

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
National
Guard

Children of the U.S. National Guard: Making Meaning and Responding to Parental Deployment

Thompson, D. E., Baptist, J., Miller, B., & Henry, U. (2015). Children of the U.S. National Guard: Making meaning and responding to parental deployment. *Youth & Society*, NULL(NULL), NULL. doi:10.1177/0044118X1557088

SUMMARY: National Guard youth at a summer camp participated in an individual interview regarding their behavior during parental deployment. Participants described a range of responses, including assuming additional household tasks to maintaining typical routines. Some youth intentionally withdrew from family relationships to avoid conflict or minimize stress on the at-home parent.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Approximately one in six youth assumed additional at-home responsibilities during deployment, often motivated by an awareness that their at-home parent was overwhelmed.
- About one in four youth denied considerable change in home life during deployment, noting their at-home parents were strong.
- Some youth reported that they intentionally withdrew from family activities and relationships, and reasons for withdrawal included a desire to avoid placing undue stress on the non-deployed parents, to avoid conflict with the at-home parent, or a sense they could not count on support from family members.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop classes for non-deploying parents and youth to proactively teach communication skills to strengthen their bond during deployment
- Offer support programs for non-deployed parents to provide them opportunities to exchange social support with others
- Host family-oriented events during the Service member's deployment for non-deployed parents and their children to provide enjoyable activities for military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support camps and other enjoyable activities for military youth affected by parental deployment
- Encourage National Guard leadership to work with the public school system to create a system for communication so school personnel know about parental deployments
- Suggest partnerships between community childcare agencies and military family programs, creating an infrastructure for additional childcare during deployment

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METHODS

- Youth were recruited at an Operation Military Kids summer camp and were eligible if they have had a parent who had deployed.
- Youth participated in a 20-40 minute individual interview and completed a demographic form on the second day of camp.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and qualitative analyses were used to examine key themes in youth's experiences.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 24 youth with a parent in the National Guard who deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.
- Their age range was 13-17 years old (M = 14.7, SD = 1.3), 13 youth were female, and 88% of the sample were White.
- The average number of parental deployments among this sample was 2.3 (SD = 2.0).

LIMITATIONS

- The study used a convenience sample of youth at one camp in one state, limiting the ability to generalize the findings.
- The sample was homogenous regarding ethnic background, so the extent to which other military youth of different ethnicities have similar experiences is unknown.
- Approximately half of the sample were National Guard Youth Council members who may have been more informed of available services for military youth than other children.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with children of Active Duty parents
- Conduct a longitudinal study of military youth who experience multiple parental deployments to better understand their adjustment and functioning over time
- Examine gender differences in youth's experiences of parental deployment

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