

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Maternal Perspectives on Deployment and Child-Mother Relationships in Military Families

Posada, G., Walker, D., Cardin, J. F., Nyaronga, D., Schwarz, R., & Wadsworth, S. M. (2015). Maternal perspectives on deployment and child-mother relationships in military families. *Family Process*, 64(5), 651-664. doi:10.1111/fare.12165

**SUMMARY:** Separation or decreased quality of parenting may affect child attachment during military deployment. Relationships between child attachment, mother depressive symptoms and quality of child care, and father involvement and deployment variables were examined. Fathers who were more involved and had less combat exposure and mothers with less depressive symptoms and higher quality of care had more securely attached children during the deployment cycle.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Greater father involvement and mother depressive symptoms were associated with better mother quality of child care, which in turn was related to more secure child attachment.
- Children whose fathers were more involved and had less combat exposure and whose mothers had less depressive symptoms and better quality of care were more securely attached.
- Fathers in the Army and with a higher household income were more involved in parenting.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer regularly-scheduled activities (e.g., picnics, science projects, zoo trips) for fathers and children in military families that build relationships and increase father involvement
- Educate military families about ways in which parent mental health problems can impact child development, and provide parents with mental health resources
- Provide parent education classes for all military families, especially during the deployment cycle

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for professionals working with military families about the impacts of deployment on child development
- Encourage collaboration between military family programs and community schools to provide preventative education and skill-building seminars to military children and parents
- Support programs that help children and families adjust during deployment

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## METHODS

- Families of male Active Duty or Reserve Service members who had a pre-school aged child were recruited via phone from 15 U.S. cities for inclusion in a larger study.
- Mothers completed phone interviews about their child's attachment, their depression and quality of parent care, and fathers' deployment and parenting involvement when not deployed.
- Associations between demographic factors, child attachment, mother depressive symptoms and quality of child care, and father deployment and involvement were examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 292 mothers of 3-5 year old children with fathers who were Service members.
- Mothers were primarily younger than 35 years of age (68%) and identified as White (54%), Latina (27%), Black (17%), or Asian-American (2%).
- Participating families were either preparing for a new deployment (28%), experiencing a current deployment (45%), or adjusting following a recent deployment (27%).
- Service members from the Army (45%), Navy (13%), Air Force (19%), Marines (19%), and Coast Guard (4%) were represented, with both Active Duty (68%) and Reserve (32%) members.

## LIMITATIONS

- Results are cross-sectional and the direction of effects cannot be inferred.
- Mothers may have tried to respond to survey measures in the most socially desirable way, especially for variables related to their parenting, such as quality of mother care.
- Results may not generalize to families with children outside the pre-school age range.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Compare the effects of parent quality of care, deployment experiences, involvement, and mental health on child attachment across each branch of the military
- Examine other variables that may impact child attachment during deployment of a parent (e.g., presence of additional caregivers, child age, number of previous deployments)
- Conduct a similar study with both male and female Service members and examine any parent gender differences in child attachment outcomes

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>