

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Impact of Maternal and Paternal Deployment on Depressive Symptoms and Well-Being Among Military-Connected Youth

Sullivan, K., Benbenishty, R., Astor, R. A., Capp, G., Gilreath, T. D., & Rice, E. (2014). The impact of maternal and paternal deployment on depressive symptoms and well-being among military-connected youth. *Military Behavioral Health, 3*(3), 182-189. doi:10.1080/21635781.2015.1038402

SUMMARY: An examination of how military parents' gender may be associated differently with deployments, wellbeing, and depression among military-connected youth was conducted. Data were drawn from the 2011 California Healthy Kids Survey of 117,000 students in Southern California. A secondary analysis was conducted on the 1,370 military-connected adolescents who completed the survey.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The relationship between the number of times deployed and depression is stronger for youth of female Service members.
- Among military-connected youth, older youth report lower levels of well-being and more depressive symptoms.
- Youth who experienced two or more parental deployments reported higher levels of well-being as compared to youth who had not experienced deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer pre and post-deployment support groups for youth and their families to discuss well-being
- Provide opportunities for post-deployed parents and their adolescent children to reconnect
- Support campaigns that bring attention to the needs of youth with parents in the military

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for the unique challenges (e.g. childcare, relationship tension) faced by deployed mothers and their adolescent children
- Recommend education of school professionals (e.g. counselors, teachers, and principals) on the needs of youth of deployed parents
- Continue efforts with each military branch to foster partnerships with local education units (e.g. elementary, middle, and high schools)

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METHODS

- A secondary analysis of quantitative data from the California Healthy Kids Survey was used.
- Data came from eight school districts in a Southern California county that educate approximately 117,000 students, 10% of whom are military-connected.
- Participants' well-being and depressive symptoms were measured by two scales and were adapted from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Expanded Form and the Kessler 6.
- A series of multivariate regressions with the well-being and depressive symptom scales as continuous outcome variables were conducted.

PARTICIPANTS

- A subset of 1,370 seventh, ninth, and eleventh grade students who identified as having a mother or father serving in the military in some capacity were included.
- Participants identified as 13% American Indian/Asian/Pacific Islander, 26% White, 18% Multiracial, 36% Latino, and 7% Black.
- Ten percent of participants mother's deployed at least once and 66% of participants' mothers or fathers deployed two or more times in the last 10 years.

LIMITATIONS

- Analyses are based on self-report, cross-sectional data, so causality cannot be inferred from these findings.
- The study used preexisting data; therefore, there were a number of contextual factors that couldn't be controlled (e.g. mental health of parents, youths' age, types of deployment, and families).
- The survey from which the data were drawn was administered in one region of the U.S.; therefore, generalizability to other military contexts cannot be made.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Identify how maternal deployment may affect youth differently than paternal deployment
- Investigate additional measures and nuanced variables to better understand the active contributors to youth outcomes such as depression and well-being
- Focus on the sex of the parent in relationship to the sex of their child, deployment, and well-being

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