

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Victimization and Adversity Among Children Experiencing War-related Parental Absence or Deployment in a Nationally Representative US Sample

Turner, H. A., Finkelhor, D., Hamby, S., & Henly, M. (2017). Victimization and adversity among children experiencing war-related parental absence or deployment in a nationally representative US sample. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 67, 271–279. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.02.039

SUMMARY: Interview data were used to compare rates of victimization and adversity among children with war-related parental deployment and those without war-related parental deployment. The associations between victimization and adversity and child trauma symptoms and delinquency were also explored. Results indicate that war-related parental deployments increased children's risk of victimization and adversity, which was associated with children's trauma symptoms and delinquency.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Children with war-related parental deployment were more likely to experience a variety of adverse outcomes (e.g., have a parent go to prison, experience a natural disaster) compared to children without a parental deployment history.
- Children with war-related parental deployments were also more likely to be victimized (e.g., maltreatment, peer assault, property crime) within the past year than children without a parental deployment history.
- Increased risk of exposure to victimization and adversity fully explained the association between parental deployment history and child trauma symptoms and delinquency.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Engage children of deployed Service members in positive youth development programs to reduce the elevated risk for experiencing subsequent adversity or victimization
- Provide education to military families about the compound effects of trauma and ways to effectively cope with trauma-related symptoms
- Continue to provide support services to spouses of deployed Service members focused on helping families effectively cope with deployment-related stress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs and services that work with military families throughout the deployment cycle to help families cope with deployment-related stress
- Continue to support programs responsible for identifying and preventing child maltreatment and intimate partner violence to reduce the risk of maltreatment in military families
- Support programs and services for military children that teach social and interpersonal skills to reduce the risk of peer victimization

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METHODS

- The National Surveys of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) data from 2008, 2011, and 2014 were utilized for this study.
- Children aged 10-17 years completed 50-minute phone interviews; proxy interviews with a caregiver were completed for children under the age of 10 years.
- Only one child per household was interviewed; participants were randomly chosen from all eligible children in the home by selecting the child with the most recent birthday.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 13,052 participants were interviewed. Among the sample, 56.8% identified as White, 51.2% were male, and the average age was 8.6 years.
- Almost 7% of children (n = 786) reported a lifetime prevalence of war-related parental deployment.
- Children who reported war-related parental deployment were, on average, older (M = 9.8 years) than children without similar parental histories (M = 8.5 years).

LIMITATIONS

- War-related parental deployments were not military specific and could have included civilian contractor deployments or absences; therefore, differences between military and civilian deployments on children's experiences of adversity and victimization could not be assessed in this study.
- No data on deployment characteristics, such as length or number of deployments, were available which could have had an influence on children's experiences of adversity and victimization.
- The use of proxy interviews with children under the age of 10 years may not accurately capture children's experiences.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the association between military-related deployment history and childhood exposure to adversity and victimization
- Continue to explore how deployment characteristics (e.g., length of time, number of deployments) influence child mental and physical health outcomes
- Examine the effectiveness of programs that support military families coping with the unique factors associated with military deployment

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