



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Effects of War-Induced Maternal Separation on Children's Adjustment During the Gulf War and Two Years Later

Pierce, P. F., Vinokur, A. D., & Buck, C. L. (1998). *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 28(14), 1286-1311.
http://www.isr.umich.edu/src/seh/mprc/PDFs/Pierce_Vinokur_Buck1998.pdf



This study used interviews and self-report surveys from mothers deployed in Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield to examine the predictors of children's adjustment problems during mothers' deployments and two years later. Predicting variables include job strain, financial strain, parenting strain, difficulties providing care for their children (including financial care, educational care, and supervision), maternal mental health, and the number of life changes children experienced.

Key Findings:

- During maternal deployment, both having more difficulties providing care for children, and children experiencing more changes in their lives, predicted more adjustment problems.
- Two years after deployment, experiencing more difficulties providing care for children and decreased maternal mental health both predicted more adjustment problems for children. Older mothers and those with younger children reported more child adjustment problems. Notably, adjustment problems during deployment did not predict problems two years later.
- Increased job strain, financial strain, and parenting strain two years after deployment all predicted poorer maternal mental health, as did being White and having younger children.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs to support military parents, either through direct service or referral services may consider targeted systems for mothers focusing on mothers' mental health and child adjustment problems.
- Programs may develop a "Resource Guide" to provide families with resources, information, and tips if they leave the military.
- Programs and services designed for parents and/or families should include curriculum or services that help meet the employment, financial, and parenting needs of military parents, particularly during deployment.

Implications for Policies:

- Increasing the availability of and access to high-quality child care and parental support programs could be instrumental in improving maternal mental health and child outcomes related to parental deployment.
- The military should continue to nurture a positive and family-friendly work environment to help reduce Service members' job strain, parenting strain, and difficulties providing care for children.
- Innovative strategies should be developed to increase access and participation by families, children, and primary care-givers in pre- and post-deployment programs and services.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Additional research should examine the tested models with families experiencing deployment in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and should include children with deployed fathers.
- Longitudinal studies are needed to clearly identify the long-term impacts of parental deployment on children and minimize the limitations of collecting retrospective data.
- Research should examine the role of available programs and services for military families in minimizing stress and improving child outcomes.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit <http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu>



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Background Information

Methodology:

- Participants completed questionnaires about their own experiences and those of their children during the period of the war (retrospective accounts) as well as their current experiences at the time of the study (i.e., 2 years post-deployment).
- This study focused on mothers serving in the Air Force.






Participants:

- 263 Air Force mothers who were deployed in Operation Desert Storm or Operation Desert Shield participated.
- 71% of mothers were enlisted, and 80% reported their ethnicity as non-Hispanic White.

Limitations:

- Mother reports were collected two years after deployment; thus, data on the variables during deployment (e.g., children's adjustment, their own mental health) are retrospective, and collected at the same time as the data for current variables. Completing the measures in this way may lead to inaccuracies as participants recall information from the past.
- Other aspects of the outcome may be missed if only one informant is used. In this case, participants reported on child adjustment during deployment, while they were deployed and likely had limited exposure to and communication about child adjustment.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★★★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
				<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications	
Overall Quality Rating					

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