

THE EFFECT OF MILITARY DEPLOYMENT ON THE PARENT-CHILD
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MILITARY MEMBER AND THEIR
CHILD LESS THAN SIX YEARS OF AGE

A DISSERTATION

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BY

KIMBERLEE J. SPENCER, B.A., M.A.

DENTON, TEXAS

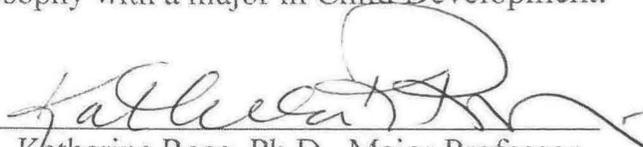
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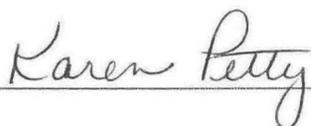
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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

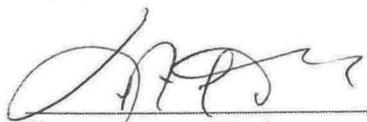
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kimberlee J. Spencer entitled "The Effect of Military Deployment on the Parent-Child Relationship between the Military Member and Their Child Less than Six Years of Age." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Child Development.


Katherine Rose, Ph.D., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:






Department Chair

Accepted:



Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

Oh, where to begin...If it weren't for the 3 most important people in my life I never would have dreamed I could do THIS! Jeff, Kayla, and Sean...what can I say? First, I love you. The 3 of you are my world and I am so thankful for each of you every day. Second, thank you. You all put up with "homework Sundays" for years while I struggled through reading journals and writing papers. You had "dinner on your own" so many times while I was in class and working on assignments. You supported me through everything and always provided encouragement. Jeff, you are the best husband ever! You kept telling me I could do this and you were right! You have supported me and encouraged me from the beginning. Kayla, my mini proof-reader, you read my papers for me and listened to me explain theories even though you had no idea what I was talking about! I am so proud of who you are and thankful for you every day. Sean...the day I came home from finishing my comprehensive exams you met me at my car door and said, "You never have to do that again!" You have no idea how much it means to me that you were so compassionate and understanding of what I was going through, but you're always that way. I love you guys more than words and this is all for you.

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To the mothers and fathers who defend our country with their lives, thank you for all you do and for sharing your perspectives with me.

ABSTRACT

KIMBERLEE J. SPENCER

THE EFFECT OF MILITARY DEPLOYMENT ON THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MILITARY MEMBER AND THEIR CHILD LESS THAN SIX YEARS OF AGE

AUGUST 2011

This dissertation applied a quantitative method to explore the perspectives of parents in the military about their relationship with their young children and their parental stress during reunification after deployment. In order to capture these perspectives, 107 participants completed an online survey containing a demographic questionnaire, the Child-Parent Relationships Scale (Pianta, 1992) and the Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective in which environmental systems interact to affect the developing individual, was used as a foundational theory for the study along with boundary ambiguity (Boss, 1999) and attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1978). Descriptive statistics, correlations, and MANOVAs were computed to examine relationships and significant differences between groups. Results revealed a relationship between scores on the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and the Parental Stress Scale. MANOVAs revealed significant group differences between mother and father in the military in their perception of parental stress and parent-child conflict. An

examination of mean scores for groups revealed a notable difference in perceived levels of conflict and stress for mothers and fathers as well as between members of different military branches.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the global war on terrorism more and more military members who are active duty, reservists, and National Guard have been deployed overseas. According to the National Military Family Association (2004) there are over 3 million active and Ready Reserve military family members and the number of children with a parent away on deployment has risen to over 700,000 since September 11, 2001 (American Psychological Association, 2007). Not only are more military members needed overseas, but the number and length of deployments are increasing as well. Lyle (2006) reported that one-third of the military service members that served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan had completed two overseas tours in 3 years.

These separations can have a profound impact on families (Chartrand, Frank, White, & Shope, 2008). It is possible that these separations may be associated with an uncertainty about family member roles, responsibilities, and relationships upon the deployed service member's return. Not only is the parent who is returning from deployment unsure of the daily routines, but the family left behind is unsure of how to integrate the returning parent. In order to facilitate positive family relationships and smooth integration of returning military members into their families' routines and relationships, it is important to better understand the relationship between deployed parents and their families. It is vital that we better understand the parent-child

relationship between these individuals and their young children. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the relationship between young children and their active duty military parents during reunification.

Statement of the Problem

There is little research on the relationship between active duty military parents and their young children during reunification. Military families with very young children may have different experiences, stresses, and needs than non-military families with young children (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003), or military families with older children. Caring for a two-year-old alone for 18 months while a spouse is deployed to a combat zone is likely very different than caring for a two-year-old alone while the spouse is on a business trip (MacDermid, Schwarz, Faber, Adkins, Mishkind, & Weiss, 2005) . These unique families also have different needs and experiences than military families with school-age or adolescent children. Very young children who are completely dependent on adults require a different level of attention and care than a more self-sufficient school aged child. Parents of these young children may get less sleep at night and may have less time to care for themselves than parents of adolescents. In order to provide appropriate support to military families with young children it is important to explore what their experiences are in relation to deployment and parenting those children.

According to the National Military Family Association (NMFA, 2005) more input is needed from military service members and their families to help guide the kind of support needed and to explore the effects of deployment. The findings of their study of 1,592 active duty and reserve military members and/or family members revealed that

military service members and their families desired family support from the armed forces throughout all phases of the deployment, including post-deployment (NMFA, 2005).

There are almost 500,000 children under the age of five years living in military families (Huebner, 2009). In these families, the child's parent or guardian experiences the stress of caring for young children while a parent/co-parent is deployed and account for 40% of the active duty population (Huebner, 2009). Research has illuminated some of the potential effects of deployment on young children, including possible emotional and behavioral difficulties that may not be apparent until up to one year after the deployed parent's return (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994). Barker and Berry (2009) conducted a survey of 57 military families during and after the military member's deployment. Participants in the study had a spouse recently deploy and had a child 0-47 months of age. The study included parent completion of two surveys regarding their child's behavior during and after the deployment. Barker and Berry (2009) found that parents' believed their child showed increased levels of behavioral problems. These behavior problems increased prior to the deployment if the child had previously experienced a parent's deployment. The study also examined the child's attachment behaviors during reunion and found that these behaviors increased. Some of the behaviors reported included refusing to sleep without the military member, lapses in toilet training, and the loss of authority for the military parent as disciplinarian (Barker & Berry, 2009). While this information raises alarms, it is unclear as to how much the deployment itself is associated with these outcomes due to the fact that little information is available on the relationship between the active duty military member and his or her young child.

The emotional cycle of post-deployment reunion has been defined by Mateczun and Holmes (1996) as return, readjustment, and reintegration. Reunion is defined as the physical return of the service member and includes homecoming rituals (Mateczun & Holmes, 1996). This can be considered a honeymoon period in which family members are focused on the excitement of the reunion (American Psychological Association, 2007). Readjustment involves recognizing the changes that have occurred in individuals during the separation. Reunion does not end at the service member's return and life does not always continue as before; these families have special circumstances and stressors that impact the parent-child relationship (Drummet, 2003). According to Mateczun and Holmes (1996), as well as Amen, Jellen, Merves, and Lee (1998), military members and their spouses frequently develop images in their minds of what the person will be like during the reunification process and many times their expectations are not met.

