

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Geographic Mobility, Family, and Maternal Variables as Related to the Psychosocial Adjustment of Military Children

Kelley, M. L., Finkel, L. B., & Ashby, J. (2003). Geographic mobility, family, and maternal variables as related to the psychosocial adjustment of military children. *Military Medicine*, 168(12), 1019-1024.

**SUMMARY:** The impact of geographic mobility, family functioning, and maternal well-being on military youth's mental health was examined among 86 mother-child dyads with an Active Duty father. Children's reports of peer relationships, self-esteem, and loneliness were predicted by family cohesion, length of time in the current home, and mother-child relationship quality. Children's aggression and noncompliance were predicted by maternal depression and mother-child relationship quality.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Length of time in current home was a stronger predictor of child functioning than frequency of family moves during child's life, and children who had lived in their residence longer had better peer relationships and less loneliness.
- Children were less afraid of negative evaluation from others when they had lived in their residence longer and had a family with greater cohesion.
- Maternal depression predicted children's anxiety, withdrawal, and sadness; positive mother-child relationships, family cohesiveness, and a longer time in the current residence predicted children's self-esteem.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer welcome events for new families at their installations, helping parents and youth meet other families and learn about community resources
- Create a buddy system, matching new military youth with mentor youth who could help the child feel welcome and meet new friends
- Provide supportive classes for mothers managing depression, including offering structures for peer support and other enjoyable socialization opportunities

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that decisions about the frequency of military family moves take into consideration the impact on the family, including children
- Continue to support programs at military installations that provide outreach and support services to families who recently moved
- Encourage the training of professionals working with military families about the factors that may affect family and child adjustment following a move

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

- Families were recruited via school newsletters and advertisements around base.
- Mothers completed questionnaires assessing family cohesiveness and adaptability, marital satisfaction, maternal depression and stress, and child behavior and emotions (e.g., sadness, anxiety, withdrawal, aggressiveness, noncompliance).
- Children completed questionnaires assessing loneliness, social avoidance and distress, fear of negative evaluation, peer relationships, perceptions of global self-worth, and attitudes toward their mothers.
- The relationships between maternal psychological adjustment, family environment, children's feelings toward their mothers, rate of family mobility, and children's psychological functioning were examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 86 mother-child dyads in which the father was an Active Duty Service member.
- Children were 11.6 years of age on average, while mothers were 36.1 years of age on average and primarily White (65%).
- On average, family had spent 2.9 years living in their current residence.

## LIMITATIONS

- Data were cross sectional, so causal conclusions cannot be drawn.
- Most of the fathers in these families were career military personnel; the extent to which the experience of other military families may differ is unknown.
- Only families with male Service members and female spouses were examined, and results may not generalize to other types of families (e.g., same-sex couples, female Service members, single-parent families).

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the effects of child age on family and child adjustment following a move
- Explore how family type (e.g., dual career couples, female Service members, families with several children) may influence child adjustment following a move
- Investigate the role of child personality and behavior on their responses to adjusting after a move

## 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>