



Perceptions of the Impact a Military Career Has on Children

Rowe, S., Keeling, M., Wessely, S., & Fear, N. (2014). Perceptions of the impact a military career has on children. *Occupational Medicine*, 64, 490-496. doi:10.1093/occmed/kqu096

SUMMARY: Data from a large United Kingdom military cohort dataset were examined to consider Service members' beliefs about the impact of their military career on their children. Approximately half of the participants perceived a negative impact of their military career on their kids. Service members with PTSD and other mental health problems were more likely to report adverse effects on children.

KEY FINDINGS

- 51% of the participants with children reported that their military service had a negative impact on their kids, 20% cited a positive impact, and 29% no impact.
- Service members who perceived a negative impact on their children were more apt to have had a 13 month (or more) deployment within a 3 year period.
- Participants with a mental health problem (including PTSD) were more likely to report a negative impact on their children.
- Active Duty Service members were more likely to report adverse impacts on children than those in the Reserves.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Develop classes for parents living with PTSD, providing them skills in minimizing the negative impacts on their children
- Sponsor events for annual awareness campaigns, such as the Month of the Military Child, in which military youth are recognized and celebrated
- Highlight the benefits of the military lifestyle for children and families in parenting classes

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Minimize the number of Service members' lengthy deployments in a short time period
- Continue to allocate resources to a range of accessible support programs for military youth
- Bolster supports for military families to help children during high-stress times, such as during geographic moves, parental training, and parental deployment

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- This study is part of a broader 2-part cohort study of the UK Armed Forces conducted from 2004-2006.
- Response rate was 59%; Reservists were over-sampled to ensure a representative sample.
- Participants completed paper and pencil self-report questionnaires that were sent via the mail.

PARTICIPANTS

- 3,198 Service members, 95% of whom were male, 90% of whom were married or cohabiting.
- 66% were in the UK Army and 18% in the Navy.
- Average age: 37 (SD = 7.0).
- Average number of children: 1.7 (SD = 0.7).

LIMITATIONS

- The response rate (approximately 59%) may have introduced biases into the findings.
- The key variable used in the study (impact on children) was a closed ended item which limits depth of interpretation of the finding.
- As data was cross-sectional, it is not possible to infer causal relationships among the variables.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Future research could examine parental perspectives on the impact of the military life on American children.
- Qualitative research could more fully examine the parents who reported a positive impact on their children to understand and draw upon their experiences.
- Additional research could include the perspectives of the co-parent/spouse/partner and child(ren).
- Future research could include other potentially relevant family variables, including number of siblings, number of family geographic moves, family support, and more global family functioning.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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