

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Communicative Experiences of Military Youth During a Parent's Return Home From Deployment

Knobloch, L. K., Pusateri, K. B., Ebata, A. T., & McGlaughlin, P. C. (2014). Communicative experiences of military youth during a parent's return home from deployment. *Journal of Family Communication*, 14(4), 291-309.  
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**SUMMARY:** Researchers conducted interviews with youth of military families to gain an understanding of their experience of parental homecoming after deployment. Themes emerged from the interviews, including the experience of certain changes within the family, youth's expectations of homecoming, and uncertainties about the past, present, and future.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth who had experienced deployment of a parent reported spending more time with their families, greater emotional tranquility, and returning to patterns that were in place before deployment during reintegration.
- These youth also identified difficulty integrating the Service member into the family's daily life upon homecoming.
- There were varied experiences of whether reunions met the youth's expectations and many stated that the returning Service member was more irritable and tired than they expected.
- Youth harbored uncertainty about parents' activities during deployment, their reasons for joining the military or being deployed, current family life, and the possibility of future deployments.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes for caregivers that enable them to help youth set realistic expectations for homecoming, including the possibility that the Service member will need time to rest and recover
- Create opportunities (such as workshops) to empower caregivers with effective communication skills that can help military youth understand their parent's commitments to military life
- Include curricula in existing classes or support structures that stress the importance of caregivers not being dismissive of youth's strong desire for information about deployment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to recommend the development of programs that provide support for youth who experience parental deployment and homecoming
- Promote programs that help Service members and other caregivers build strong parent-child communication skills
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families that increases their awareness of the particular challenges faced by military youth before, during, and after deployment

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited at a camp for military youth held in the Midwestern United States.
- Researchers utilized semi-structured interviews to obtain information about youth's experiences of parental deployment and subsequent reunion.
- Interviews were transcribed and then coded by four independent coders in order to identify themes that emerged throughout the interviews.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 31 children (20 boys, 11 girls), ranging in age from 10 to 13 years old ( $M = 11.42$  years,  $SD = 1.15$  years), from military families in which a parent had been deployed and returned home.
- Most youth (94%) had experienced the deployment of their father. These deployments had ended within the past 12 months for 48% of participants and within the past 24 months for 21% of participants.
- Parents were affiliated with the Army National Guard (45%), the Army (42%), the Navy (7%), the Air Force (3%), and the Air National Guard (3%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Given the participants' ages, some may have been reporting about homecomings that occurred when they were quite a bit younger and thus they may have misremembered the experience.
- Participants were selected from youth attending a summer camp for military youth; they may differ from other military youth in some important ways.
- Interviews were kept brief which may have limited the depth of the information collected.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the role of demographic characteristics on youth's experience of parental deployment and homecoming
- Employ prospective longitudinal methods, following youth's experiences over the entire deployment cycle
- Examine ways in which families communicate about deployment throughout the full deployment cycle

## 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>