

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## The Relationship of Predeployment Child-Focused Preparedness to Reintegration Attitudes and PTSD Symptoms in Military Fathers With Young Children

Zanotti, D. C., DeMarni Cromer, L., & Louie, A. D. (2016). The relationship of predeployment child-focused preparedness to reintegration attitudes and PTSD symptoms in military fathers with young children. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 2(4), 429-438. doi:10.1037/tps0000093

**SUMMARY:** Deployment may pose stress for both Service members and their children. This study interviewed 30 Service members about their pre- and post-deployment experiences, and examined the relationship between pre-deployment child-focused preparation, reintegration attitudes, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Results revealed that compared to Service members who did not prepare their children for deployment, those who engaged in pre-deployment child preparation were less likely to have negative reintegration attitude or meet the clinical criteria for PTSD.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members who prepared their children for deployment viewed their deployment as less stressful and reported more positive reintegration attitude than Service members who did not engage in child-focused pre-deployment preparation.
- No significant associations were found between pre-deployment child preparedness and Service members' PTSD symptoms.
- Service members who prepared their children for deployment were less likely to meet the clinical criteria of PTSD.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Organize family events frequently so that Service members can have better opportunities to bond with their children through fun activities
- Teach Service members and their spouses about how to prepare their children for an upcoming deployment
- Offer activity groups for children whose parents are deployed to increase their understanding of the deployment cycle

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness by holding family education events of the importance of pre-deployment child-focused preparation on Service members' well-being
- Support programs that foster positive relationships between Service members and their children
- Continue to support research on how to engage the whole family to help Service members' reintegration process

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited via emails, in-person briefs, and social media.
- Participants were interviewed face-to-face or by phone about whether or not they prepared their children for the upcoming deployment, their attitudes about the reintegration experience, and PTSD symptoms.
- Data were analyzed to examine the associations between pre-deployment child-focused preparation and Service members' reintegration attitude and PTSD symptoms.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 30 male Active Duty or Reserve Service members who returned from a deployment within two years of the study and had a child aged six years or younger during the deployment.
- The average age of the participants was 30.97 years (SD = 4.49); most of them were White (n = 25), followed by Black (n = 3) and others (n = 2).
- The participants who were Active Duty Service members served in Air Force (n = 7), Navy (n = 2), and Army (n = 1), and the participants who were Reserve Service members served in Air National Guard (n = 17), Army National Guard (n = 2), and Army Reserves (n = 1).

## LIMITATIONS

- Service members' child-focused pre-deployment preparation was assessed by only one question; therefore, it may not accurately capture the level of preparedness.
- Data were not gathered immediately after deployment but were collected up to two years after deployment, so they could be subject to participants' memory bias.
- The cross-sectional design of the study made it impossible to determine the causal relationship between child-focused preparation, reintegration attitude, and PTSD symptoms.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Gather data in shorter time intervals between Service members' return from deployment and assessment to obtain a more accurate examination of their reintegration attitude and pre-deployment child preparation
- Examine female Service members' associations between pre-deployment child preparation, PTSD symptoms, and reintegration experience
- Design longitudinal studies to examine whether poor pre-deployment child-focused preparation causes negative reintegration attitude and PTSD symptoms, or vice versa

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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