

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
National  
Guard

## Children of Deployed National Guard Troops: Perceptions of Parental Deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom

Houston, J. B., Pfefferbaum, B., Sherman, M. D., Melson, A. G., Jeon-Slaughter, H., Brand, M. W., & Jarman, Y. (2009). Children of deployed National Guard troops: Perceptions of parental deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom. *Psychiatric Annals*, 39(8), 805-811. doi:10.3928/00485713-20090728-03

**SUMMARY:** Children of deployed Service members may face many difficulties and concerns, but little research addresses child deployment perspectives. Children of newly-deployed National Guard Soldiers were interviewed about their perspectives on deployment and frequencies of responses were calculated. Children's greatest difficulty was the absence of their parent (e.g. missing them, not being able to spend time with them) and greatest concern was the safety and well-being of their parent and family.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Children's interviews revealed that the greatest difficulty of deployment was their fathers' absence (e.g., missing him, not being able to see him, talk to him, or do usual activities with him).
- Children's biggest area of worry and concern was the safety and well-being of their deployed parent and their family at home.
- Children reported that the biggest changes for themselves during deployment revolved around increased household responsibilities.
- Over a third of children felt the purpose for deployment was positive (e.g., fathers were fighting for their rights or serving the country) and many of these children felt pride about their father's duties.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops for children of deployed Service members to discuss their feelings with military children who have had a parent deployed in the past
- Provide support groups for National Guard Soldiers' children and families to discuss pride and shared meaning of the deployment
- Educate non-deployed parents about common changes, emotions, and difficulties their children may experience during deployment and how to talk about these changes with their children

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that provide resources for children and families of deployed Service members
- Recommend professional development for community providers about the impacts (e.g., emotional, mental health, household responsibilities) of parent deployment on military children
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that teach military children important household skills so that they feel confident in their new responsibilities during deployment

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## METHODS

- Children of National Guard Soldiers who were in pre-deployment training were recruited through an invitation letter or through flyers at various National Guard facilities.
- Children answered open-ended interview questions regarding their perspectives of their parents' deployment.
- Frequencies of responses to each question were calculated.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 24 children (63% male) in 14 families whose parents were Soldiers (100% male) about to be deployed to OIF.
- Children identified as White (58%), Black (21%), Native American (17%), and Hispanic (4%).
- Children's ages were between 6-9 years (33%), 10-13 years (33%), or 14-17 years (17%); the majority of children had siblings (71%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Detailed information on analyses were not presented, and it is unclear if transcripts were reviewed and analyzed by more than one reviewer or examined for reliability.
- Several factors may have limited the generalizability of this sample to the larger population of military children, including the small sample size, inclusion of only children of National Guard Soldiers from a specific region, and inclusion of only children whose parents had just recently left for pre-deployment training and were not yet actually deployed.
- Because so many of the children were from the same families (e.g., 24 children from 17 families), results may be affected by the shared factors of siblings (e.g., parenting, family relationships, household characteristics).

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore longitudinal designs to assess changes in childrens' perspectives of deployment throughout the deployment cycle and with multiple deployments
- Examine the effects of child age and gender on their perspectives of parent deployment
- Explore other factors that may impact how children view parental deployment (e.g., parent rank, family beliefs and narrative about deployment, child characteristics)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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