not provided.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was limited to National Guard/ Reserve families with school-age children; therefore, not representative of the entire military population.
- The small sample size of male civilians precluded the analysis of sample subgroups by gender and deployment status.
- The sample was limited to National Guard/ Reserve families from one state (Minnesota) and may not be applicable to National Guard/ Reserve families in other states.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize a larger sample to explore the pathways (direct and indirect) by which each parent, and child, is affected by deployment within a family
- Explore different aspects of the deployed mother within military families
- Examine the association over time among parenting, emotion regulation, and deployment among both mothers and fathers

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