Lastly, the reunification process refers to accepting the changes that have occurred in individuals during separation. Mateczun and Holmes (1996) and Drummet (2003) provide clear descriptions of why the return, reunion, and reunification process may be laced with challenges; relationships include two people who are changing and after a separation (deployment) those people may not fit together the way they once did. It is logical to relate this process to the parent-child relationship. Family members may experience resentment toward the military member as individual levels of independence are changed. The military member may feel insecure about his or her place in the family or may have difficulty switching from combat mode to family mode (American Psychological Association, 2007). During reunification the parent returns home, the

parent and child recognize differences in one another that may not have been expected, and the parent and child must learn to accept those differences and move forward.

The current literature available regarding military families experiencing deployment includes children's adjustment to a parent's deployment. In 1998, Amen, Jellen, Merves, and Lee provided an explanation of the factors that most significantly affect children's adjustment to deployment which included the child's emotional development and stage of cognitive development. Amen et al (1998) also provide support for how the parent's emotional development and acceptance of the deployment affects the child's adjustment to deployment. Studies such as these show the importance of understanding and supporting children's development with regard to preparing for, and dealing with, military deployment; however, the research is lacking on how military members adjust to being parents during the reunification cycle.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore parental perspectives about their relationship with their young children during reunification and their level of parental stress. Military service members and their families have unique parenting experiences that necessitate understanding and support from the military, the community and family service providers. This study provides important insight for those who provide support to military families before, during, and after deployment. By using well-established measures (the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1992) and the Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995)) to explore parent's perspectives about their relationships with their children and their level of parental stress during reunification, researchers and

practitioners interested in assisting military families may gain a broader understanding of this potentially stressful process.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

When considering the effects of deployment on families and individuals there are several pertinent questions to be addressed. The following research questions guide this study:

Q1. How do active duty military members perceive the child-parent relationship during reunification as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale?

Q2. How do active duty military members perceive their level of parental stress during reunification as measured by the Parental Stress Scale?

Q3. Are perceptions of parenting stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale related to perceptions of the parent-child relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale?

It was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between the perspectives of active duty military members levels of parental stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale and the parent-child relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale.

Q4. Are there group differences among military members from different demographic groups (ethnicity, age of child, age of child during deployment, gender of child, gender of participant, total family income, education, branch of the military, rank,

type of deployment, number of deployments, and length of deployment) in their perspectives of the parent-child relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and their levels of parental stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale?

Hypothesis One

It was hypothesized that there would be statistically significant group differences in the perspectives of active duty military members who have completed only one deployment and military members who have completed more than one deployment in the parent-child relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and the Parental Stress Index.

Hypothesis Two

It was hypothesized that there would be statistically significant group differences in the perspectives of active duty military members who have completed a deployment lasting more than 3 months and military members who have completed a deployment lasting less than 3 months in the child-parent relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and the Parenting Stress Scale.

Hypothesis Three

It was hypothesized that there would be statistically significant group differences in the perspectives of active duty military members who have completed a deployment while their child was less than 3 years of age and military members who have completed a deployment while their child was over 3 years of age in the parent-child relationship as

measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and in their levels of parenting stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale.

Hypothesis Four

There will be statistically significant group differences in the perspectives of active duty military members who complete a non-combat related deployment and those who complete a combat-related deployment in the parent-child relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and their level of parenting stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale.

Definitions

The following definitions were used to inform the study:

Child-Parent Relationship Scale: A 15 question scale completed by parents regarding the parent-child relationship. The scale was developed in 1992 by Dr. Robert Pianta at the University of Virginia to examine closeness, dependency, and conflict between parent and child (Pianta, 1992).

Combat related deployment: Deployment to an unknown area for an unknown length of time in which there is a significant level of danger (Weins & Boss, 2006).

Cycle of deployment: Includes pre-deployment, mid-deployment, and post-deployment (NFMA, 2005).

Dependents: Family members of a uniformed service sponsor (active duty, reservists or retired) who are eligible to receive care through the Military Health System (American Psychological Association, 2007).

Deployment (unaccompanied): Relocation of forces to desired operational areas, families are not authorized to attend (DoD, 2008).

Dual military family: a family in which both parents are active duty military service members.

GWOT: Global War on Terror. Global efforts to address threats to national security, often involving military manpower and resources. GWOT began October 7, 2001 and includes U.S. Military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa the Philippines, and Colombia (DoD, 2008).

MilitaryOneSource: A Department of Defense program that provides on-line educational assistance, 24-hour phone consultation, and free brief counseling services to service members and their families (American Psychological Association, 2007).

Military service member: Any member of any branch of the military that is serving on active duty orders.

Non-combat related deployment: Deployment to a known area for a limited amount of time in which there is limited risk of danger (Weins & Boss, 2006).

OEF: Operation Enduring Freedom, The war in Afghanistan (American Psychological Association, 2007).

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom, The war in Iraq (American Psychological Association, 2007).

Operational: Activities in support of a military mission (American Psychological Association, 2007).

OPTEMPO: Operational Tempo is the pace of military operations and the ratio of time a unit spends at home to the time they are deployed (American Psychological Association, 2007).

Parent: An individual who is the legal custodian and primary caregiver of a child.

Parental Stress Scale: An 18 question scale completed by parents regarding levels of parental stress. The scale was developed in 1995 and includes both positive and negative aspects of parenthood (Berry & Jones, 1995).

Parent left-behind: An individual who shares custodial and caregiver responsibilities for a child but is not deployed.

Resilience: The ability to stretch or flex in response to everyday life stresses (Weins & Boss, 2006).

Assumptions

The single assumption of this study is the definition of parents and co-parents. It is assumed that each parent dyad consists of a mother and a father. Therefore, when a father is deployed it is assumed that the mother has been left behind to care for the child(ren). This study focuses on military families with a child less than six years of age, families with older children have been excluded due to the amount of research currently available on school age children and adolescents of military service members. In compliance with the U.S. military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy at the time that the data were collected (General Accounting Office, 1992), it is assumed that same-sex parents will not be represented in this study.

Summary

Since the start of the Global War on Terrorism there has been an influx of research on military families (Basham, 2008; Burrell, Adams, Briley, & Castro, 2006; Chapin, 2009; Palmer, 2008). These studies provide valuable information on the effects of deployment on marital relationships, family resiliency, children's behavior, and spouse employment.

During the years typically considered "early childhood" (birth through eight years of age) researchers have discussed the importance of attachments with caregivers and emotional development (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall 1978; Amen, Jellen, Merves, and Lee, 1988; Bowlby, 1969; Erikson, 1950). With that in mind, the importance of examining the active duty parent- child relationship during reunification is obvious. By using an ecological perspective and the theories of boundary ambiguity and attachment theory this study provides a picture of the effects of deployment on the parent-child relationship between active duty parents and a child less than six years of age.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents the literature available on military families and deployment. To begin, the theoretical perspectives used in this study are reviewed, followed by a discussion of the importance of relationships in children's development, the current demographics of the U.S. Military, and the effects of deployment on the child-parent relationship. By understanding the relationship between young children and their active duty parent during reunification professionals in the fields of early childhood and family studies can provide appropriate supports to individuals and families during this potentially difficult time.

Theoretical Perspectives

Multiple theoretical approaches, including the ecological perspective, boundary ambiguity, and attachment guide the proposed study. By examining the experiences of military families through these lenses it is possible to begin to understand the needs of these unique families. By utilizing a constructivist worldview the researcher acknowledges that participants create their own meaning which may allow the researcher to better describe the relationships between active duty parents and their young children and provide information that may impact family support programs.

