

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Transactions Between Child Social Wariness and Observed Structured Parenting: Evidence from a Prospective Adoption Study

Natsuaki, M.N., Leve, L.D., Harold, G.T., Neiderhiser, J.M., Shaw, D.S., Ganiban, J., ... Reiss, D. (2013). Transactions between child social wariness and observed structured parenting: Evidence from a prospective adoption study. *Child Development*, 84(5), 1750-1765. doi:10.1111/cdev.12070

**SUMMARY:** Several studies have linked childhood anxiety symptoms to parenting behaviors; however, the mechanisms of this association are not well characterized and may be due to socialization, shared genes, or a combination of both. Using an adoption design, this study sought to elucidate the relationship between mother and father structured parenting (e.g., verbal commands to do something) and child social wariness (e.g., shyness). Results indicate that mother and father structured parenting influenced children's child social wariness differently.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Child social wariness at 18 months of age was related to reduced structured parenting at 27 months. Fathers' (but not mothers') lower structured parenting was related to increased social wariness in children at 27 months.
- There was no association between birth mother anxiety-related disorders and child social wariness, which suggests genetic influences on social wariness was low.
- These results suggest a reciprocal influence between structured parenting and social wariness in children; social wariness elicited less paternal structured parenting and less paternal structured parenting led to greater social wariness.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate support groups for military fathers struggling with structured parenting
- Attend trainings on fostering structured parenting to enhance their ability to provide support to military parents

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer special event to increase father participation such as "Bring Your Father Day"
- Include components that focus on parenting by fathers, such as potential consequences of low structured parenting for shy children

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend a balanced gender composition among program service providers
- Support additional inquiry into the reciprocal influence between structured parenting and social wariness in military children

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



## METHODS

- In this study, data were collected on adoptive mothers and fathers, the adopted child, and the child's birth mother using computer assisted interviews.
- Parenting data were collected using a three minute lab-based clean-up task where parents and children were observed picking up toys in a room.
- This study reflects a quantitative two group longitudinal design; data were collected when children were 17 months and again at 28 months.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Study participants (N = 361) were recruited from 10 adoption agencies throughout the northwest, mid-Atlantic, and southwest United States.
- Among children included in this study, 43% were female, 58% were White, 21% of mixed race, 11% Black, and 11% unknown ethnicity.
- The average age of adoptive mothers, fathers, and birth mothers was 38, 38, and 24 years, respectively; the majority of adoptive parents (90%) and birth mothers (71%) were White.

## LIMITATIONS

- Genetic influences was determined using lifetime history diagnosis and was biased towards older mothers.
- Because the task was lab-based, the toy clean-up observation may not reflect parents' typical parenting style with their children at home or in other settings.
- Although data were collected on birth fathers, the small sample size did not permit analysis of these data.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Continue to explore the unique socializing role for fathers of socially wary children
- Examine the influence of paternal deployment on military children's social wariness
- Investigate strategies to promote greater father participation in military parenting programming

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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