

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Parenthood and Psychological Well-Being: Clarifying the Role of Child Age and Parent-Child Relationship Quality

Nomaguchi, K. M. (2012). Parenthood and psychological well-being: Clarifying the role of child age and parent-child relationship quality. *Social Science Research*, 41(2), 489-498. doi:10.106/j.ssresearch.2011.08.011.

SUMMARY: A nationally representative random sample of parents participated in a study examining the association between age of children and adult psychological well-being. Parents whose oldest child is under five report higher satisfaction with the parent-child relationship, higher self-esteem, higher self-efficacy, and lower levels of depression than parents whose oldest child is school-aged or an adolescent.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents whose oldest child was under the age of five reported higher levels of satisfaction with parent-child relationships than did parents whose oldest child was school-age or adolescent.
- Parents whose oldest child was under the age of five reported lower levels of depression, higher levels of self-esteem, and greater self-efficacy than those whose oldest child was older.
- Parents whose oldest child was a young adult, regardless of if the child lived at home or away, reported less satisfaction with parent-child relationships than did parents whose oldest child was under five.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate support groups for military parents with children to help foster kinship among these groups
- Attend trainings related to normative child development to provide accurate information to military parents regarding child development

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military parents regarding the normal fluctuations in parent-child relationship satisfaction and parental well-being across the development of their children
- Offer workshops to military parents that provide information and strategies to cope with common parenting challenges at various ages and stages of development

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide support for parenting programs for military parents who are interested in strengthening their parenting skills
- Recommend that evidence-based information on child development is made available to the general public, such as via community workshops and websites

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METHODS

- Data were drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households, a U.S. national probability sample collected in 1987-1988; the response rate was 74%.
- Only data from families whose oldest child was 22 years old or younger were used.
- Parents completed measures of depression, self-esteem, self-efficacy, global happiness, and parental satisfaction with their oldest child.

PARTICIPANTS

- Six thousand two hundred twenty-eight parents participated (55% mothers).
- Average number of children under 18 living in the household was 2.75 (SD = 1.74).
- Twenty-six percent of children were 5-11 years old, 24% were 12-17 years old, 20% were 18-22 years old, and 18% were 0-4 years old.
- The majority of parents were White (77%) with an average age of 37.81 years (SD = 9.89).

LIMITATIONS

- All measures are self-reported and may be biased.
- These results are correlational, and causal interpretations are inappropriate.
- Parents were not followed longitudinally so no conclusions about how these variables change over time for individual parents were possible.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar population-based study to see if the relationships between the variables differ in an updated sample (these data were collected in the late 1980s)
- Investigate how having multiple children across multiple life stages may create particular demands for military parents
- Examine how parents military status (branch and component) and children's age influence parental mental health and psychological well-being

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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