Ecological Perspective

Bronfenbrenner (1979) introduced the ecological perspective as one in which all systems affect one another and individuals. The microsystem and the mesosystem have the most direct impact on individuals and include the family, peers, work or school environment and the interactions within these systems. According to Bronfenbrenner, individuals are strongly influenced by factors within the microsystems (systems in which individuals have direct interactions, such as school, home, child care center) and the mesosystem (the relationship between microsystems) in which they develop. They are indirectly influenced by the exosystem (parents' employers, the community and its available resources) and the macrosystem (larger societal factors such as cultural values, economic and political system, and policies).

For military families, micro-level relationships may be disrupted by deployment and re-unification in ways not experienced by other families. For example, the sheer fact that a parent may be required to leave the physical home for long periods of time may be disruptive to their relationship with his or her child(ren). Additionally, the media portrayal (a macro-level influence) of post-deployment reunion may set unrealistic expectations for a service member's return and when those expectations are not met, disappointment may set in and relationships can be stressed. For example, a study by Pittman, Kerpelman, & McFadyen (2004) using the ecological perspective explains that the more support military families feel they receive from the military command (an exo-level influence), the better they are able to adapt to military life overall. In turn, the better

the adaptation to military life, the more committed families become to the military service members' career, thus influencing their daily interactions at the micro-level.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) also adds that parents who do not have strong social networks (an exo-level factor for the child) may exhibit increased parental hostility and decreased responsiveness to their children's needs. These micro- and exo- level experiences may also influence the service members' perspectives about their role as a parent and their relationship with their children.

Boundary Ambiguity

Another perspective that compliments Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1986) in examining and understanding the unique realities of military families is offered by Boss (1999). According to Boss, the family is both a physical entity and a psychological entity which requires clarification and understanding. Boss (1999) defines family as an "intimate group of people whom we can count on over time for comfort, care, nurturance, support, sustenance, and emotional closeness" (p. 4). People who reside in the same home can be called family and even those who are in the same home may not be considered "family". With many potential family members it is important for individuals to identify who is in the family and who is not, but physical presence alone is not the determining factor, which is especially important when considering families with a deployed member.

Boundary ambiguity (Boss, 1977) is the term used to describe the feeling of not knowing who is in the family and who is not. Without knowing who is in the family and available for support, families cannot function normally (Boss, 1999; Kaplan & Boss,

1999; Madden-Derdich, 1999). One example may be a mother who is deployed overseas and physically unavailable but is still very involved with her family, as opposed to a mother who lives at home but is emotionally unavailable for her family. Many military families may experience boundary ambiguity both when a parent is deployed as well as when the parent returns from deployment. When a loved one is deployed, many families try to maintain a connection with that individual through email, phone calls, and packages (Weins & Boss, 2006). Many of these families work to maintain close connections despite the distance. The confusion occurs when the military member returns from deployment and the family must re-negotiate which parent holds which role and responsibility. For example, when a mother was left at home during deployment she had to take on new roles and responsibilities that were once her husband's. Now that he has returned the family must make adjustments to allow him to fully participate in the family. It is possible that young children may struggle with understanding the role of the active duty parent during reunification. Young children may be hesitant to approach the military member and prefer the comfort of the parent who has been physically present. According to Boss, until a balance has been reached boundary ambiguity may occur. This confusion may place additional stress on both parent-child relationships. It may also be important to consider the impact of the length of the deployment as well as the number of deployments completed during the child's early years.

In addition to the adjustments that must be made regarding daily household functioning, it is important to consider the lasting-effects of serving in the military during a time of war. Many military members who deployed during combat returned home and

began to face the trauma they may have experienced overseas (Basham, 2008). This additional stress may result in a disconnect between the military member and the family. This disconnect can greatly influence the micro-level interactions that children have with their parents, as well as add a layer of stress to the co-parenting relationship between the two parents all of which affect the child and his or her development.

Attachment

In addition to understanding how environmental influences, definitions of roles, and loss may influence developing families, it is also important to understand the types of relationships that grow between family members and how those are facilitated. Researchers such as Ainsworth (1978) and Bowlby (1973) have provided widely-held empirical research that arms professionals with the tools necessary to understand the types of attachment relationships that develop between children and adults. These seminal studies also provide information on attachment behaviors that can be directly observed to help us better understand them. The theories of both attachment and attachment behaviors continue to be supported by current research (see Madigan, Moran, Schuengel, Pederson, & Otten, 2007; Pauli-Pott, Haverkock, Pott & Beckmann, 2007). Attachment can be described as the strong bond between an infant and his or her primary caregiver (Ainsworth, 1978), and this feeling of dependency is usually developed between an infant and a primary person such as the mother (Bowlby, 1956). According to Bowlby, there are four phases in the development of attachment which include pre-attachment, attachment-in-the-making, clear-cut attachment, and the formation of a reciprocal relationship (Bowlby, 1969). The pre-attachment phase occurs from birth to 6

weeks of age. The newborn has innate signals to attract others. Once the infant receives attention additional skills are used by the infant to encourage the person to stay. Although incidents at this age can recognize their mother by her smell and voice they have not yet established an attachment to her. From 6 weeks to approximately 6-8 months infants are in the attachment-in-the-making phase during this stage infants show a preference to familiar caregivers. Infants also learn that their behavior can affect the behavior of others. This learning results from nurturing interactions with others. The phase of clear-cut attachments occurs between 6 and 8 months to 18 and 24 months. Some indicators of this phase are the appearance of separation and stranger anxiety. This can be seen when infants display distress at the departure of a trusted caregiver or at the presence of a stranger. As motor skills develop infants will not only verbalize distress but may also approach and cling to the caregiver. Additionally, during this phase children will establish the caregiver as a secure base to return to during play and exploration. The formation of a reciprocal relationship begins around 18 months and extends past 24 months. Mental representations and language development allow children to understand the departure and arrival of caregivers. This understanding reduces the distress caused when a caregiver leaves. Through this attachment process children develop expectations of attachment figures and these expectations are carried throughout the lifespan.

Bowlby (1969) also differentiates between attachment and attachment behaviors; attachment is the relationship and attachment behaviors are occurrences which draw caregivers to the child. Utilizing the strange situation procedure, Ainsworth (1978) and her colleagues attempted to define the quality of an attachment relationship by observing

attachment behaviors exhibited between children and their mothers. These researchers were able to identify four distinct styles of attachment which included secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-resistant, and insecure-disorganized. According to Craig and Dunn (2007) research has shown that learning as well as environmental circumstances help shape attachment bonds, but the most important and critical aspect is the quality of the attachment bond. Secure infants share an intense bond with their caregiver as a result of responsive care while insecurely attached infants have received unresponsive or unpredictable parenting (Ainsworth, 1978). John Bowlby (1973) theorized that early attachment experiences support infants in creating beliefs and expectations about relationships, the world, and themselves. These beliefs are considered “internal working models” (p237) which are carried throughout the individual’s life. A child with a secure attachment believes he is worthy of care and affection (Egeland & Erickson, 1999) while a child with an insecure attachment is at risk for future behavior problems (Pauli-Pott, Haverkock, Pott & Beckmann, 2007) and possible psychopathology (Madigan, Moran, Schuengel, Pederson, & Otten, 2007). Based on his observations, Bowlby (1973) believed that when children are separated from important attachment figures the child may become depressed, anxious, and demonstrate aggressive behaviors. This becomes particularly important when discussing military families, who may have a primary caregiver deployed, thus separating the child from an important attachment figure for prolonged periods of time due to length of deployment or frequency of deployment.

