

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Intensive Mothering on the Homefront: An Analysis of Army Mothers

Murray, K. (2017). Intensive mothering on the homefront: An analysis of Army mothers. *Sociological Spectrum*, 37(1), 1-17. doi:10.1080/02732173.2016.1227284

SUMMARY: Military-related civilian mothers have a lot in common with other civilian mothers but also face some unique challenges, such as their husbands' deployment. Nine Army-related civilian mothers and one Army wife were interviewed to understand their experience of parenting. Results indicated that like other civilian mothers, Army-related civilian mothers felt more responsible than their husbands to take care of children. However, they were more likely than other civilian mothers to raise children together within the military community in order to adapt to deployment-related stress.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Similar to other civilian mothers, the Army-related civilian mothers in the study were intensely child-focused, which means that they spent a lot of time and resources on their children.
- Army-related civilian mothers consciously made more effort to create a loving and nurturing environment for their children in order to offset the negative impact of husbands' deployment.
- Compared to other civilian mothers, Army-related civilian mothers bonded more with other military wives and raise their children in a community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for military-related civilian mothers so that they can support each other, especially during their husbands' deployment
- Design classes for Service members who are parents to promote their communication and parenting skills
- Disseminate written resources to military-related civilian mothers about available resources in the community (e.g., child care, support groups, parenting classes)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support the development of programs that teach military-related civilian mothers parenting skills
- Continue to support programs aimed at increasing family well-being during deployment
- Encourage training for community providers who work with military families with young children on how to help military-related civilian mothers cope with stress during deployment

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from social media and a snowball sampling method was used.
- Each participant was interviewed over the phone for 60 to 90 minutes.
- Participants' answers were compared to previously published data from civilian mothers.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were nine Army-related civilian mothers and one child-less Army wife who had been connected to the military for at least six months and whose husbands were deployed during the interviews.
- The participants were all White; the average age was 25 years (age range = 20-36 years) and the average number of children was 2.25.
- Most of the participants were unemployed (60%) and married to husbands with E-3 to E-5 ranks (90%).

LIMITATIONS

- Some of the participants were referred by other participants, therefore the sample was not random and may not represent the general military wives population.
- The participants were all White and all related to the Army, so caution must be taken to generalize the findings to non-White and non-Army-related military wives.
- One of the participants was childless at the time of interview, therefore her responses may not represent Army wives who had children.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit participants from various racial/ethnic backgrounds, social economic status, and military branches so that the results can be better generalized
- Examine the parenting style differences between military mothers who live on post and those who live off post to better understand the influence of military community on parenting
- Interview military-related civilian fathers as well as military-related civilian mothers to get a full picture of parenting in military families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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