

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Parent-Child Attachment During the Deployment Cycle: Impact on Reintegration Parenting Stress

Louie, A. D., & Cromer, L. D. (2014). Parent-child attachment during the deployment cycle: Impact on reintegration parenting stress. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 45(6), 496-503. doi:10.1037/a0036603

SUMMARY: Service members face high demands that can be a burden on military families with young children. This study examined how Service members prepare their young children for the deployment period and discovered common themes across multiple branches of their approaches to preparation. Themes that included attachment-focused preparation, information-focused preparation, and paying it forward with things such as spending more time together before deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The most common preparation was information-focused, in which Service members talked about deployment with their children, regardless of the children's age, which was used by half of the participants.
- During deployment, 80% of participants used video calling to talk with their children
- During reintegration, 87% of participants expressed the need to get reacquainted with their children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate Service members on developmentally appropriate ways to prepare their young children for parental deployment
- Promote parent-child attachment by facilitating bonding experiences to increase resilience in family members
- Support Service members during reintegration by offering resources to help reduce parental stress during the adjustment period

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote education of community providers on how to prepare Service members for deployment when they have young children
- Continue to support Service members who have young children throughout the deployment cycle
- Recommend professionals be equipped to support Service members during reintegration, specifically when they need to become reacquainted with their roles as parents

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Researchers recruited participants from the Midwest in-person on military bases and via email.
- Data were collected through self-report measures and interviews that were conducted in-person and by phone.
- Self-report measures were rated on a five point scale and three coders identified themes in the responses from the interviews.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants of this study included 30 military fathers from the Air Force (80%), Navy (7%), and Army (13%) who had a child 6 years old or younger.
- The mean age of the fathers was 30.97 years (SD = 4.49) and their children had a mean age of 2.71 years (SD = 4.49).
- The racial background of the participants consisted of 83% White, 10% Black, and 7% other races.

LIMITATIONS

- The information provided was based on male Service members only and did not consider the female Service member's experience as a parent preparing her child during pre-deployment.
- Service members gave retrospective reports on their deployment experiences and this may not be an accurate representation of the actual deployment experience.
- Researchers recorded the prevalence of the pre-deployment preparation methods used by Service members but did not examine the relative efficacy of the different methods.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate how the differences among military branches and rank play a role in families' experiences
- Evaluate participants across multiple deployments to examine how their approach to deployment preparation may change
- Focus on the children's perspective during pre-deployment to investigate what the best way is to help them cope during their parent's deployment

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>