Numerous studies have documented the effects of paternal absence on children (see Angrist & Johnson IV, 2000; Bach, 1946; Blount, Curry, Lubin, & Blount, 1992;

Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson, 2003; Burrell, Adams, Briley Durand, & Castro, 2006; Ghafoori, Hierholzer, Howsepian, & Boardman, 2008; Hill, 1949; 1952) which included increased behavioral problems, aggression, and problems with peer relationships. Citing the work of Bowlby (1973) and Robertson (1971), Applewhite and Mays (1996) further explain that the length of paternal separation affects the child's adjustment to the separation as does the child's relationship with an available and responsive mother. A child's ability to cope with the separation is partly determined by the parent's ability to cope and to protect the child from the stress (Huebner, 2009). In her study of military families, Huebner (2009) developed a theory of attachment systems and adjustment as they relate to military deployment (see Figure 1). According to this theory the spousal relationship directly impacts the adjustment of the spouse who is left behind during deployment. That adjustment directly impacts the attachment of that parent to the child and the family's adjustment to deployment. This model provides a framework for thinking about how attachment can affect the experiences of children in military families who experience deployment.

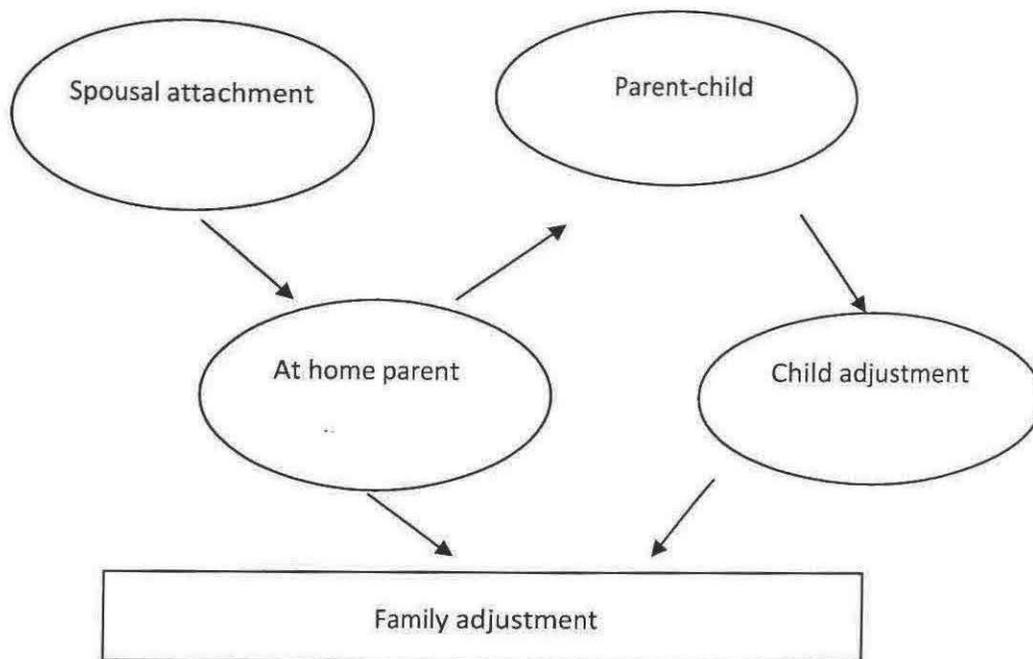


Figure 1. Huebner's theory of attachment systems

Research also shows that the quality of care an infant receives directly impacts attachment. Sensitive caregiving is a prime factor in secure attachments and according to Van Ijzendoorn (1995) the mother's attachment history is a primary factor affecting her interactions with the child. In other words, mothers with secure attachment relationships promote securely attached relationships by responding promptly, consistently, and appropriately to the child's cues and needs. Life events can both positively and negatively affect how a parent interacts with his or her child, which can in turn affect how the child relates to the parent, ultimately affecting the style of attachment (Elder, 1998). Thus, micro-level influences seem to be crucial to the development and formation of attachment relationships.

Many things can affect a child's attachment. In fact, a great deal of research exists supporting the idea that children of depressed mothers may show developmental lags and

experience attachment issues (Kiernan & Huerta, 2008; Petterson, 2001; Roberts, 1989). Caregivers who experience a traumatic event such the injury or loss of a loved one may inadvertently provide poor quality interactions due to a depressed emotional state. Other life events such as unemployment, marital difficulties and financial stress can also impact attachment (Lewis, Feiring, & Rosenthal, 2000; Waters, Hamilton, & Weinfield, 2000). Children in these situations may feel a sense of insecurity and this type of environment may result in limited positive interactions between caregiver and child and affect the child's attachments. It is clear that both micro- and exo-level influences may be important to the quality of the attachment relationship between parents and children. A spouse's deployment overseas may be considered a life event which may negatively affect a parent's emotional state.

There are many factors that affect how parents and children connect during reunification in the cycle of deployment. From boundary ambiguity to the importance of secure attachments between parent and child there are numerous constructs to consider when trying to understand the impact of deployment on families. By applying the lens of the ecological perspective to theories of attachment and boundary ambiguity it may be possible to better understand the relationship between active duty military parents and their young children during reunification. In addition to these theories on the impact of deployment on families it is important to examine the developmental stages of children as they adjust to deployment and the effects of deployment on specific parenting behaviors.

Child Development and Parenting

Researchers have provided families with key ingredients for optimal development in young children, some of which include positive and nurturing relationships, responsive interactions, respect, routines and repetition (Seibel, Britt, Gillespie, & Parlakian, 2006). In fact, according to Parlakian and Seibel (2002), “All children are born wired to form relationships. In fact, establishing a close, nurturing bond with a primary caregiver is a major developmental task for infants and toddlers and one that is fundamental to future development” (p. 5). These nurturing bonds and supportive relationships can protect against the effects of stress (Siegel, 1999). The ability to develop secure attachments is one of the key developmental milestones in infancy (Volling, McElwain, Notaro, & Herrera, 2002).

Physical and Emotional Availability

Researchers at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2002) conducted a study of 813 children who were in child care at least 10 hours per week. Mothers completed interviews when the child was one month of age, and the family environment and childcare settings were measured when the children were 6, 15, 24, 36, and 54 months of age. Through observational quality assessments of the child care program the study found that the quality of caregiving is a strong predictor of the child’s cognitive and social competence (NICHD, 2002). For child care environments quality was measured by child-staff ratios and teacher education while maternal caregiving was scored by sensitivity, access to resources, and parenting style. Some characteristics of quality parental caregiving include supportive, warm, and engaged

parents and responsive, sensitive care. However, Nievar and Becker (2008) remind parents that sensitivity and stimulation are not synonymous and too much stimulation can hinder an infant's emotional development. Again, the importance of positive parent – child interactions are stressed in relation to children's development.

Attachment security has been shown to be an indicator of the parent-child relationship which develops from parenting behaviors (Brown, McBride, Shin, & Bost, 2007). Bowlby (1969) explained that attachment security is the child's way of demonstrating confidence in his or her caregiver. When children feel a secure connection with a caregiver they are more likely to explore their environments which can lead to increased physical, cognitive, and emotional development. This secure attachment develops during early parent-child interactions such as a parent's warm and sensitive response to the child's needs (Brown et al., 2007)

Attachment relationships and behaviors have been studied in a variety of contexts including adult and child attachment (Ghafoori, Hierholzer, Howsepian, & Boardman, 2008; Medway, Davis, Cafferty, & Chappell, 1995). In 1951, Stolz interviewed 19 military veterans and their families regarding military separations and found that when mothers are separated from their infant the child is more likely to be fearful, nervous, and worried in later childhood. Stolz (1951) also concluded that when the separation occurs during early childhood, the children develop a fear that the mother will never return. In contrast to the effects of maternal separation on children the effects of parental separation were less harmful if the mother sheltered her child from her own fears and stresses. Seplin (1952) continued to research the effects of parental separation on children by

interviewing 86 children of military families. The study showed that children who were separated from their father during early childhood had closer relationships to their mother than did children who were not separated from their father. Another significant finding of the study was the increase in problematic behavior among children who were separated from their fathers. According to Seplin (1952) this problematic behavior was more prevalent in boys than in girls. Researchers have continued to examine the effects of separation and attachment since World War II (see Applewhite & Mays, 1996; Brown, 2007; Volling et al. 2002) including paternal involvement.

