

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Impact of the Threat of War on Children in Military Families

Ryan-Wenger, N. A. (2001). Impact of the threat of war on children in military families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71(2), 236-244. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.71.2.236

**SUMMARY:** Survey, assessment, and interview data were used to examine Active Duty, Reserve, and civilian children's perceptions of war, levels of anxiety, coping strategies, and emotional problems. Results indicated differences between coping strategies and perceptions of war, although Active Duty, Reserve, and civilian children had similar levels of anxiety and emotional problems.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- No differences were found among children of civilian, Active Duty, and reserve families on anxiety, emotional problems, or number of coping strategies used.
- Active Duty children were more likely to "fight with someone," "bite my nails," or "daydream" to cope with stress as compared to Reserve children; whereas, Reserve children were more likely to "do something about it" (no specific action specified) as a coping strategy as compared to Active Duty children.
- Civilian and Reserve children were more likely to obtain information about the war from parents; Active Duty children obtained information from teachers or movies.
- Reserve and civilian children were more likely to state that war "was not right" as compared to Active Duty children, but Active Duty children were more likely to fear that their parent would die.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to military parents that provide materials that help parents discuss their children's perception of the war and the impact of war on their family
- Provide support groups to children during deployment that allow them opportunities to discuss their feelings and ask questions regarding deployment
- Educate military families and children regarding healthy ways to cope with deployment-related anxiety and stress

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that support military children throughout the deployment cycle
- Recommend education for service providers regarding the impact of deployment on children's well-being
- Continue to provide support for programs that aim to increase family readiness prior to deployment

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.



# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



## METHODS

- To be included in the study, families had to have only one child in the study who was between the ages of 8-11 years and who was in an age-appropriate grade in school.
- Military children were recruited via advertisements at unit meetings, posted on bulletin boards, unit newsletters, and flyers placed in tables in military community facilities. Civilian children were recruited at school using similar advertising methods.
- Children completed 20-30 minute interviews as well as two assessments and a human figure drawing, which assess children's fears.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included civilian (n = 48), Active Duty (n = 18), and Reserve (n = 25) children.
- The majority of participants were White (89%) and male (55%).
- Ten children had mothers who were Service members, 25 children had fathers who were Service member, and eight were from dual-military families.

## LIMITATIONS

- Data were collected prior to the OEF/OIF wars and may not be generalizable to military children involved in the most recent conflict.
- No data regarding parents service branch were included, making it difficult to assess whether children's perceptions differed based on parents service branch.
- The use of convenience sampling allows for bias, such that families with children who had more anxiety or emotional problems may have chosen not to participate, which may influence the results

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore children's perceptions of war, coping strategies, and mental health outcomes with a larger and more representative sample
- Utilize validated self-report instrument to measure children's perceptions of war is necessary
- Link anxiety and coping measures and children's perceptions of war with outcome measures, such as psychosomatic symptoms and emotional and behavioral problems

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>