

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Pathways of Risk and Resilience: Impact of a Family Resilience Program on Active-Duty Military Parents

Saltzman, W. R., Lester, P., Milburn, N., Woodward, K., & Stein, J. (2016). Pathways of risk and resilience: Impact of a family resilience program on active-duty military parents *Family Process*, 55(4), 1-14. doi:10.1111/famp.12238

SUMMARY: Military families experience unique stressors and may benefit from increases in resilience. Researchers investigated a brief, strengths-based intervention focused on enhancing military family resilience through increased communication, parenting skills, collaboration, flexibility, and routines. They evaluated whether decreases in parent distress after the intervention were due to increases in family resilience. The results indicated that changes in family resilience did explain reductions in parent distress.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Increases in family resilience predicted improvements in military and civilian parents' mental health.
- Military parents' reports of improvement in family functioning predicted improvements in civilian parents' mental health, but civilian parents' reports did not predict military parents' mental health.
- Parents who indicated higher levels of distress before intervention were more likely to experience benefit from the intervention, both individually and as a family.
- The number of sessions a family attended was predicted by the distress of the military parent but not by distress of the civilian parent.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops that aim to increase family communication, collaboration, flexibility, and routines
- Engage with Service members in order to recruit and retain families for participation in activities
- Identify families with parents who are experiencing higher levels of distress and create targeted efforts to support those families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development of programs to increase military family resilience
- Encourage professionals who work with individual Service members to consider the role of family functioning in Service member well-being
- Recommend that programs for military families focus on recognizing and optimizing family strengths

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METHODS

- Information about how participants were recruited was not included.
- Participants completed online surveys to measure emotional distress and family functioning before and after the intervention; distress was re-assessed six months post-intervention.
- Clinicians also rated each parent on how well they were functioning in key areas of their lives at the beginning and end of the intervention.
- Data were analyzed to determine which changes in scores after the intervention explained decreases in parent distress.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 434 families from 14 U.S. Marine Corps and Navy installations.
- For 97% of the families, the parents were a male Service member and a female civilian spouse.
- On average, there were two children in each family.
- Information about race and ethnicity were not included.

LIMITATIONS

- No information was included regarding recruitment of participants, so it is unclear how these families were chosen to receive the intervention.
- No information was included regarding the race and ethnicity of participants, so the populations to which results can be generalized are unclear.
- There was no comparison or control group; therefore, it is unknown whether the changes in family resilience and distress were due to participation in the intervention.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include a variety of family structures and gender roles (i.e., families with a female Service member)
- Compare families receiving the intervention to families not receiving the intervention to determine what changes in family resilience are a direct result of the intervention
- Investigate the effects of using a strength-based intervention to increase family resilience shortly before deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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