

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

The Impact of Family and Community on Children's Understanding of Parental Role Negotiation

Sinno, S. M., Schuette, C. T., & Hellriegel, C. (2017). The impact of family and community on children's understanding of parental role negotiation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(4), 435-456. doi:10.1177/0192513X15573867

SUMMARY: Family and community factors may influence a child's social reasoning about parental role negotiation. Interviews assessed children's judgement of two parent role negotiation scenarios. Differences between demographic, family type (traditional or nontraditional), and community type (near a military base or metropolitan) groups were examined. Factors from all three groups affected children's judgement of the parental role negotiation scenarios.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Children from schools within 10 miles of a large military base were less likely than those from metropolitan schools to think it was acceptable for the mother to get a job.
- Most children in both the traditional (those children with only a father working) and nontraditional groups (children with a mother working outside the home) rated the father's desire to stay at home as acceptable.
- In making a judgement, younger children were most likely to use social convention reasoning and older children were more likely to use personal choice reasoning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Provide support to military families with changing parental roles by offering training on parental role negotiation
- Collaborate with other professionals on ways to facilitate program activities that support military families involved in parental role negotiation

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to helping military families cope with parental role changes
- Provide workshops to military families on negotiating parental role changes

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development and continuation of programs that help military families resolve conflicts around parental role negotiation
- Recommend education for service providers around the possible effects of parental role change on military families' functioning

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.



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METHODS

- Children were recruited from schools in either a metropolitan community or within 10 miles of a large military base.
- Interviewers presented children with two scenarios involving a parent wanting to switch to a nontraditional role. Children then judged the acceptability of the role change and the other parent's opposition.
- Demographic and group (family and community type) factors affecting the children's judgments and reasoning were compared.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 272 children; 131 were aged seven years ($M = 7.13$, $SD = .39$) and 141 were aged 10 years ($M = 10.43$, $SD = .57$).
- Gender for the seven year old group was 49% female and 51% male, and gender for the 10 year old group was 55% female and 45% male.
- Race of the study participants was not included; though, the metropolitan community was 48% White and 18% Black and the community near a military base was 41% White and 50% Black.

LIMITATIONS

- The scenario involving the father wanting to stay at home gave a reason but the other scenario did not. This may have increased the perceived acceptability of the scenario involving the father.
- The study used only participants aged seven years or aged 10 years; results may not generalize to other child age groups.
- Only children from families with two, opposite sex parents were included; thus, the findings may not generalize to children from less traditional households.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore how children from nontraditional families use social reasoning to judge parental role negotiations
- Replicate the current study using more equivalent judgement scenarios
- Assess child social reasoning about parental role negotiation in children from different age ranges

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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