

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Accumulation of Risk and Promotive Factors Among Young Children in US Military Families

Wadsworth, S. M., Cardin, J. F., Christ, S., Willerton, E., O'Grady, A. F., Topp, D., ... Mustillo, S. (2016). Accumulation of risk and promotive factors among young children in U.S. military families. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 57 (1-2), 190-202. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12025

**SUMMARY:** Children of Service members who have experienced combat-related deployments are at increased risk for a variety of negative outcomes. This study sought to examine risk and promotive factors and the likelihood of negative outcomes in children aged 0 to 10 years. Findings revealed children's outcomes were significantly related to parental depression, community poverty, and cumulative risk.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents' depression and the health among community members were both positively related to anxiety in children ages 3-5 years.
- Older children, ages 6-10 years, as opposed to younger children were more likely to experience increase difficulties, which impacted their overall development.
- Children living in low-income communities were twice more likely to be at-risk than children who lived in higher income communities or where residents indicated better health.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide ongoing education for military families regarding family functioning and well-being
- Collaborate with community professionals who work with Service members and their families to raise awareness of resources to recognize risk and promotive factors of military children
- Establish mentoring groups for children of Service members to pair up with other military children in hopes to build a sense of community and network of support

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage that further research examine healthy ways for children to learn how to cope better
- Recommend monitoring of school-aged children, especially children experiencing a parental deployment as they may be at an increased risk of negative outcomes
- Support the development of programming that helps Service members and their families get acquainted with their communities and build healthy family functioning

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## METHODS

- A sample of participants were recruited from the Defense Manpower Data Center where military families who had at least one child younger than 11 years were invited to participate.
- Of the 1,651 families contacted, 680 (41%) consented to participate in a telephone interview.
- To assess the presence of risk and promotive factors among children, child's developmental problems (ages 0-2 years), levels of anxiety (ages 3-5 years), overall difficulties with emotions and behaviors (ages 6-10 years), and an overall measure of risk status (ages 0-10 years) were examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 680 families (average of 2 children under the age of 18 years in home) where one or both parents served in the Army (48%), Navy (17%), Air Force (24%), or Marine Corps (11%).
- A majority of the participants were female (94%), married (97%), and had at least a high school education (98%).
- Parents' race included 77% White, 9% Black, 5% Asian-American, and 9% other with a mean age of 34 years for females and 38 years for males.
- Many of the parents served as officers (42%), were in Active Duty (87%), and experienced two or more deployments (62%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The study used a composite score to measure level of risk among children of all age groups, thus altering the accuracy of the study's findings.
- Data were collected at one time point, thus limiting the ability to determine risk and promotive factors among children across time.
- Parents' mental state may have negatively impacted their overall assessment of their children making it difficult to determine the reliability of the study's findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Develop and test a measure that accurately assesses the level of risk among children of all ages
- Examine the likelihood of children's negative outcomes as risk factors accrue in both civilian and military families to determine whether there are differences among these two populations
- Ask multiple informants, such as children's teachers, to be a part of the child's assessment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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