Developmental Issues Impacting Military Families with Young Children During Single and Multiple Deployments

http://www.amsus.org/index.php/journal

This correlational study investigates how young children (younger than 4 years old) have been affected by single and multiple Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) deployments. The study surveyed families at two separate times assessing child behavior problems, along with individual and family characteristics. The first survey was administered at least 3-4 months into the deployment, and the second survey was administered roughly 4-6 weeks after the soldier returned home from deployment.

Key Findings:

• Children with a deployed parent showed increased behavior problems at deployment and increased attachment behaviors at reunion compared with children whose parents had not recently deployed. Older children (toddler and preschoolers) were more prone to behavior problems than were infants.
• Other factors significantly correlated with behavioral problems were child temperament ("anxious" and "difficult" as opposed to "easy"), duration of recent deployment, total time deployed, number of PCS moves, and number of parent stressors experienced during deployment.
• Child attachment behaviors were related to (significantly correlated with) the length of the deployment, number of deployments, and the number of stressors faced by the parent.
• The most common child behavior problems appeared to be attachment behaviors: clinginess, needing attention, asking questions about the parent's absence.

Implications for Programs:

• Programs could help families explore practical strategies to caregiving issues and collaborate in designing services to overcome them.
• Military families may benefit from family-centered services and community partnerships that are linked to other families with similar experiences, demands, and resources.

Implications for Policies:

• Service members who deploy should be provided with supports to help buffer the negative impact of deployment on young children.

Avenues for Future Research:

• Future research should investigate the concentric circles of individual, family, and community supports that buffer individuals against the effects of deployment-related stress.
• Future research should investigate the effects of deployment on child attachment at developmentally critical milestones.
• Future research is needed to determine the contribution of young children’s responses during parental deployment to the retention decisions of their parents.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.
For additional information, please visit http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu
Methodology:
- In this correlational study, military families were surveyed at two separate time points (3-4 months into the deployment and 4-6 weeks after the soldier returned home from deployment). For comparison purposes, families were divided into three groups: no-deployment group (n = 14 families), single deployment group (n = 21 families), and multiple deployment group (n = 22 families). Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) compared symptoms of children in these three groups.
- This study focused on active duty Army families.

Participants:
- Parents from 57 military families with at least one young child provided survey data. On average, parents were 29 years of age and children were between 0 and 47 months of age.
- Gender and ethnic composition was not specified.

Limitations:
- Conclusions based on a non-random, self-selected sample may not be representative of the larger population. Those who participated may have been functioning better (or worse) than those who did not participate.
- Without control variables, it is not possible to determine whether the few effects that were found resulted from other causes.
- Constructs may not have been properly defined as the researchers used non-standardized scales; this may have caused some effects to appear as non-significant.

Assessing Research that Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Design and Sample</th>
<th>Quality Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was…. | Not applicable because authors do not discuss design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Quality Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were… | Not applicable because authors do not discuss methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>Quality Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The limitations of this study are… | Not applicable because authors do not discuss limitations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implications</th>
<th>Quality Rating:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are… | Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications.

Overall Quality Rating: Excellent (★★★)