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


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)

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

- 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

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

- **Design**
  - Appropriate Research Plan and Sample
- **Methods**
  - Appropriate Measurement and Analysis
- **Limitations**
  - Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
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