

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Strong Military Families Intervention Enhances Parenting Reflectivity and Representations in Families with Young Children

Julian, M. M., Muzik, M., Kees, M., Valenstein, M., & Rosenblum, K. L. (2018). Strong military families intervention enhances parenting reflectivity and representations in families with young children. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 39(1), 106-118. doi:10.1002/imhj.21690

SUMMARY: Military parents with young children may benefit from interventions that aim to improve their parenting practice. This study examined the effectiveness of the Strong Military Families intervention by assessing 78 caregivers' parenting reflectivity (i.e., a parent's ability to reflect on the child's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and motivations) and parenting representations (i.e., a parent's perception of his/her child and their relationship) before and after the intervention. Results indicated that compared to the waiting-list comparison group, participants in the intervention group showed improved parenting practice.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Neither parenting reflectivity nor parenting representation differed between Service members and civilians, or between fathers and mothers.
- Approximately 70% of participants reported the same parenting reflectivity and parenting representation styles from pre-test to post-test, regardless of the intervention type.
- Compared to the comparison group, participants in the multifamily group showed improvements in both parenting representation and parenting reflectivity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for military parents with young children to facilitate their support of each other
- Disseminate information regarding evidence-based good parenting practice and parenting skills to military families
- Provide parenting workshops for military families, especially the ones that are struggling with military-related stressors (e.g., deployment, relocation)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development of parenting programs that aim to improve military parents' parenting practice
- Recommend that all Service members with young children be offered parenting classes
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families on how to teach parents positive parenting skills

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited by flyers, contacts at community events, or referrals from military family service agencies.
- Participants were divided into two groups: the multifamily group (n = 33) and the waiting-list comparison group (n = 45).
- Each participant was assessed prior to the intervention and again two months after intervention. Measures assessed the following constructs: parenting representations and parenting reflectivity.
- Data were analyzed to examine the difference between the multifamily group and the waiting-list comparison group in parenting representations and reflectivity.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 78 caregivers of children under the age of seven years old in military families; 46 of them were mothers, 29 of them were fathers, and three were grandparents. The average age of the participants was not reported.
- About half of the participants were Service members; however, their military branches were not reported.
- Most participants were White (78%) or Latino (10%); the race/ethnicity of the remaining 12% of participants was not reported.

LIMITATIONS

- The participants were not randomly assigned to the intervention and control groups, so caution must be taken to examine the group differences.
- Three of the participants were grandparents; therefore, their results may not apply to parents.
- The study was based on self-report data, so results of the study may be subject to social-desirability bias.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Randomly assign participants to the intervention and control groups to examine the relationship between intervention and parenting practice
- Conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the long-term effect of the intervention
- Explore the effect of the intervention on other aspects of parenting practice (e.g., parenting skills)

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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