

The Effects of Military-Induced Separation on Family Factors and Child Behavior

Kelley, M. L. (1994). *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 64(1), 103-111.



Data from 61 mothers was examined before, during, and after the military deployment of their husbands. Separations resulted in temporary disruptions in families' reported ability to maintain supportive relationships. Mothers whose husband deployed to a warzone reported less nurturance and family cohesiveness, and more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in their children than did those whose husbands had peacetime separations.

Key Findings:

- Overall, children exhibited more externalizing behaviors before and during separation than after the father's return. Children whose fathers experienced a peacetime separation exhibited decreasing internalizing and externalizing behaviors over time; both of these kinds of behavior problems did not change over time among children whose parent was away due to war.
- For all families, family cohesiveness (togetherness) was significantly higher at postdeployment than at predeployment; in the group comparisons, spouses who experienced a wartime separation as compared to a peacetime separation reported less family cohesion and less nurturance. Separation appears to be especially disruptive for families with early-school age children.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs serving military children and families may wish to continue providing services well in advance of separations when possible.
- Programs could describe the potential difficulties associated with separation and offer practical coping strategies to help family members maintain close, supportive relationships and improve discipline practices during deployments.

Implications for Policies:

- Consideration could be given to continued support for programs that offer practical skill development for families facing military separation.
- Considering the interplay of maternal response to separation and child behavior, support services for spouses, children, and families during deployment may be warranted. Improving coping skills as well as the overall well-being of military spouses and children is likely to have a positive impact on mission readiness.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Given that findings suggest more behavior problems in children during the preseparation stage of deployment, future research that includes predeployment measures of family functioning and child behaviors, beginning as early as possible in the deployment cycle, may be useful.
- The current study could be replicated in a larger sample of spouses and children across military branches.
- Using multiple informants (e.g., mothers, fathers, children, teachers) to examine the impact of deployment on family functioning could be valuable.

Background Information

Methodology:

- Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to examine the impact of type of separation (peacetime or wartime) across three phases of deployment on family structure and warmth, disciplinary practices, and child behavior.
- For the wartime versus peacetime separation comparisons, 14 wartime spouses were matched to the 14 peacetime spouses. Participants were matched on their child's age, child's gender, and father's rank.






Participants:

- Participants were female spouses (n = 61) of active-duty Navy personnel who had at least one child between the ages of 5 and 13 and who had experienced either a routine, peacetime (n = 47) or a wartime (n = 14) separation.
- The majority of spouses (84%) had experienced between 1 and 9 previous separations.

Limitations:

- The results may not generalize to the Navy as a whole, to the other branches, or to different types of deployment, given the small sample size of the study.
- Those who participated may differ from nonparticipants in a way that was not measured, but affected the outcome variables. For example, participants were recruited from predeployment meetings; those who participate in such meetings may be functioning better or worse than those who do not participate.
- Findings should be interpreted with caution given the unequal number of boys and girls and the small group sizes.

Assessing Research that Works

| Research Design and Sample | | | | Quality Rating: |  |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| | 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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Research Methods | | | | Quality Rating: |  |
| | 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"/> | |
| Limitations | | | | Quality Rating: |  |
| | Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★) | Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★) | Limited Several Limitations (★★★) | Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★★★) | |
| The limitations of this study are... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Implications | | | | Quality Rating: |  |
| | 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 | | | | | |
| Overall Quality Rating | | | | |  |