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


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

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design
Appropriate Research Plan and Sample

Methods
Appropriate Measurement and Analysis

Limitations
Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works