

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Military Children's Difficulty with Reintegration After Deployment: A Relational Turbulence Model Perspective

Knobloch, L. K., Knobloch-Fedders, L. M., Yorgason, J. B., Ebata, A. T., & McGlaughlin, P. C (2017). Military children's difficulty with reintegration after deployment: A relational turbulence model perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 31(5), 542-552. doi:10.1037/fam0000299

**SUMMARY:** Various aspects of couples' relationships can affect their children in different ways. To better understand how certain aspects within military couples' relationships impact their children after reintegration, couples were surveyed on topics that included depressive symptoms, relationship uncertainty, interference from a partner, and on the difficulties their oldest child had during reintegration. Results suggest parents' difficulties with reintegration are associated with the eldest child's reintegration difficulties.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Symptoms of depression reported by both fathers and mothers directly had a negative affect on reports of their oldest child's ability to reintegrate.
- Relational uncertainty reported by military parents was associated with their oldest child's reintegration difficulty.
- Reports of a spouse interfering with the other partner's ability to achieve daily activities and reach their goals was linked to their oldest child's reintegration difficulty.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Facilitate support groups for couples to work on their communication skills during the reintegration period
- Develop activities for military children in order to offer skills to help them adapt following the return of a parent
- Create educational modules that inform Service members of the challenges of reintegration and strategies to successfully reintegrate

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support reintegration programs for military couples and their children
- Encourage early access to support services for children following reunion with a Service member parent
- Encourage the training of professionals to better identify parental relationship issues influencing the well-being of a child in a military family

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited via online forums used by military families and via emails to military families.
- In order to be eligible to participate, military families were required: (a) one or both parents must have returned from deployment in the last 20 days, (b) the couple must be parents to one or more children, and (c) each parent must have their own email account.
- The relationship between parents' responses on their relationship and their eldest child's reintegration difficulty were analyzed

## PARTICIPANTS

- One hundred and eighteen heterosexual military couples were involved in the study. Participants were 33 years old on average and had been in a romantic relationship for an average of 9.61 years. The number of children in families ranged from one to eight ( $M=2.11$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ).
- Participants were 84% White, 6% Latino, 4% Black, 3% Native American, 2% Asian American and 1% other.
- The Service members from the couples were part of the U.S. Army (57%), Army National Guard (21%), Air National Guard (13%), the Air Force (6%), and Marines (3%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The participants were predominantly White and most families had fathers who had been deployed, limiting the ability to generalize the findings to families with dissimilar demographic information.
- Military parents reported difficulties with reintegration for children who ranged in age from infants to emerging adults, however the questions were best suited for adolescents, which could introduce bias into the results.
- The study did not collect information on whether there were pre-existing mental health or relationship problems prior to reintegration, which could have influenced the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include a more diverse population sample in regards to race, which spouse was deployed, and a more representative sample of military branches
- Use measures developed for the age ranges of children enrolled in the study
- Include no pre-existing mental health or relationship problems as one of the participation criteria, to limit the influences of other factors on the findings

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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