



## Separated by their Work: Families with Fathers Living Apart

Hiew, C.C. (1992). Separated by their work: Families with fathers living apart. *Environment and Behavior*, 24, 206-225.



66 elementary-school children (whose fathers were absent as part of service in the Canadian military forces) and their mothers participated in a study examining youth coping methods, maternally-perceived social support, and child adjustment and behavior. Less social support during a father's absence (as perceived by mothers) was associated with poorer youth behavior and academic performance.

### Key Findings:

- According to the children, the time of the actual parental absence was most stressful, while the anticipation of their father's departure was the next highest rated source of stress.
- Across all stages of parental separation, children tended to primarily use emotion-focused coping. They also employed social support seeking and problem-focused coping.
- Children of mothers with more social support were rated better by teachers on classroom behavior when compared to children of mothers with less social support. Youth with mothers with high social support also reported significantly fewer acting out behaviors and learning problems.
- When mothers experienced less social support during the father's absence, children were more likely to experience poorer behavior and have worse academic functioning.

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs could develop outreach programs for families who have parents who are deployed or away as a means of bolstering social support (e.g., providing meals or child care).
- Military family programs could include information in their curricula about how to promote the development of healthy coping strategies in their children.
- Programs could design programs to strengthen relationships between children and parents during their absence.

### Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate funds for military families with a deployed family member to help cover additional child care costs during deployment.
- Policies could recommend funding for peer support programs for at-home parents when their partner is deployed or away on training as a means of enhancing social support.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could use a longitudinal design to identify how these variables impact school and home functioning years after a father's absence.
- Additional studies could measure differences in outcomes if the absent family member is a mother or father.
- Research could also examine gender differences in functioning among children whose parents are away.



## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Elementary school age children (grades 4-6) of Canadian military families whose fathers had been away in the past 8 months (due to training activities or overseas deployment) were recruited through their schools. 64% of the participated.
- Mothers completed measures of perceived social support and their children's emotional and separation adjustment. Teachers completed a measure of the child's classroom behavior.
- Children were interviewed for 30 minutes to discuss their coping behaviors (classified as problem, emotion-focused coping, and social support seeking) in response to father absence at each stage of family separation (stage 1 – anticipation, stage 2 – actual absence, stage 3 – return and reunion).
- T-tests compared high and low socially-supported mothers on youth classroom behavior. Correlations assessed social network size, coping, classroom adjustment, and home adjustment.

### Participants:

- 66 children and their mothers participated (about 50% of the youth were boys).
- Average child age = 9.95 years (range = 8-11 years)
- Average age of mother = 33.00 years (range = 26-45 years).
- Mother's education = 66% completed high school, 33% had some postsecondary education
- 36% of mothers were employed full-time; no racial or ethnic information was presented.

### Limitations:

- The present sample consisted of Canadians; it is unclear how these might generalize to the United States military population.
- All of the families participating consisted of two-parent families; these results may not apply to other family systems.
- Although the response rate was quite good (64%), it is unknown how the participating families differed from those that chose not to participate in the study.

## Assessing Research that Works

Assessing Research that Works					Quality Rating:
<b>Research Design and Sample</b>	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★☆
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Research Methods</b>	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★☆
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Limitations</b>	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	★★★★☆
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Implications</b>	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★☆
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
<b>Overall Quality Rating</b>					★★★★☆