Brown et al. (2007) conducted a study of father's involvement and the father-child attachment security. The goal of the study was to examine how father involvement and fathering quality contribute to father-child attachment security. The study focused on children who were two years of age, living with both biological parents, and enrolled in a child care program. The families of 46 children who met the criteria completed a self-report and interview, participation of laboratory setting activities, and provided access for researchers to complete observations in the families' homes. The self-report and interview required fathers to recall their activities in detail for the most recent work day and non-work day to examine father-child interaction and the father's availability to the child. A modified Parental Responsibility Scale was also used to measure parental involvement in daily activities and was completed by the mothers and the fathers. During the lab setting the father and child were given tasks that were challenging for the child to complete such as puzzles and blocks. The home observations consisted of

implementation of the Attachment Behavior Q-set conducted for two hours by trained observers.

The results of the study showed that when fathers demonstrated positive parenting behaviors the amount of father involvement had little impact on father-child attachment security (Brown, et al., 2007). However, when fathers demonstrated “less desirable” parenting behaviors the amount of father involvement contributed to a less-secure father-child attachment security (Brown et al., 2007). In summary, according to this study positive parenting behaviors have a greater impact on father-child attachment security than the amount of father involvement. This study can provide reassurance to military families, even if the father is deployed and spends less time with the child the father and child can still have a secure attachment if the time they do spend together is positive. It can also be a warning to military family support programs to continue to provide parenting education programs that identify and promote positive parenting practices.

In addition to understanding the effects of the father-child attachment it is important to examine the role of parents’ emotional availability in attachment and children’s ability to self-regulate. Research has shown that in order for very young children to develop the skills necessary to express and regulate their own emotions a supportive caregiving environment must exist (Volling et al., 2002).

Building on Biringen and Robinson’s definition of emotional availability as parental sensitivity and non-intrusiveness, Volling et al. (2002) conducted a study to explore the differences in emotional availability among mother and infant and father and infant relationships. By observing mother-infant and father- infant interactions the

researchers examined the infant's focused attention and the parent's emotional availability at 12 months of age in relation to the child's compliance at 16 months of age.

This study of 62 infants and their parents showed that fathers were less emotionally available than mothers and infants showed greater emotional competence when with emotionally available fathers (Volling et al., 2002). Based on the tasks observed during the study the researchers also found that parents are more emotionally available during "teaching" activities than free play but infants show more positive affect during free play rather than "teaching" activities. Lastly, the researchers found that in families with mothers who were emotionally available and infants who sought parental attention there was an increase in the child's compliance at 16 months of age. This research is important as professionals prepare military families to complete the transition of reunification as smooth as possible by promoting positive parenting behaviors.

Children's Development

The studies cited above demonstrate the impact parent-child attachment relationships and emotional availability can have on children's development. It is equally important to examine some parenting behaviors that can impact a child's development. According to Maccoby and Martin (1983) parenting can be defined in terms of warmth (affection and behavioral response) and control (demandingness and asserting power to achieve compliance). Numerous studies have reported that stressful life events can negatively impact the mother-child relationship and maternal responsiveness (Belsky, 1984; Vaughn, Egeland, Sroufe, & Waters, 1979). The study conducted by Roberts (1989) of 35 two-parent families with children ages 3 to 5.8 years implemented home

observations, parent completed questionnaires, and the Preschool Behavior Q-sort to examine the effects of stress and social networks on parenting behaviors and children's competence. Roberts (1989) findings indicate that the effects of stress and social networks on parenting are diminished when the stress is perceived as "low" and social networks are present. However, for families who experience high levels of stress and do not have strong social networks the impact on parenting is evident. Additionally, the researchers agreed that social support that includes both friends and family is most beneficial (see also Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

The importance of adopting an ecological perspective in examining relationships within a family is evident in this study as the results show that the amount of emotional support a wife receives from a husband can be a predictor of children's cooperative behavior in preschool (Roberts, 1989). Awareness of the interactions between the microsystem and mesosystem and its effect on children's development is critical in exploring the effects of deployment on young children in military families.

Parental Emotional and Mental Health

There is evidence that parental mental and emotional health may also influence their relationships with their child(ren). It has been hypothesized that mothers who experience depression and/or economic hardships may display less nurturing and responsive parenting behaviors thus negatively effecting children's cognitive and emotional well-being (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007; Kiernan & Huerta, 2008; Petterson, & Albers, 2001). By using data previously collected as part of the Millennium Cohort Study in the United Kingdom, Kiernan & Huerta (2008) used structural equation

modeling to analyze data on 13,877 children in order to further understand the effects of maternal depression and economic hardship on children's development. The researchers found that children of mothers who are depressed demonstrate more externalizing behavior problems than children whose mothers are not depressed. Mothers who suffered from depression were found to use harsher discipline methods, have a less positive relationship with their child, and spend less time on reading activities with their child (Kiernan & Huerta, 2008). One positive note from the study was the finding that maternal depression was not associated with children's cognitive development (Kiernan & Huerta, 2008). The findings of this study add to the literature on the effects of parenting styles on children's well-being by highlighting the effects of parental accessibility as well as parenting quality. Armed with this information, professionals can prepare military families to focus on quality parent-child interactions despite distance and limited physical contact.

Discipline practices and affection can affect children's social behavior (Knafo & Plomin, 2006). While applying Maccoby & Martin's (1983) definition of warmth and control Knafo and Plomin (2006) discuss how positive affect and discipline from the parent positively impacts the child's social behavior and how, conversely, negative affect and discipline negatively effects the child's social development. The Knafo and Plomin (2006) study examined previously collected data from the Twins Early Development Study in England and Wales from 1994-1996. The sample for the study included 9,319 twin pairs and data was collected when the children were 18 months, and 2, 3, 4, and 7 years of age. This data collection included parent responses of children's behavior for

periods 18 months, and years 2 through 4. Data collection at age 7 included a parent and a teacher report of the child's prosocial behavior. The researchers (Knafo & Plomin, 2006) found a relationship between parenting and prosocial behavior in that positive parenting was positively correlated to prosocial behavior and negative parenting was negatively correlated to prosocial behavior. Again, the implications of this study on military families who are at risk for experiencing high levels of stress is significant as professionals work to support families in dealing with stress and maintaining positive interactions with their children.

Numbers of Military Families

Before examining the effects of deployment on children and families and to examine those effects through the lens of research based theories it is necessary to be aware of how many children and families are affected by these deployments. Of the nearly 3 million active duty and reserve military members, 1.5 million military members have deployed since September 11, 2001. One-third of those have served at least two tours in a combat zone, 70,000 have completed three tours, and 20, 000 have completed five tours (APA, 2007). According to Orthner (2003), 90% of Army spouses surveyed had been separated from their spouse for at least one week in the previous year and 33% were separated for at least 17 weeks in the previous year. Of those deployed military members, 58% have family responsibilities (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009). The 1.5 million active duty military members have approximately 1.8 military dependents of which 1.2 million are children and adolescents under the age of 23 and 40% of those are under 5 years of age (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009). The

900,000 reserve members have nearly 700,000 dependent children (APA, 2007). The number of young children impacted by military deployment is staggering. It is clear from these statistics that studies are needed to further understand the effects of deployment and how to develop effective programs that will support young children and their families during this life course event.

