

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Parental Deployment and Well-Being in Children: Results From a New Study of Military Families

Mustillo, S., Wadsworth, S. M., & Lester, P. (2016). Parental deployment and well-being in children: Results from a new study of military families. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 24(2), 82-91. doi:10.1177/1063426615598766

SUMMARY: There are aspects of parental deployment that impact child development and emotional health. The association between deployment and child well-being was examined in this study by interviewing and collecting survey data from military families with a child under 10 years old. Results showed that military children were resilient in general, although children aged 6 to 10 years were more likely to be affected by parental deployment than younger children.

KEY FINDINGS:

- For 0-5 year old children, no association was found between deployment and problematic development; however, deployment was related to anxiety for preschoolers.
- For 6-10 year old children, parental deployment was associated with peer and emotional problems.
- The associations found in the study were modest in size, therefore it was concluded that military children were doing well in general.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop after-school activities for military children that encourage them to express their feelings associated with parental deployment, as well as teach them about effective coping skills
- Create classes and workshops for school administrators and teachers on the importance of emotional well-being for military students
- Offer family activities that allow Service members and their children to engage with each other and express feelings about deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Increase awareness about the importance of resilience and well-being for military spouses and children
- Continue to support research and programs that aim to assist military families experiencing deployment-related stress
- Recommend routine screening for emotional and behavioral problems in school-age military children

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METHODS

- The study was part of a larger study regarding the impact of deployment on children aged 0 to 10 years.
- Each participating family finished a telephone interview followed by a web-based survey about parent and child well-being, child emotional and behavioral issues, and child help-seeking behaviors.
- Of all the 9,549 parents, 680 finished the initial interview (response rate = 7%), and 301 of them completed the web-based survey (response rate = 49%).

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 680 military families; each family had at least one child between 0 to 10 years old, and at least one parent currently serving in the Army, Air Force, Marine, Navy, or Reserve.
- The average age of the children was 5.44 years, and 46% of them were girls.
- Information about race or ethnicity of the participants was absent in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- The response rate of the study was low, so results may be subject to self-selection bias.
- No data were gathered during deployment, therefore the deleterious effect of deployment might be underestimated.
- The study was based on an existing data set, so the design did not allow for drawing conclusions about causation between parental deployment and children's development.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Design a longitudinal study to examine if there is a latency or accumulation effect of deployment on child development over time
- Increase the response rate by using incentives, or extend period of data collection
- Collect data during parental deployment to get better understanding of the entire deployment cycle

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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