

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Air Force

Impact of Military Deployment on Family Relationships

Lowe, K. N., Adams, K. S., Browne, B. L., & Hinkle, K. T. (2012). Impact of military deployment on family relationships. *Journal of Family Studies*, 18(1), 17-27. doi:10.5172/jfs.2012.2003

SUMMARY: The requirements of military service (e.g. training, deployment) can negatively influence military families and children. Survey data were utilized to examine the ways in which length of service and length of deployment predict parenting stress and parenting quality among spouses of Active Duty Airmen. Results indicated that shorter length of service and longer deployments were related to an increase in problems in the relationship between children and parents at home.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Weaker parent-child communication skills were associated with increased levels of parent distress.
- In families of Service members with shorter lengths of service, parent distress was higher during deployment.
- Families who experienced longer deployments had worse parent-child relationship quality (with regard to the child's relationship with the spouse).
- Spouses of individuals with longer length of service reported less parenting stress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop classes or workshops about effective parent-child communication, particularly for individuals who are newer to military service
- Offer support groups to spouses pre- and post-deployment
- Disseminate information regarding the services and resources available to military families during deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that foster effective parent-child communication
- Continue to recommend support for spouses and children during and after deployment
- Recommend education for community service providers regarding the effect of deployment on the parent-child relationship

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METHODS

- Participants included spouse of a Service member stationed at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia who had school-aged children.
- Surveys were voluntary and only offered during non-mandatory military functions during non-duty hours.
- Eligible participants completed surveys during monthly meetings or on breaks during volunteer work.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 30 White female spouses, with a mean age of 35.4 years (SD = 4.8).
- The average number of children in the family was 2.4 (SD = 0.8).
- Service member spouses of participants had an average length of service of 14.2 years (SD = 5.5).

LIMITATIONS

- A small number of participants were included and the sample lacked diversity, which does not allow for generalization to other populations.
- Information was provided through self-report; therefore, some individuals may have under-reported certain feelings of stress or misreported other information.
- This research was done with a cross-sectional design and so conclusions about causation cannot be made.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study in different populations with larger, more diverse samples
- Employ prospective longitudinal methods in order to obtain baseline levels of parenting stress and relationship quality before deployment
- Investigate the efficacy of parenting programs for dependent spouses during deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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