Effects of Deployment on Children

The stressful time of military deployment may be perceived as a life course event that impacts the future of each individual. While no one argues the importance of a mother in a child's life, research offers compelling evidence for the significance of the father's influence as well (see Applewhite & Mays, 1996), a relationship that frequently receives less focus and less influence than that with the mother. A study by Applewhite and Mays (1996) included children ages 4-18 years of age whose parent was active duty military. Participants completed two questionnaires to understand the child's experience with parental separation. Of the 288 participating children, 139 had a mother in the military and 149 had a father in the military. The researchers found that children who were separated from their mothers experienced the same effects as children who are separated from their fathers (Applewhite & Mays, 1996). Knowing that children do not experience more severe effects when their mother is deployed may provide relief for active duty military mothers who may feel additional pressure by being a mother who must leave her child for her career, but also highlights the importance of understanding the father-child relationship as well.

Children's Behavior During and After Deployment

Despite the reassurance the Applewhite and Mays (1996) study may have provided it is important to examine the effects of deployment on children's behavior. In fact, recent studies offer the finding that young children who are separated from their parent may exhibit problematic behavior (Amato, 2001; Chartrand, Frank, White, and Shope, 2008). Chartrand et al. (2008) asked participating parents and child care providers to complete various surveys regarding the child's behavior as well as parent completed measures of stress and depression. The study of 169 children found that children age 3 years or older with a deployed parent have more negative behaviors than their same-age peers who do not have a deployed parent. Some of the negative behaviors included anxiousness, depression, withdrawal, attention difficulties, and aggression. Additional findings were that children of deployed parents demonstrated higher levels of emotional and behavioral difficulty than children not in families with deployed parents; these children also expressed more anxiety and reported more trouble with school work (Chartrand et al. 2008). The results found more difficulties for children in reserve families who have greater trouble interacting with peers and teachers and increased difficulties during reunification (Chartrand et al. 2008). These findings related to children's emotional development support the assertion that a child's emotional development is one of the significant keys to a child's adjustment to parental absence (Amen et al, 1988; Stadelmann, Perren, Groenben, & von Klitzing, 2010).

Concerns regarding the behavioral effects of deployment on children have prompted agencies such as Zero to Three (see Egeland, 1999; Zeanah & Zeanah 2001) to

compile a list of possible behaviors that may be seen in very young children who are experiencing stress. Those behaviors may include: increased clinginess, crying and whining, increased fear of separation from parents or primary guardian, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, and a regression to earlier behaviors, like frequent nighttime awakenings and thumb sucking (Zero to Three, 2003).

In addition to the potential behavioral effects of deployment on young children researchers such as Amen et al. (1988) have expressed the need for a cautionary attitude regarding reunification of the deployed military member and his or her child. Amen et al. (1988) illustrate the passionate planning that goes into reunion following deployment and then reminds readers of the reality of reunification. These kinds of expectations can be a source of stress for all family members. According to Amen et al. (1998) some preschool children may be pleased their parent is home and become clingy while others may be avoidant and distant. School-age children may be happy about the parent's return yet feel threatened by someone interfering with his or her time with the parent who was left behind.

For example, a study of 116 Army spouses with a deployed military member and a child between the ages of 5 and 12 years found that 56% of these children had trouble sleeping, 39% are at-risk of internalizing behaviors, 14% had difficulties in school, and parents believed their children are at increased risk for psychosocial difficulties (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009). However, the study also found that parental college education was correlated to reduced reports of behavioral difficulties. For some families these behavioral changes can become significant problems if left unaddressed. By being

informed before, during, and after deployment parents, families, and professionals can be prepared to face these types of issues and support healthy family functioning.

Effects of Deployment on Families

It is also important to look at the effects of deployment on families as a whole unit. It is not hard to imagine the changes in parenting style that may take place when a parent is on deployment. For both the deployed parent and the parent left behind it may be difficult to maintain the previous routines and expectations for children. According to Kelley (1994), some military wives felt overwhelmed during the military member's deployment and be more willing to concede to the children's requests. Still others may become overprotective or possibly less patient with their children's behavior.

Kelley (1994) hypothesized that mothers and children would have a greater increase in relational difficulties prior to a military member's deployment than at any other time of the deployment cycle. The researcher interviewed 61 women who had children ages 5-13 years whose father had completed a 6-7 month deployment. The results of the Kelley (1994) study showed that family interaction and child behavior were most affected by work-related separation rather than mother's behavior.

Some additional findings were that families with younger school-age children have less organization during deployment than do families with older school-age children; mothers of girls were more consistent in discipline practices and had higher occurrences of reasoning than did mothers of boys; children's behavior improved when the deployed father returned; and the time immediately preceding deployment was the most difficult for children.

This study by Kelley (1994) highlights the association between family functioning, maternal behavior, and children's behavior. The findings suggest adults recognize the challenges children face when a parent is deployed and have access to additional support and resources to help children. Counseling and other similar interventions are recommended for children and families experiencing deployment.

Research has also been conducted to examine the different effects of maternal and paternal deployment on children. Bey and Lange (1974) found that fathers who were separated from their children experienced challenges in family communication, disappointment in missing their child's developmental milestones, lack of authority within the family, and difficulty maintaining parent-child attachments. Mothers who deployed also experience separation anxiety and stress around the need to depend on the father to care for the child alone (Kelley, Herzog-Simmer, & Harris, 1994). A literature review conducted by Lincoln, Swift, and Shorteno-Fraser (2008) discussed findings of previous research conducted in the area of military families; however this review neglects to examine the number and length of military deployments and how that may also affect children's behavior. A notable reminder was of the challenges families face when a parent returns from deployment. Each family member must make accommodations for other members of the family and roles must be adjusted. According to Mmari et al. (2009) adjusting to new roles and responsibilities is one of the greatest challenges throughout the cycle of deployment. Every area of family functioning is impacted by this return which may result in unexpected difficulties.

Additionally, a mother's ability to adjust to her spouses' deployment is related to her relationship with her spouse while the adjustment of a child to a parent's deployment is related to his or her relationship to the mother. The mother's intentional parenting is dependent on the support she receives from her deployed spouse (Huebner, 2007), a clear example of the ecological perspective at work. Jensen (1996) describes the child's coping as a mirror effect of the parent. If the parent-left-behind is depressed and anxious the child will be also (Palmer, 2008).

A survey of military families by the American Psychological Association (2007) also suggests that military members that are in lower pay grades are at greater risk for experiencing financial difficulties which may increase the level of stress in the family and in turn negatively affect parental availability and involvement. This study offers significant findings that indicate a need to examine the demographic variables at play in the parent-child relationship and stress levels during reunification.

In studying the effects of deployment on families it is important that we not forget the experiences of the military member. Military members who have deployed as part of the Global War on Terrorism often experience mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety. Studies have shown that these symptoms may increase in the months following reunion (Grieger et al., 2006; Hoge et al., 2004). A study of 3,339 active duty men and women found that longer deployments and first time deployment resulted in higher stress scores for men on the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale and the Post Traumatic Stress Scale (Adler, Huffman, Bliese, & Castro, 2005). The Adler et al. study also found that men's reported levels of depressive and post-traumatic symptoms

increased as the deployment progressed whereas women's reported symptoms maintained a relatively consistent level.

Additionally, a report by the Institutes of Medicine (2006) found that the length of time that an individual is exposed to combat-related stress is directly related to that individual's mental health. These types of feelings may adversely affect the parent-child relationship during reunification. Parents who compete with one another for their child's attention may in fact diminish the child's sense of security in the parent-child relationship (Caldera & Lindsey, 2006).

