

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Psychological Adjustment of Navy Mothers Experiencing Deployment

Kelley, M. L., Hock, E., Jarvis, M. S., Smith, K. M., Gaffney, M. A., & Bonney, J. F. (2002). Psychological adjustment of Navy mothers experiencing deployment. *Military Psychology, 14*(3), 199-216. doi:10.1207/S15327876MP1403_2

SUMMARY: Deployment can be a difficult time for families in many ways. This study focused on the experience of Sailors who were also mothers. Researchers compared the experience of deployed Navy mothers to those who were not deployed and examined predictors of mental health outcomes for deployed mothers. Support, both from friends and from a partner, predicted better mental health outcomes for these Service members.

KEY FINDINGS:

- After deployment, single women reported the highest levels of depressive symptoms.
- Being married was associated with higher levels of anxiety and stress across both the deployed and non-deployed groups.
- Greater support from friends or from a partner was associated with less stress in deploying mothers.
- Longer military service was associated with better mental health for these Service members.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop peer support programs for female Service members to encourage the exchange of social support as it pertains to deployment stress
- Offer workshops that may help children of military families learn how to manage stress associated with deployments
- Provide classes to Service members who are mothers about ways in which they can maintain good physical and mental health, particularly post-deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support the enhancement of programs for female Service members and their families
- Recommend training for professionals who work with female Service members, offering information about the effects of deployments and shifts in caregiving role when deployed
- Encourage strategies to enhance awareness of resources, such as childcare, that can assist Service members who are parents in meeting their children's needs during deployment

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a Naval base in Virginia by a local Navy newspaper and by letters sent home with children at a military day care center.
- Participants completed interviews before deployment and surveys before and after deployment, which included scales measuring depression, stress, anxiety, parental investment, and social support.
- Analyses examined differences between single and married deployed and non-deployed mothers both before and after deployment.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 120 Navy mothers, 48 of whom were scheduled to deploy within 60 days, and 72 of whom were not scheduled to deploy.
- Average age for mothers was 28 years old (SD=5.2) and for their children was three years old (SD=1.7).
- Just over half (56%) of the participants were married, with an average length of military service of 8 years (SD=4.2).
- Among the mothers, 59% were White, 31% were Black, 3% were Latina, and 6% were other races.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was limited to Navy mothers; it is uncertain how their experiences compare to Service members in other branches.
- This study relied on self-report data, which may have introduced reporting biases, including under-reporting of mental health concerns.
- Mothers who dropped out of the study differed from those who completed the study in some important ways (for example, they reported higher anxiety), which may influence results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the experiences of deployed mothers in other military branches
- Identify stressors related to deployment and factors that help minimize these stressors, especially among Service members who are mothers
- Collect data regarding other risk factors that impact female Service members' psychological well-being, such as role-overload

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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