UNDERSTANDING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WITHIN A MILITARY CONTEXT

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Healthy human development involves a lifecourse marked by mutually beneficial exchanges between an individual and his or her context.

- Lerner, 2006
Presentation Overview

- Understand key factors related to youth development within a military context

- Highlight research findings regarding parental deployment during OEF/OIF and the impact on youth outcomes

- Examine the role that youth development programs play in promoting positive youth development
What do Youth Say About Parental Deployment?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44UDhn5Cbgw
Youth and the Military Context
Youth and Military Families

- Families face many common stressors
  - Child care issues
  - Parenting concerns
  - Developmental stage of children and adolescents

- Military families and youth also face some unique challenges and stressors
  - Frequent separation
  - Increased relocation
    - Communities, schools, social networks
  - Deployment of parent(s) and reintegration
  - Changing family roles
  - Safety of deployed parent
Deployment Affects Many Families

- First time in history that the number of military dependents outnumbers military Service members

- Deployment impacts Service members as well as their families

- Changing face of deployment
  - Higher number
  - Longer duration
  - Increased frequency
  - Women, single parent, and dual Service member families
Youth and the Impact of Deployment

- Children and youth may experience:
  - Feelings of loss
  - Anxiety and stress
  - Uncertainty regarding changing family roles
  - Concern for safety and return of deployed parent

- Small body of research on impact of parental deployment during recent conflicts
  - Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)
  - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)
Impact of Parental Deployment on Youth Outcomes
Forging the Partnership: Universities, Cooperative Extension, and DoD

- Funding from Department of Defense (DoD) and United States Department of Agriculture – National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA)

- University of Arizona: Military REACH
  - Multi-disciplinary approach to strengthening:
    - Military families
    - Helping professionals that support military families
    - Afterschool and youth development programs
    - All military branches, Guard, and Reserve
National Defense Authorization Act 2010 Section 571 requires that DoD

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the impact of parental deployment on children
- Highlight empirical findings to provide information for Congressional report
Report Objectives

To gather and evaluate existing literature on the impact of parental deployment during OEF and OIF on children, with a focus on three areas:

1. Impact of deployment on children;
2. Impact of multiple deployments on children; and
3. Impact that deployment of a military parent(s) has on risk factors (e.g., child abuse, child neglect, family violence, substance abuse by children, and parental substance abuse)
Special attention was also given to:

- **Age group of children:**
  - Pre-school age children;
  - Elementary school age children; and
  - Adolescents

- **Family composition:**
  - Service members with civilian spouses: two-parent families with only one parent in the Armed Forces;
  - Single parents: members who are single parents; and
  - Dual-military couples: parents who are both members and subject to dual deployments.
Review Methodology

- Gathered existing literature, using a variety of academic sources
- Reviewed relevant academic literature (28 studies)
  - Peer-reviewed articles were reviewed, including quantitative and qualitative studies and literature reviews
  - Coded study, participant, and military characteristics of each article
  - Evaluated methodologies, findings, and limitations of the studies
  - Developed framework for organization, based on outcomes
  - Examined buffering/exacerbating factors (e.g., race, age, sex)
Six Primary Outcomes Identified

- Internalizing behavior problems
  - Emotional problems
- Externalizing behavior problems
  - Acting out
- Academic adjustment
  - Falling grades
- Family problems
  - Child abuse, family functioning
- Peer problems
  - Friendships
- Physical health problems
  - Blood pressure
Internalizing Behavior Problems

• Deployment alone did not directly impact children’s internalizing behavior problems

• Deployment, in conjunction with other factors, impacted outcomes (Chandra et al., 2010; Lester et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009).

• Deployment and age:
  » For children ages 6 to 17 years, deployment was not related to emotional problems (e.g., Chandra et al., 2010a; Lester et al., 2010).
  » For Marine children ages 3 to 5 years, parental deployment was related to more emotional problems (Chartrand et al., 2008).

• Deployment and parent well-being:
  » Parent distress led to more emotional problems for children (Chandra et al., 2010a; Finkel et al., 2003; Lester et al., 2010)
Externalizing Behavior Problems

- Deployment alone did not directly impact children’s externalizing behavior problems.

- Deployment, in conjunction with other factors, impacted outcomes (Flake et al., 2009; Lester et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009).

- Deployment and age:
  - For younger children (under 5), experiencing parental deployment was related to more behavior problems, especially if it was not the first deployment (Barker & Berry, 2009; Chartrand et al., 2008).

- Deployment and parent well-being:
  - Parent distress led to more behavioral problems for children (Chandra et al., 2010a; Finkel et al., 2003; Lester et al., 2010).
Academic Adjustment

- Deployment was directly associated with experiencing more academic problems (Chandra et al., 2010a, 2010b; Engel et al., 2010).

- Deployment and age:
  - Being older was associated with more academic problems during both deployment and reunion for children of Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Service members (Chandra et al., 2010a).

- Deployment and parent well-being:
  - Decreased parent well-being was associated with less academic engagement for children (Chandra et al., 2010b).
Family Problems

- Parental deployment was directly associated with a higher likelihood of child maltreatment and neglect (Gibbs et al., 2007; McCarroll et al., 2008; Rentz et al., 2007).
  - Children between 2 and 12 years were at heightened risk (Gibbs et al., 2007; McCarroll et al., 2008; Rentz et al., 2007, 2008).

- Parental deployment was directly associated with increased family functioning problems (e.g., Barker & Berry, 2009; Huebner et al., 2007; Mmari et al., 2009).
  - Poorer parent well-being is associated with more family problems (Barker & Berry, 2009; Chandra et al., 2010a; Flake et al., 2009; Morris & Age, 2009).

- In a study on Navy families, parents were resilient, continuing to provide support to their children (Morris & Age, 2009).
Peer Problems

- Deployment alone did not directly impact children’s peer and social problems
- Deployment in conjunction with other factors impacted outcomes (Chandra et al., 2010a).
- Deployment and family functioning:
  - Poor family relationships and parent well-being were both related to more social problems for children (Chandra et al., 2010a; Finkel et al., 2003).
Physical Health Problems

- Parental deployment was related to higher Body Mass Index for Army adolescents (Davis & Treiber, 2007).
Limitations to Consider

- There is a lack of branch-specific research and research inclusive of all branches.
  - Limits the ability to draw conclusions about the impact of parental deployment on children across branches
- Few studies include a pre-deployment assessment or examine children over time
  - Limits the understanding of the relation between variables
  - Limits the ability to rule out alternative explanations
- In general, there are few studies in this area
  - Limits the ability to fully understand the impact of parental deployment on children
Report Conclusions

- Deployment is directly related to more academic problems, higher likelihood of child maltreatment, and increased family functioning problems.

- Deployment alone did not directly impact children’s internalizing or externalizing behavior problems. Instead, deployment, along with other variables (e.g., age, parent well-being), influenced child well-being.

- The impact of parental deployment is age-specific and the impact of age differs, depending on the type of outcome analyzed.

- Decreased parent well-being negatively magnified the effects of parental deployment on children.


Supporting Military Families: The Role of Youth Development Programs
Youth Development Programs: An Essential Part of Any Community

- Youth development programs offer:
  - A context for young people to interact in meaningful ways with peers and adults
  - Explore identity and social relationships
  - Gain skills and competencies

- Young people who grow up in communities that promote their positive development have:
  - A better understanding of their own values
  - Often become life long learners
  - Are actively engaged in their communities
  - Are more likely to promote the positive well-being of others
Youth Development Programs and Positive Developmental Outcomes

- Youth programs offer:
  - Structure
  - Consistency
  - Opportunity
  - Meaningful relationships with peers and non-familial adults

- Positive youth outcomes
  - Social, emotional, and life skills development
  - Academic achievement
  - Health and well-being
  - Civic engagement
Youth Development in Action: Operation Military Kids

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ageHn9zbhv0
What Do Youth Programs Need?

- Youth Development Programs must:
  - Be of high quality
  - Provide access to and sustain programming
  - Be intentionally designed and address the needs of participants
  - Have well trained, well prepared, and well compensated staff (youth development practitioners)
  - Develop and sustain partnerships with families, community organizations, governmental organizations, and schools
How Youth Programs Can Support Military Youth

- Deployment is directly related to more academic problems, higher likelihood of child maltreatment, and increased family functioning problems.

- Youth programs can provide consistency and structure, homework assistance, mentoring, leadership opportunities, and other intentional programming.

- Deployment along with other variables (e.g., age, parent well-being) influenced child well-being.

- Youth programs can provide age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for skill development and interaction with caring others.

- Decreased parent well-being negatively magnified the effects of parental deployment on children.

- Youth programs can provide opportunities for families to become involved, promote community engagement, and offer social support.
Thank You!
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