Deficiencies in Current Research Efforts

Several studies on the effects of deployment on adolescents have been conducted (Barnes, Davis, & Treiber, 2007; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass & Grass, 2007; Mmari, et al., 2009). While these studies have contributed to the field by providing information on adolescent's increase in boundary ambiguity, symptoms of depression and anxiety, and relationship conflict with their deployed parents (Huebner, et al., 2007) as well as higher heart rates and blood pressure (Barnes, Davis, & Treiber, 2007), the effect of deployment on adolescents is qualitatively different than it's affect on young children primarily due to the adolescent's developing autonomy and independence (Mmari, et al., 2009). Young children (and especially infants) face the challenge of forming and fostering a secure attachment relationship with the deployed parent; developmental tasks that have their critical periods seated in early childhood. Therefore, it is important that researchers investigate this age group as well when examining the influences of deployment on parent-child relationships.

Summary

Despite the research available on military families there remains a gap in examining the effects of these deployments on the parent-child relationship during reunification. While researchers have provided information on how school-age children and adolescents respond to separations and reunifications there is little information on very young children's response and coping. Kelley's et al. (2007) participant evaluation of a parent support program acknowledges the importance of finding out what military families actually need rather than what policy makers assume they need. The survey by the National Military Family Association (2005) further reinforces the need for listening to military service members and their families. It is clear from this review of the literature that military families, especially those with deployed family members, face unique challenges to the parent-child relationship that need to be better understood. Through a multi-theory approach, this study seeks to answer the following questions.

Research Questions

The study will explore the parent-child relationship of active duty military members and his or her young child during reunification. The following research questions guide the study:

Q1. How do active duty military members perceive the child-parent relationship during reunification as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale?

Q2. How do active duty military members perceive their level of parental stress during reunification as measured by the Parental Stress Scale?

Q3. Are perceptions of parenting stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale related to perceptions of the parent-child relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale?

Q4. Are there group differences among military members from different demographic groups (ethnicity, age of child during deployment, gender of participant, total family income, education, branch of the military, rank, type of deployment, number of deployments, and length of deployment) in their perspectives of the parent-child relationship as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and their levels of parental stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale?

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Young children are being impacted by military deployment than ever before (NMFA, 2004). With an increase in the number and lengths of military deployment it is important to examine how these deployments affect young children and the parent-child relationship. Research has shown the importance of the early childhood years on children's development including attachment relationships to caregivers (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Erikson, 1950). The purpose of this study was to examine parental perceptions of their relationship with their young children during reunification.

Methodology

Due to the increase in number and length of military deployment due to the Global War on Terrorism (NMFA, 2004) it is necessary to explore deployed parents' perceptions of their relationship with their child(ren) upon their return home. This quantitative study was based on a multi-theoretical foundation which includes an ecological perspective, boundary ambiguity, and attachment theory. By utilizing a constructivist worldview (Creswell & Clark, 2007) the researcher explored the parent-child relationship between an active duty military member and his or her young child during reunification in order to provide information to impact family support programs.

Participants

According to a power analysis, 325 participants were needed for the study. Due to the strict regulations regarding research participation by military members the researcher was unable to achieve the desired number of participants. Therefore, the study proceeded with 107 participants who were active duty military service members with children between 6 weeks and 6 years of age at the time of their deployment reunification. Participants were initially recruited from Naval installations in Texas, Virginia, and Florida; however due to the nature of the online survey the geographical location of all participants is not known. The study provides information regarding military members from all military branches and all ranks.

Institutional Review Board

Prior to commencing this study, all procedures and methodology were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas Woman's University. This insured that all participants were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation, of their ability to decline to continue in the study at any time, and the protection of their confidentiality. The participants were required to complete the questionnaires online via PsychData ©, which required participant consent before access to the measure was granted.

Measures

A questionnaire developed by the researcher was administered in order to gather basic demographic information about the individual participant, his or her experience in the military, and his or her child (ren) (see Appendix A). This included information about the participant's age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, marital status, military

affiliation and rank, deployment history, child's age at deployment, child's gender, and household income.

In addition to the demographic questionnaire, the Child-Parent Relationship Scale © (Pianta, 1992) (please see Appendix B) was administered. This is a widely-used quantitative measure with well-established reliability and validity developed to examine the relationship between a parent and child. This measure includes 15 questions on a five point scale: (1) definitely does not apply, (2) not really, (3) neutral/not sure, (4) somewhat applies, and (5) definitely applies. By using the Child-Parent Relationship Scale the researcher quantified the perspectives of parents who have experienced a military deployment in regard to the relationship they have with their child. The scores from the Child-Parent Relationship Scale are divided into two subscales: conflicts and positive aspects of the relationship. Additionally, the Parental Stress Scale © (Berry & Jones, 1995) (please see Appendix C) was completed by the participants. This is a quantitative measure developed to assess the amount of stress experienced by mothers and fathers in relation to parenting. Participants were asked to answer each of the 18 items on a five point scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Higher scores indicate a higher level of stress related to the area of parenting. The Parental Stress Scale has an internal reliability of .83 and a test-retest reliability of .81 (Berry & Jones, 1995). Completion of the Parental Stress Scale allowed the researcher to examine the perspectives of military parents with regards to everyday parenting experiences.

Independent Variables

The independent variables used in this study were: ethnicity of participant, age of focal child during deployment, gender of participant, participant's total family income level, participant's educational level, participant's relationship to the military, participant's rank, and type, and length of military deployment.

Ethnicity. Respondents indicated their ethnicity on the demographic questionnaire. Based on the race categories from the 2000 U.S. Census (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001), the following categorical variables were used: White, Black or African American, Spanish/Latina/Hispanic, Asian, and Other (with a blank available to fill in ethnicity).

Age of child. Information about the age of the child was gathered from the item on the demographic questionnaire asking for the age of the child. In cases in which there is more than one child, a distinction was made between children (i.e., appoint a focal child) to help parents focus their answers on one specific age group, by asking them to think about their oldest child under 6 years of age as they completed the questionnaire. The participant indicated the age of the focal child in months. For statistical analyses requiring categorical variables, the categories for children's age were created as follows (in months): Infants: 0-12, Toddlers: 13-30, Preschoolers: 31-60.

Gender of participant. Information about the gender of the participant was obtained from the item 4 on the demographic questionnaire asking for the gender of the participant.

Income level. Participants were asked to indicate their total annual household income for question eleven. On the demographic questionnaire incomes were listed as follows: Up to \$28,000, \$28,001 - \$34,000, \$34,001 - \$44,000, \$44,001 - \$55,000, \$55,001 - \$70,000, and \$70,001 and up. These income levels have been created by the Department of the Navy to determine payment categories for families who utilize the Navy Child and Youth Programs. For statistical purposes and due to the small sample size, the income levels were categorized according to the US Census Bureau's Median Household income for States (2009) in the following manner: Low: < \$34,000, Middle: \$34,001 - \$55,000, \$55,001 - \$70,000, and High: > \$70,001.

Educational level. For item number 3 on the demographic questionnaire, respondents indicated the highest educational level they have achieved ranging from high school diploma to an earned doctorate. Categories include High school diploma/GED, some college, 2-year degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, and doctorate degree. For statistical purposes education levels were compressed into the following three categories: High School: High school Diploma/GED/some college, College Degree: Bachelor's degree, Graduate Degree: Master's degree, Doctoral degree.

Participant relationship to the military. Participants were asked to indicate which branch of the military they are a member of as well as their current rank in item six of the demographic questionnaire by choosing one of the following: Army, Navy, Air force, Marines, National Guard, and Reserves; and E1 – E4, E5 – E9, or O1 – O4.

