



The impact of military deployment experiences on child social development

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This study explores the impact of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in military parents on their children's mental health, with particular emphasis on externalizing behavioral conditions such as ADD/ADHD and conduct disorder (Bommersbach et al., 2022). It aims to broaden existing literature on the intergenerational influence of trauma from military parents, hypothesizing that such children may encounter difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships, as well as potential issues in parent-child functioning. We use the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) and multiple regression analysis to focus on these relationships in military deployed households. We anticipate that children may manifest symptoms of depression or aggression during deployment subsequently facing challenges in sustain friendships and communicating effectively with their military parent.

Prior research

- Military deployment increases the risk of attachment disturbance in young children (age 0-5) because at this age they are more vulnerable from prolonged separations from their deployed parent (Paris et al. 2010).
- Children with a deployed parent show increase in behavioral problems during deployment and increased attachment behaviors (clinginess, needing attention, asking about parent's absence) when reunited with deployed parent (Baker and Berry, 2009).
- Parents symptoms of PTSD influence the child's internalizing (depression, anxiety, etc) and externalizing behaviors (Creech and Misca, 2017).

Current efforts

We are focusing on intergenerational transmission of trauma to children from both military mothers and fathers. Using SAS to analyze data collected from the National Survey of Children's Health, we are able to see how these children are having a harder or easier time keeping relationships with their friends. Key variables include the child's difficulty making friends, the parents military status, child's mental health conditions, etc. Results found that children with parents that have deployed at least once may have trouble sustaining relationships with friend.

Prelim. results of transmission model (N = 57,912)

	β	SE	t	Pr > t
Military Families				
- Parent on active duty	0.115	0.03	4.51	***
- Parent is veteran	0.040	0.02	2.12	*
- Parent is reservist	0.021	0.02	2.37	*
- Parent never served		reference		
- Parent has deployment	0.667	0.02	3.69	***
Demographics				
- Child's age	0.009	0.00	14.38	***
Sex				
- Female	-0.012	0.00	-2.87	**
- Male		reference		
Race/Ethnicity				
- Hispanic	-0.043	0.01	-8/09	***
- Black(Non-Hispanic)	-0.077	0.01	-11.21	***
- Other (Non-Hispanic)	-0.035	0.01	-4.88	***
- White (Non-Hispanic)		reference		
Household Characteristics				
- Below FPL Poverty	-0.008	0.00	-3.52	***
Family structure				
- Two parents, currently married		reference		
- Two parents, not currently married	0.058	0.01	6.40	***
- Single Parent (mother or father)	0.033	0.01	6.12	***
- Grandparent Household	0.027	0.01	2.20	
- Other Family Type	0.071	0.02	4.09	***
Social Characteristics				
Sharing ideas and conversations that matter	-0.268	0.00	-73.58	***
Eating meals together	-0.024	0.00	-9.60	***
Constant	0.963	0.017	57.99	***

R² / adjusted R² 0.1070 / 0.1068
Data Source: 2020-2021 National Survey of Children's Health, Weighted.
Reference group is white, male, non-military household with two married parents.
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Key measures

J11 Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or the National Guard? *Mark ONE box.*

Never served in the military → SKIP to question J13

Only on active duty for training in the Reserves or National Guard → SKIP to question J13

Now on active duty

On active duty in the past, but not now

J12 Were you deployed at any time during this child's life?

Yes

No

G6 Compared to other children their age, how much difficulty does this child have making or keeping friends?

No difficulty

A little difficulty

A lot of difficulty

Key finding

- Compared to other children their age, children in military families are significantly more likely to have difficulty making or keeping friends.
- The effect size varies for active duty (0.115), veteran (0.040), and reservist (0.021) families compared to the general population.
- It is most pronounced, across the entire model, for families where at least one parent has had a deployment (0.667).



Next steps

Moving forward, I will continue finding literature on intergenerational transmission of trauma to veteran dependents to prepare to write a literature review and wrap our findings into a peer-reviewed publication. In addition, I will investigate how the secondary traumatic stress in the child may impact the parent-child relationship.

References

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