FOCUS for Early Childhood: A Virtual Home Visiting Program for Military Families with Young Children


SUMMARY: Researchers examined the effectiveness of the Families OverComing Under Stress for Early Childhood (FOCUS-EC) program for military/civilian parents and their children's mental health. Each family completed six virtual home visit sessions, and their mental health status was assessed. The pilot data showed that FOCUS-EC was helpful and feasible for military families with young children.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Preliminary results from the pilot study showed a decrease in child psychopathology symptoms, and an increase in child prosocial behaviors.
- Both military and civilian parents reported enhancement in their families' functioning and improvements in their mental health status, including declines in depression and anxiety symptoms.
- Results suggest virtual home visiting is useful and feasible for military families with young children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide more family-centered mental health and parenting guidance to military families so that more families could benefit from the services.
- Offer outreach services to military families; such outreach could note the availability of potentially useful services and resources.
- Provide concrete information on normative versus delayed child development and useful parenting skills.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the virtual home visiting model for mental health interventions so that the services would be more convenient and feasible for military families.
- Continue dedicating resources to help military/civilian parents receive necessary education on child development and parenting skills.
- Encourage awareness campaigns regarding the importance of family-centered preventive intervention.
The Center for Research and Outreach

Putting Research to Work for Military Families

METHODS

- The FOCUS-EC program was adapted from the broader FOCUS program by keeping the core elements.
- Each family completed six virtual home visiting sessions online, and received education on child development, parenting strategies, and military family resilience in the sessions.
- The real-time assessment evaluated parental psychological health, child behavioral symptoms, and general family functioning.

PARTICIPANTS

- The pilot study included 637 military families with children aged 3-5 years old.
- Participants’ age, gender, race, and military information were not specified in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- The study was only a pilot study, therefore a better controlled study is needed.
- Families were only assessed at the beginning and the end of the intervention; more assessments are needed to examine the effectiveness of the FOCUS-EC program over time.
- Information about parental characteristics (e.g., marital status, deployment history) were not available, so some confounding factors were not controlled that may impact the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Future research could use randomized controlled trials to draw more firm conclusions
- Additional research could collect more comprehensive data about the parents, such as their marital and socioeconomic status and history of deployment
- Future research could also compare the effectiveness of telehealth and face-to-face interventions.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design

Appropriate Research Plan and Sample

Methods

Appropriate Measurement and Analysis

Limitations

Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works

www.reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu