

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Psychological Traumas of War: Training School Counselors as Home-Front Responders

Waliski, A., Kirchner, J. E., Shue, V. M., & Bokony, P. A. (2012). Psychological traumas of war: Training school counselors as home-front responders. *Journal of Rural Health, 28*(4), 348-355. doi:10.1111/j.1748-0361.2012.00404.x

SUMMARY: A workshop was held for school counselors to train them on best practices for helping children with a deployed parent. Attendees participated in discussion groups about their own experiences and rated the usefulness of the training for their careers. Participants indicated that the training increased their knowledge of the military lifestyle and that the information they learned could be implemented into their professions.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Level of knowledge about the impact of deployment on military children and families significantly improved from pre- to post-workshop training.
- Four themes emerged in the counselors' discussions of their experiences with military youth: parenting and childcare, emotions and behaviors, finances, and barriers to treatment.
- Facilitating communication between a deployed parent and their child was a significant way that counselors attempted to support military children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop programs that help facilitate communication between a deployed parent and child
- Offer classes that teach children evidence-based coping techniques to help them successfully manage emotions related to the deployment
- Encourage school counseling services to school-aged children of deployed parents to help them communicate their thoughts and feelings related to the deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training programs to educate school officials about how to help military students cope with a parent's deployment
- Encourage routine screening to assess for distress among students who have experienced parental deployment
- Urge the dissemination of materials that educate military families about resources that support children's adjustment and development at their schools

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METHODS

- Participants attended a two-day workshop about the impact that parental separation due to deployment has on military children and families.
- Pre- and post-workshop questionnaires about knowledge of the impact of deployment on military children and families were completed by participants.
- After the workshop, participants engaged in open-ended discussion groups where they identified benefits of the workshop.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 82 school counselors and the majority were from rural areas in Arkansas (67%).
- Most participants were school counselors: the majority were from secondary school (39%), followed by elementary school (32%), college (4%), and intermediate school (1%).
- No additional demographic information about participants was provided (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender composition, school characteristics).

LIMITATIONS

- Participants were members of the Arkansas Counseling Association and, as such, may not be representative of school counselors generally.
- The pre/post knowledge measure asked participants about perceptions of knowledge (rather than using direct measures to assess actual knowledge).
- No follow-up surveys were provided to determine whether counselors' recently obtained knowledge persisted and was useful in their jobs.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct follow-up assessments with counselors several months after the workshop to determine whether knowledge gains persist and to assess whether this new knowledge is positively impacting counselors' work
- Provide questionnaires that directly measure participant knowledge rather than relying on perceived knowledge
- Include a larger and more diverse sample of school counselors and from more urban areas

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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