

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Baby Boot Camp: Facilitating Maternal Role Adaptation Among Military Wives

Schachman, K. A., Lee, R. K., & Lederman, R. P. (2004). Baby boot camp: Facilitating maternal role adaptation among military wives. *Nursing Research*, 53(2), 107-115. doi:10.1097/00006199-200403000-00006

SUMMARY: Military wives can face unique stressors that may be particularly difficult for mothers who are pregnant or have new babies. Military wives were randomly assigned to either a traditional birth class or a “baby boot camp,” which added a focus on resilience and resources, and mothers in each group were compared on self-reported prenatal and postpartum adaptation and resources. Mothers in the baby boot camp classes reported higher levels of prenatal and postpartum adaptation and more resources at the end of the class.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Women in the baby boot camp, compared to those in a traditional birth class, reported greater overall prenatal adaptation, including being more prepared for labor, having less fear of labor, and having fewer concerns about well-being for themselves and their baby.
- Women in the baby boot camp, compared to those in a traditional birth class, also reported greater overall postpartum adaptation, including more satisfaction with their labor and delivery, more confidence and satisfaction with being a mother, and more support from family and friends.
- Immediately after the birth classes, women in the baby boot camp had greater internal (e.g., self-reliance, determination) and external (e.g., social support, available programs) resources compared to women in the traditional birth class; however, there were no differences between groups six weeks postpartum.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Incorporate activities and discussions to promote resilience and use of resources into existing birth classes for military families
- Provide pregnant military wives with support groups to discuss fears related to childbirth, as well as educational information about childbirth
- Disseminate information about the available resources (traditional and alternative) for pregnant mothers or mothers with new infants in military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that provide resources and education for pregnant women and new mothers in military families
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community programs to provide home nursing visits for new military mothers and extend the length of parenting services past the initial few weeks that they are typically offered
- Recommend education for professionals working with military families about how to best support pregnant women and new mothers in military families, especially during the deployment cycle

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METHODS

- Women who were 30-36 weeks pregnant and married to Active Duty military members were recruited via newspaper, poster, and flyer ads at the military hospital on a large Midwestern U.S. Air Force base.
- Participants were randomly assigned to a traditional child birth class or a baby boot camp class where they were provided with educational information regarding childbirth and parenting at a one-month weekly class.
- Women in the traditional birth class and the baby boot camp were compared on self-reported prenatal adaptation, postpartum adaptation, and internal and external resources at baseline, the end of the group, and six weeks postpartum.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 91 military wives between the ages of 18 and 28 years; approximately 70% were younger than 22 years of age and 69% had been married less than 2 years.
- Mothers identified as White (76%), Black (14%), Latino (5%), or Asian American (2%).
- Participants' Service members served in the Air Force (79%), Army (13%), Navy (7%), and Marines (1%) and were either junior enlisted (63%), mid-enlisted (20%), or officer (17%) rank.

LIMITATIONS

- Baby boot camp classes were one hour longer than traditional birth classes, and mothers' outcomes may have been impacted by the differences in time rather than only the intervention.
- Given that all participants were on the same military base and able to interact with one another, participants may have influenced the findings by sharing information or resources.
- The researchers, who taught both the traditional birth class and baby boot camp, were not blind to condition and therefore may have biased the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a longitudinal study with birth classes equal in length to control for class time
- Compare differences in the effectiveness of birth classes with components to increase resilience and internal and external resources of military mothers between different military branches
- Examine how Service members' deployment effects prenatal and postpartum adaptation of military wives who are pregnant or new mothers

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