

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

The Contribution of Marital Quality to the Well-Being of Parents of Children With Developmental Disabilities

Kersh, J., Hedvat, T. T., Hauser Cram, P., & Warfield, M. E. (2006). The contribution of marital quality to the well-being of parents of children with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 50(12), 883-893. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2788.2006.00906.x

SUMMARY: Parents of children with a developmental disability (e.g., Down syndrome, motor impairment, or developmental delay) may have increased stress related to parenting, thus impacting marital quality. This study explored differences of depression and parenting stress as potential factors impacting marital quality among parents of a child with a developmental disability. Findings suggest child's behavior was related to parents' overall well-being for both mothers and fathers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Less stress and depressive symptoms were present among parents with greater marital quality.
- Children's behavior was related to mothers' marital satisfaction, but not to fathers' satisfaction.
- Parent stress, efficacy, and income were related to children's behavior problems; however, each had a more significant effect on fathers' depressive symptoms than on mothers' symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with other professionals to facilitate program activities specific to military families of children with a developmental disability
- Facilitate support groups for military parents of children who have a developmental disability to increase efficacy and improve overall well-being

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide resources for military families of children with a developmental disability, especially low-income families
- Educate military couples on ways to deal with parenting stress, which is particularly beneficial to families of children with developmental disabilities

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for professionals on navigating appropriate resources for military families of children with developmental disabilities
- Continue to support programs that provide assistance to military families of children with developmental disabilities

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METHODS

- Families were recruited through community intervention programs located in northeastern U.S.
- Questionnaires examined both parents' levels of depression, stress, efficacy, socioeconomic status, social support, marital quality, as well as child functioning and behavior problems.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to determine differences and relations of perceived marital quality to depression, parenting stress and efficacy, and child's behavior.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included married parents (N=67) of a child (10 years old) with a disability.
- A majority of the sample were White (96%); other race/ethnicity information was not provided.
- Mothers' average age was 40 years (SD=5), while fathers' average age was 42 years (SD=6).

LIMITATIONS

- Interpretations based on the findings are limited due to the small, homogenous sample.
- Data collected were self-reported, thus study conclusions may be bias for this specific sample.
- The study was conducted at one time point, which limits the ability to determine long-term effects of marital quality among parents of a child with a developmental disability.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data from a larger, more heterogenous sample to explore differences among families with various types of childhood developmental disabilities
- Further explore the lived experiences of families of children with a developmental disability
- Examine additional factors that may impact couples' marital quality among parents of a child with a developmental disability

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