

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Adverse Childhood Experiences, Family Functioning, and Resilience in Military Families: A Pattern-Based Approach

Oshiri, A., Lucier-Greer, M., O'Neal, C. W., Arnold, A., Mancini, J. A., & Ford, J. L. (2015). Adverse childhood experiences, family functioning, and resilience in military families: A pattern-based approach *Family Relations*, 64(1), 44-63. doi:10.1111/fare.12108

SUMMARY: Negative childhood experiences may be related to long-term, negative consequences in adulthood. Results from this study found that there are specific types of families who may be vulnerable to experiencing negative consequences as a result of adverse childhood experiences. However, there are also certain types of families with a history of adverse childhood experiences who are likely to be resilient.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Four types of family profiles were found based on participants' responses: balanced (40%), unbalanced (13%), midrange (44%), and rigidly balanced (3%).
- Balanced family profile represents families with high levels of positive functioning and low levels of negative functioning; unbalanced family profile represents the opposite. Midrange family profile represents moderate levels of positive and negative functioning. Rigidly balanced family profile represents high levels of both positive and negative functioning.
- Families classified as unbalanced had military parents with the most positive health outcomes, but partners had the poorest health outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop initiatives to educate more military parents about the impact of adverse childhood experiences on youth and adult outcomes
- Host support groups for military parents with a history of adverse childhood experiences to learn ways to maintain their well-being despite negative experiences in childhood
- Teach military families skills to address their coping and family functioning to improve their resilience

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support collaborations between professionals who work with military families and community organizations to provide services and resources to military parents with a history of childhood trauma
- Recommend additional programming centered around well-being for military parents and their civilian partners who experienced adverse childhood experiences
- Encourage further research that focuses on how histories of childhood trauma impact military readiness among Service members

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METHODS

- Families with at least one Active Duty Service member and at least one adolescent between 11-18 years of age were recruited.
- Parents and one adolescent completed the surveys separately (if there were more than one adolescent in the family, the older adolescent was chosen to participate in the study).
- Participants completed measures of demographic information, adverse childhood experiences, family functioning, and parenting practices. Parents also completed measures of physical health, health behaviors, depression, and well-being.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 273 Active Duty Army families. Among the sample of Soldiers, 88% were enlisted and 90% experienced at least one deployment. No information on ethnic composition was presented.
- Of the sample of Soldiers, 86% were male and 73% were between 31 to 40 years old. Of the sample of spouses, 94% were female and 79% were between 31 to 40 years old.
- Among the adolescents, 51% were female and 60% were between 11 to 14 years old.

LIMITATIONS

- Parents' reports of adverse childhood experiences were not separated in the analyses, which limits understanding of which specific experiences are related to which outcomes.
- No data about race/ethnicity were collected, which limits the ability to understand and apply the results to racially and ethnically diverse populations.
- The sample was not randomly recruited and consisted only of Army Active Duty Service members and their families which may limit the generalizability of these findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data on cultural factors to test whether those factors buffer the impact of adverse childhood experiences on adults' functioning among military samples
- Develop a similar study with different Service branches and with families who have younger children
- Conduct studies on adverse childhood experiences that test relationships between adults' functioning and certain subtypes of adverse experiences

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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