

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Parental Deployment, Adolescent Academic and Social-Behavioral Maladjustment, and Parental Psychological Well-Being in Military Families

Nicosia, N. , Wong, E., Shier, V., Massachi, S., & Datar, A. (2017). Parental deployment, adolescent academic and social-behavioral maladjustment, and parental psychological well-being in military families. *Public Health Reports*, 132(1), 93-105. doi:10.1177/0033354916679995

SUMMARY: Effects on military families' overall well-being has yet to be examined as it relates to duration and frequency of deployments. This study sought to explore the relationship between parents' deployment and change in adolescent behavior and parent well-being. Findings suggest long deployments have a greater impact on adolescents' behavior and parents' well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- A long deployment of a parent Soldier was significantly related to an adolescent's decrease in independence, academic performance, and responsibility, and an increase in fear or anxiety.
- Adolescent girls were less likely to have poor academic performance or behavior problems at school, but were more likely to have increased fear or anxiety while their parent was deployed.
- Depression was more common in families with fathers serving in the military and who experienced a long deployment than in mothers serving in the military.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for children of military families throughout deployment
- Develop curricula that helps military fathers connect with their male children to build bonds that will be strong throughout the duration of any deployment or time away
- Provide workshops for military parents to learn skills to reduce stress or worry related to deployments

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote leisure activities for all military families to encourage parent Service members to build bonds with their children prior to deployment
- Continue to provide support for programs that work to help military children cope with deployment stress and changes
- Recommend integrating parenting education into existing service delivery systems for all military families with children in various age groups

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METHODS

- U.S. Army families with an adolescent child (12 or 13 years) participated in an online survey.
- Parents reported on nine changes in adolescent behavior (e.g., academic performance, closeness to family, problem behavior at school) during the most recent deployment and indicated perceived level of depression.
- The relationship between parent's depression and length and time of last deployment with adolescent behavior was examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,021 Active Duty Army families; 537 (53%) were fathers and 479 (47%) were mothers.
- Parents' race/ethnicity consisted of 415 (41%) White, followed by 251 (25%) Latino/a, 208 (20%) Black, and 147 (14%) other.
- A majority (N=854, 84%) of the sample were fathers as Service members with 366 (36%) who deployed in the past 12 months lasting more than 180 days (N=625, 61%).

LIMITATIONS

- Parents reported on adolescent behavior which may have introduced subject bias.
- The sample consisted of only families of Active Duty Soldiers, thus study findings may not be generalizable to all Service members and their families.
- Some parents who served in the military were deployed when they responded to the survey, which may reduce the accuracy of changes in their adolescent's behavior during deployment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data from multiple perspectives, including adolescents, on how changes in adolescent behavior impact parents' overall well-being
- Compare adolescent behavior among civilian and military families where the male figure is absent
- Examine differences among military fathers and adolescent boys compared to military mothers and adolescent girls in regards to the effects of long deployments

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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