

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Parenting Stress After Deployment in Navy Active Duty Fathers

Yablonsky, A. M., Yan, G., & Bullock, L. (2016). Parenting stress after deployment in navy active duty fathers. *Military Medicine*, 181(8), 854-862. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-15-00302

SUMMARY: Deployment is often a stressful time for military families, and U.S. Service members have been deployed more often and for longer periods of time since 2003 and the start of OIF. This study synthesizes 21 qualitative articles related to the process of deployment among military families. The authors detail important tasks and specific challenges related to each stage of deployment, including pre-deployment, deployment, household adjustment for the family, and post-deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- More perceived threat to a Service member's life or well-being during deployment was associated with increased parenting stress when Service members returned home.
- Greater exposure to warfare during deployment was also associated with increased parenting stress when Service members returned home.
- Neither Service members' level of life stress, nor posttraumatic stress symptoms were associated with parenting stress following deployment.
- Depression symptoms accounted for the relationship between both perceived threat and warfare exposure with parenting stress post-deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Inform Service members and their families about deployment stressors and how they may impact parenting post-deployment, as well as ways to reduce the negative impact on parenting
- Provide support groups for Service members post-deployment to discuss parenting concerns
- Educate Service members and their families about depression symptoms and the effects of depression on relationships and provide information about treatment and community resources

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development courses for providers working with Service members and their families regarding deployment stress, depression, and parenting difficulties
- Encourage collaboration between the Department of Defense and mental health providers to make treatment easily accessible for Service members, particularly post-deployment
- Promote the development of parenting programs for military families that include education regarding the associations between deployment, depression, and parenting stress

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METHODS

- Fathers were recruited via informational advertisements at a naval outpatient clinic in Virginia.
- Participants completed questionnaires about demographic information, deployment factors, parenting stress, and life stress and emotional difficulties.
- The associations between deployment factors, parent emotions, and parenting stress were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 111 Navy fathers who returned from a deployment during the past year, had a civilian wife, and had a child between the ages of one month and six years old.
- On average, Navy fathers were 32.14 years old (SD = 6.10), had been married 6.37 years (SD = 3.80), and were primarily White (65%) or Black (23%), with 17% reporting Latino ethnicity.
- Navy fathers had been in the military for 10.03 years (SD = 10.03), experienced 2.39 deployments (SD = 1.27), and spent 19.95 total months deployed (SD = 11.31), on average.

LIMITATIONS

- Participants in this sample were all Sailors and included few Service members with high levels of warfare exposure, potentially limiting generalizability of results to other military populations.
- Fathers may have under-reported their parenting stress in order to appear more favorable, which could have biased the results of the study.
- The direction of effects cannot be determined due to the cross-sectional nature of the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar larger, longitudinal study with multiple military branches to more thoroughly assess the effects of deployment factors on parenting stress among military parents
- Examine the role of child factors (e.g., child emotional or behavioral difficulties, child temperament) on the association between deployment factors and parenting stress
- Investigate potential protective factors (e.g., social support) of parenting stress post-deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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