

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
National  
Guard

## Children of National Guard Troops Deployed in the Global War on Terrorism

Pfefferbaum, B., Houston, J. B., Sherman, M. D., & Melson, A. G. (2011). Children of National Guard troops deployed in the Global War on Terrorism. *Journal of Loss & Trauma*, 16(4), 291-305. doi:10.1080/15325024.2010.519293

**SUMMARY:** Children of deployed Service members may experience a variety of difficulties, including emotional and behavioral concerns. The self-reported and parent-reported frequencies of emotional and behavioral difficulties experienced by children during parent deployment were compared across pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment. Children of deployed service members experienced more emotional and behavioral problems overall during deployment and when they had more family and safety worries

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall, children's emotional and behavioral difficulties were worse during parent deployment than post-deployment.
- Children who were more worried about their family's future, the deployed parent's safety and return, and how safe the world was in general, reported greater emotional difficulties, internalizing problems, school problems, and difficulties with personal adjustment before and during deployment.
- Parents' report of externalizing and behavior problems was associated with child worry about the family's future pre-deployment, with child worry about the non-deployed parent during deployment, and with child worry about both parents post-deployment.
- Children who had experienced a previous parental deployment had lower personal adjustment post-deployment and had more behavior problems across deployment phases than those whose parents were deployed for the first time.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate children and partners of deployed Service members about stressors of deployment and useful coping skills
- Host social gatherings for families of deployed Service members to connect with one another
- Provide support groups for children who have already experienced a parental deployment and are facing multiple parent deployments

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programming for military families at all stages of deployment
- Encourage professional development for providers working with military children about the stressors and potential emotional and behavioral problems children may exhibit during parent deployment
- Recommend the development of parenting classes for Service members and their partners, offering skills in how to support their children across the deployment cycle

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.



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## METHODS

- Children, ages 6-18 years, and non-deployed spouses of National Guard Service members who were deployed in OIF were recruited via flyers at National Guard facilities and events.
- Parents and children completed surveys or interviews pre-deployment, during deployment, and post-deployment regarding children's behavior, emotions, and worries related to deployment.
- Frequencies of child difficulties were calculated, and levels of difficulties were compared between deployment phases.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 13 non-deployed wives and 18 children (61% male) of deployed National Guard personnel.
- Spouses were ages 24-53 years and identified as White (77%), Black (15%), and Native American (8%).
- Children were ages 6-17 years and were 61% White, 28% Black, 11% Native American.
- This was the first deployment for 54% of the spouses, second for 38%, and third deployment for 8%.

## LIMITATIONS

- The small, convenience sample from only National Guard families limits generalizability to other military families.
- Families who chose to participate may have been experiencing more or less child difficulties and could have differed from families who did not participate.
- The timing of assessments may have impacted results given that pre- and post-deployment assessments were both very close to the deployment phase.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a long-term follow-up of families post-deployment to understand the effects of deployment on military children across time
- Explore additional factors potentially related to child emotional and behavioral difficulties during deployment (e.g., non-deployed parent emotional problems, changes in schedule and household responsibilities)
- Investigate whether programs that educate military children about common responses and coping strategies during deployment or programs that provide social support impact levels of emotional or behavioral difficulties among military children during deployment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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