

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Evaluation of a Family-Centered Prevention Intervention for Military Children and Families Facing Wartime Deployments

Lester, P., Saltzman, W. R., Woodward, K., Glover, D., Leskin, G. A., Bursch, B., ... Beardslee, W. (2012). Evaluation of a family-centered prevention intervention for military children and families facing wartime deployments. *American Journal Of Public Health, 102*(S1), S48-S54. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2010.300088

SUMMARY: Evidence-based programs are needed to help military families cope with the stress of deployment. Parent, child, and overall family well-being was compared before and after the Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS) program to examine its effect on resilience and psychological health. Family satisfaction with the FOCUS program was high, and the program was associated with improved parent, child, and family health and well-being (e.g., positive coping skills, decreased distress) among Marine Corp and Navy families experiencing combat- and deployment-related stress.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The FOCUS program was associated with significant reductions in parent distress and unhealthy family functioning among Marine Corp and Navy families.
- Children who participated in the program experienced significant improvements in adjustment and increases in prosocial behavior; children seven years and older who completed a measure of coping reported increased use of positive coping strategies.
- Parents rated the program highly in terms of overall helpfulness to the family, satisfaction with the program, and willingness to recommend the program to another family.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Teach family communication skills used within the FOCUS program across all types of family and parent support programs
- Educate both military parents and children about the benefits of healthy emotion regulation and how to use healthy emotion regulation techniques
- Use evaluation measures, like those used by FOCUS, to assess the feasibility and acceptability of activities, resources, and supports offered to military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that all programs use a uniform stress continuum model (e.g., U.S. Navy and Marine Corps green, yellow, orange, red four-color system) to aid in clear communication between agencies and programs during referrals
- Encourage the development of a comprehensive system that connects families to resources, including referring to new programs after families change location
- Promote professional development for providers working with military families to learn about the techniques used in the FOCUS program

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METHODS

- The authors utilized data from a previous program evaluation study collected between July 2008 and February 2010 with families on U.S. Navy and Marine Corp bases across the U.S. and Japan.
- Data collected included family demographic information and functioning, Service member deployment history and PTSD or other mental health symptoms, and child coping skills and strengths and difficulties.
- Parent, child, and whole family well-being were compared before and after the FOCUS intervention.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 488 families (742 parents and 873 children) at baseline and 331 families at pre- and post-intervention, and all families included at least one Active Duty parent.
- Parents were 34.39 years of age on average and were primarily married (96%); Primary caretakers were mostly female (97%), while Active Duty caretakers were mostly male (84%).
- Children were boys (55%) and girls (45%) aged 3-7 years (61%), 8-10 years (19%), or 11 years and older (20%).

LIMITATIONS

- Without a control group who did not receive the intervention, it cannot be concluded whether the results are due to the program alone.
- The data were collected from Marine Corps and Navy installations only and may not generalize to other Service branches.
- Since there is no long-term follow-up of participating families, the later effects of the intervention are unclear.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a study with a longitudinal design to assess if improvements last over time following the intervention
- Compare the well-being of military samples who have and have not received the FOCUS intervention research should include a control or “treatment as usual” group
- Explore the effects of the FOCUS intervention in a sample with more racial/ethnic diversity, different family types (e.g., divorced, partners), and different military branches.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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