



Military REACH's review of CHANGES IN PARENTING AND YOUTH ADJUSTMENT ACROSS THE MILITARY DEPLOYMENT CYCLE

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BRIEF SUMMARY: This study examined how deployment of a National Guard service member parent related to changes in at-home partners parental responsiveness (e.g. comforting and supporting their child), at-home parent's depressive symptoms, and child adjustment (externalizing and internalizing behaviors) over the course of the deployment cycle, and how these components related to one another. One hundred and fourteen families were interviewed at four time points (pre-deployment, three months in to deployment, eight months in to deployment, and reunion). A life course perspective was used to evaluate the multiple transitions of deployment, and to examine parent and child behavioral changes. Overall, parental depressive symptoms and child maladjustment increased throughout the deployment cycle until reunion, at which point these returned to pre-deployment levels.

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, at-home parents with younger children were more responsive than at-home parents with older children.
- Parental responsiveness generally decreased after pre-deployment and continued to decline even after the reunion stage of deployment for at-home parents.
- Both parental depressive symptoms for at-home parents and child externalizing behaviors increased in symptoms through the deployment stage, but they decreased to pre-deployment levels as reunion approached and occurred.
- On average, increased depressive symptoms and decreased parental responsiveness among at-home parents were related to higher externalizing and internalizing behaviors in children across time.
- Changes in child behavior were more connected to at-home parenting behavior than the experience of parent deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES

- Seek services to map out your family's progress through the stages of deployment to understand normative changes in family members and access appropriate resources for the unique impacts of each stage.
- Prioritizing and monitoring mental health and parenting behaviors may improve child adjustment outcomes.
- During the reunion stage, most individuals experience significant positive changes (e.g. decreased at-home parental depression and decline in child internalizing and externalizing behaviors), but be aware that some changes (e.g. at-home parental responsiveness) may not immediately improve.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- Practitioners might benefit military families by becoming aware of the stages of deployment and consider adapting services based on those transitional stages.
- During interventions, address parental mental health, parenting behaviors, and parent-child relationships directly in relation to all stages of the deployment cycle.
- Continue to offer services beyond the immediate return of the service member, as some family members and family characteristics may take longer to readjust (ex: at-home parent responsiveness).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY ADVOCATES AND POLICY MAKERS

- Advocate for the provision of services that specifically addresses changes for families at various stages of deployment, especially resources that help at-home parents with their own mental health and parenting needs in the midst of deployment.
- Supply families with research-informed information about the importance of parental well-being in preventing negative adjustment for children during the deployment of a parent; also, provide information to those who might see negative adjustment (e.g. teachers, coaches), so they are able to reach out to families in a sensitive and supportive manner.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ Military families ($N = 114$)
- ✓ National Guard

- ✓ Longitudinal secondary data from at-home parenting partners of deployed guardsmen

METHODOLOGY

- Families consisted of one deployed parent, one at-home parent, and a child.
- Data for this study were from a larger sample of Indiana National Guard families who were expected to deploy. Seventy-one percent of guardsmen had previously experienced a deployment; 91% of at-home parents were white (94% were women); and 14% were also in the military.
- Interviews with families took place at four time points: pre-deployment (one to four months before deployment, with both parents), three months in to deployment, with the at-home parent, eight months in to deployment, with the at-home parent, and reunion (one month after service member return, with both parents).
- Although both parents participated in interviews, only data from at-home parents were used in these analyses.
- Multi-level statistical models were created to examine how the variables of at-home parental mental health, at-home parenting responsiveness, and the oldest child's adjustment changed over time within participants. Models also examined how variables were related, considering within person changes over time.

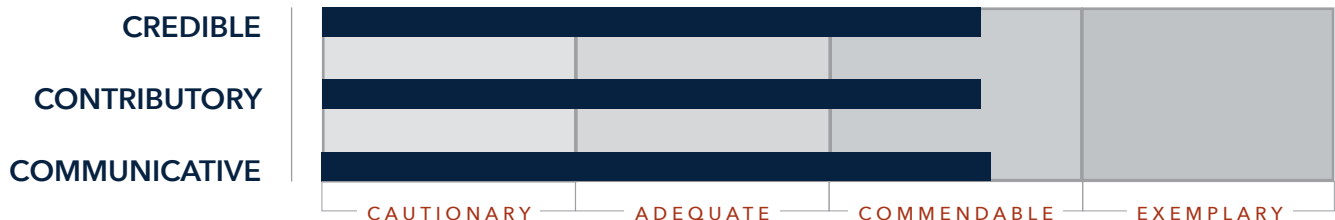
ARTICLE STRENGTHS

- Longitudinal data collection allowed for more detailed understanding of how parenting and child adjustment both changed over time with the stages of deployment.
- This research examined associations between two important constructs that merited observation and potential intervention (i.e. parenting, child adjustment) in a military context, but discussed how this applies to a variety of families that experience parental absence (e.g. work travel, incarceration).
- Theory informed this study.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- There were not enough data to determine if changes in variables were associated with child age.
- Research focused only on self-reported parental responsiveness, rather than any other aspect of parenting from the perspective of other reporters. This study also assumed that changes in the parent would precede changes in the child.
- The sample included first-time deployed individuals and dual-military families, which had the ability to skew results, because it is possible that families experiencing their first deployment and dual-military couples may have particularly unique experiences (e.g. more or less stressful).

ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY



DIMENSIONS OF ASSESSMENT

- CREDIBLE: Research that is rigorous, transparent, consistent, and generalizable. This dimension reflects an evaluation of the study's scientific methodology.
- CONTRIBUTORY: Research that is original, applicable, and has the potential to enhance the well-being of military families. This dimension examines the impact of the study.
- COMMUNICATIVE: Research that is coherent, understandable, and readable. This dimension assesses how effectively the authors convey the content of the study.

★ These dimensions are adapted from the work of Mårtensson et al. (2016). For more information on the REACH evaluation framework and rubric visit: militaryREACH.org

PARTNERSHIP

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