

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Psychological Health of Military Children: Longitudinal Evaluation of a Family-Centered Prevention Program to Enhance Family Resilience

Lester, P., Stein, J. A., Saltzman, W., Woodward, K., MacDermid, S. K., Milburn, N., ... Beardslee, W. (2013). Psychological health of military children: Longitudinal evaluation of a family-centered prevention program to enhance family resilience. *Military Medicine*, 178(8), 838-845. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-12-00502

**SUMMARY:** The impact of a family centered prevention program, Families OverComing Under Stress Family Resilience Training (FOCUS), on the psychological adjustment of military children and parents was examined. Distress was significantly related among family members at the outset of the intervention; family functioning was improved at the end of the program as well as four to six months after the program ended.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Baseline levels of distress among Service members, non-military parents, and children were all significantly related.
- At the onset of the program, children had elevated emotional and behavioral symptoms and both parents had greater anxiety and depression symptoms than community norms.
- Family adjustment variables improved over the course of the program and predicted reduced distress among military children.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop curricula on how to offer additional support to families during reintegration when a Service member is distressed
- Offer trainings to community-based providers about how to address the mental health needs of military families during deployment and reintegration
- Integrate programming that focuses on educating children about changes they may experience during deployment and reintegration

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for the development and evaluation of interventions related to reduction of family distress across all military branches
- Encourage the increase of family prevention and intervention programs that address child adjustment during transition periods
- Increase educational campaigns about child adjustment needs during transition periods for professionals who work with military families

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## METHODS

- Data were taken from another study that collected information from families with at least one Active Duty military parent and at least one dependent child from 11 U.S. Marine Corps and Navy installations in the United States and Japan.
- Each family participated in FOCUS Family Resiliency training, which was delivered over eight modularized sessions in a parent-only, child-only, and family format about topics such as stress and communication.
- Families completed pre- and post-surveys, as well as at one month and four to six months post-completion.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 280 families; 66% had a Service member in the Marine Corps and 35% had a Service member in the Navy.
- Among the families, there were 505 children, about half of whom were male (56%), and the average age was 7.5 years (range = 3-17 years).
- There were no data about the racial/ethnic composition of the sample.

## LIMITATIONS

- There was no control group and thus no conclusions about the improvement of adjustment and levels of distress being due to the intervention can be drawn.
- The researchers specify that the program and its interventions can be delivered in different formats, but did not test the impact of those formats.
- Percentages do not add up properly, lending doubt as to the accuracy of the reported results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct studies that include control groups to allow for comparisons between families who receive the intervention components and those who do not
- Examine the relationships between child adjustment and family's levels of distress when children are cared for by alternative caregivers (e.g., grandparents) during deployment of military parents
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in an older sample of children and their families

## 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>