Adjustment and Achievement Associated With Mobility in Military Families


SUMMARY: Army families participated in a study regarding their history of geographic mobility, identification with Army life, personal well-being, and their children’s school achievement and social competence. Frequent relocation was not found to negatively impact well-being for Service members, their spouses, or children.

KEY FINDINGS:
- There was a relationship between total moves a child had experienced in his or her life and school achievement such that more moves were associated with greater academic achievement.
- Children who often moved further than 500 miles away had lower social competence than youth who typically moved fewer than 500 miles.
- Parental identification with the military was related to higher youth social competence, but not with youth school achievement.
- The frequency of family moves was not related to Service member and spouse well-being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:
Programs could:
- Enhance the ease of military children and family’s adjustment in moving to new locations by providing welcoming social events to facilitate new social connections
- Offer mentoring programs such that children who are new to an installation could be matched with established children who could help them feel welcome
- Develop workshops for families who have recently experienced a relocation in order to help parents develop skills to assist their children during the transition

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:
Policies could:
- Recommend monitoring of the wellbeing of all family members after a military-related move, including following them over time to track adjustment
- Encourage the development of programs that help families and children transition between schools for military related moves
- Promote training for professionals who work with military families regarding the challenges those families may face around relocations
METHODS

- Superintendents from the three elementary schools at Fort Jackson Army Base recruited English-speaking families in which the child was enrolled in grades two, four, and six. The rate of participation was 24%.
- The Service member and spouse separately completed measures of mobility history, well-being, and identification with the military as well as completing a combined measure of the social competence of one of their children.
- Children’s school achievement was assessed via an achievement test administered at school.
- Data were analyzed to examine relationships among total life moves; location, distance and recency of latest move; and social competence scores.

PARTICIPANTS

- Forty families participated. Of the Service members, 90% were male.
- Of the participants, 90% were in the enlisted ranks.
- The Service member parent had been in the military, on average, 13 years.
- No additional demographic data were presented.

LIMITATIONS

- Limited demographic data were presented, so it is unclear which populations these findings extend to.
- All the families who participated were in the Army; results may not apply to other military branch members.
- Participants opted in to the study; these families may differ from families who chose not to participate in important ways that may influence results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the impact of transitioning from military to non-military schools on youth school achievement and competence
- Use a longitudinal design to investigate the long-term academic outcomes associated with family moves
- Investigate the efficacy of programs that aim to ease the transitions around relocations

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design

Appropriate
Research Plan and Sample

Methods

Appropriate
Measurement and Analysis

Limitations

Few