Type and length of military deployment. Participants were asked to indicate the length of their deployments and the type (combat or non-combat) of their deployments in the focal child's lifetime in items eight, nine, and ten of the demographic questionnaire.

Dependent Variables

This study examined the association of the above independent variables with the following dependent variables: parents' perceptions of the child-parent relationship during reunification and parents' perceptions of the stress of being a parent during reunification.

Parent's perceptions of the child-parent relationship. By utilizing the information obtained from the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1992) portion of the survey, the researcher examined this continuous variable in relation to the independent variables above. Analysis includes all 15 items on the Scale which contains two subscales: conflicts and positive aspects of the relationship. An example of a question from the Child – Parent Relationship Scale, conflicts subscale is, “My child and I always seem to be struggling with each other”. Participants answered the 15 questions on a five point scale: (1) definitely does not apply, (2) not really, (3) neutral/not sure, (4) somewhat applies, and (5) definitely applies. For the subscale on ‘conflicts’ scores may range from a sum of 7 to 35 and include questions 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. The scores for the subscale ‘positive aspects of the relationship’ the sum may be 7 to 35 and include questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 15. A higher score on the conflicts subscale of the Child – Parent Relationship Scale indicates a more negative perception of the child-parent relationship while higher scores on the subscale for positive aspects of the relationship of

the Child – Parent Relationship Scale indicate a more positive perception of the child-parent relationship.

Parent’s perceptions of the stress of being a parent. Participants’ responses on the Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995) portion of the survey were averaged and provide information regarding the military members’ perception of stress while parenting a young child during reunification. This continuous variable was also examined in relation to the independent variables previously discussed. Analysis included all 18 items on the scale with a range of 1 - 5. An example of a question from the Parental Stress Scale is, “Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give”. Participants answered the 18 questions on a five point scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Higher scores on the Parental Stress Scale indicate a higher level of stress related to the area of parenting. Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18 were reverse scored as follows: (1 = 5), (2 = 4), (3 = 3), (4 = 2), and (5 = 1) (Berry & Jones, 1995).

Procedures

Participants were active duty military members or reservists called to active duty. The recruitment process included Navy Child and Youth Programs and Fleet and Family Readiness Programs across the country. Utilizing the Principal Investigator’s contacts within the Navy Child and Youth Programs and Fleet and Family Readiness Programs the recruitment flyer (Appendix D) was emailed to the Child and Youth Programs and Fleet and Family Readiness programs at bases in Texas, Virginia, and Florida. It was also posted within the Child and Youth Programs and Fleet and Family Services Program at

Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base, emailed to the patrons of the Child and Youth Program, and emailed to the Child and Youth Programs and Fleet and Family Services Programs at Naval Air Station Kingsville, Naval Air Station Corpus Christie, Naval Air Station Jacksonville, and Naval Air Station Norfolk. In addition, the Principal Investigator attended post-deployment meetings held onboard Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base in order to explain the study, its risks, and answer any questions the potential participants may have. The recruitment flyer was also be posted in high traffic areas onboard Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base such as the base commissary, Exchange, medical center, and gymnasium. The recruitment flyer (Appendix D) contained a link to the PsychData© website which contained basic demographic questions (Appendix A), the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (Appendix B), and the Parental Stress Scale (Appendix C). The Training and Curriculum Specialist and Family Advocacy Representative at each of the above mentioned bases were asked to post the recruitment flyer in a prominent place within their facility. All participants were informed that this study and the researcher were not affiliated with the U.S. Military.

The study consisted of participants' completion of a demographic questionnaire, the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1992) and the Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995) online via PsychData©, a secure database used by researchers at this university to collect confidential and/or anonymous data in an online environment. The website containing the study survey is housed on a secure server accessed only by the researcher through a protected username and password.

The participant recruitment flyer (Appendix D) contained a link to the survey which was completed anonymously online at PsychData. Once participants clicked on the Psychdata link, they were given a detailed description of the study and were required to give consent prior to accessing the questionnaire. Participants were asked to provide demographic information, an explanation of his or her relationship to the military, information about his or her family, and to complete the provided surveys. Participants were also asked to report the number of deployments they have completed since becoming a parent.

The participants' responses on PsychData were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS to reveal a picture of the perceptions of military families with regards to the parent-child relationship during reunification. The demographic information obtained was also used to address the study's hypotheses. Descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment correlations, and a Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA) were used to answer the research questions.

Limitations

The current study does not contain the amount of participants that were needed to generalize the research findings. This limitation is duly noted and lends itself to future research implications. Regardless of this limitation it is believed that the results of the study support the need for further research in the area of parent-child relationships during reunification. Further research can only benefit military members and their families, military commands, and communities. Official Department of Defense support may help researchers contact a wider number of military members.

A second limitation of the study is the unknown condition of the parent-child relationship prior to the deployment. If the relationship between the deployed member and his or her child was tenuous prior to the deployment the findings may be more reflective of a stressed relationship rather than the impact of the deployment. Future researchers may consider a longitudinal study to include military members who are expecting in order to gauge the pre-deployment relationship as well as the post-deployment relationship between parent and child.

A third limitation to this study is the researcher's role as the Training and Curriculum Specialist for the Child and Youth Programs at NAS JRB Fort Worth. Participants who have children enrolled in the Child and Youth Programs at NAS JRB Fort Worth may have felt obligated to portray a certain level of parental competence which may have resulted in bias during the data collection process. The number of participants recruited for the study may have compromised the generalizability of the study.

Delimitations

The study was limited to active duty military families who completed a deployment while their child(ren) was between the ages of 6 weeks and 6 years and participants will only included the active duty military parent.

Summary

This was a quantitative study that explored the relationship between young children and their active duty military parent during reunification. The study included the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1992) and the Parental Stress Scale (Berry &

Jones, 1995) administered via PsychData©. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used for the quantitative data analysis.

CHAPTER IV
PLAN OF ANALYSIS

Results

One hundred and seven members of the armed forces participated in this study. A majority (65.4%) were married, with an additional 8.4% indicating they were divorced, 8.4% separated, and 17.8% indicating they were single. A majority (57%) identified themselves as white, with an additional 15.9% identifying as Black, 18.7% Spanish/Hispanic/Latino, and 4.7% Asian American. Over half of the respondents (60.7%) were males and the majority of the respondents had some college education (31.3%). When looking at the rank of participants, the majority of participants fell into the E5-E9 group (56%) and have a household income greater than \$70,001 per year. The most represented branch of the military was the Navy (37.5%) followed by Reservists (22.9%), Air Force (15.6%), Army (12.5%) Marines (8.3%) and National Guard (3.1%). Please see Table 1 for a detailed description of the demographic characteristics of participants in this study.

Table 1
Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Male	64	60.7
Female	41	39.3

(continued)

Table 1 cont'd

Ethnicity		
White	61	57
Black or African American	15	15.9
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino	20	18.7
Asian American	5	4.7
Other	4	3.7
Highest Level of Education Completed		
High school/GED	23	21.7
Some College	33	31.3
2 year degree	20	18.9
Bachelors degree	17	16
Masters degree	9	10.4
Doctoral degree	2	1.9
Current Marital Status		
Single (never married)	18	17.8
Married	70	65.4
Divorced	7	8.4
Separated	8	8.4
Current Military Branch		
Army	12	12.5
Navy	36	37.5
Air Force	14	15.6
Marines	8	8.3
National Guard	3	3.1
Reserves	21	22.9
Current Military Rank		
E1- E4	31	29
E5-E9	37	56
O1-O5	15	13
Household Income		
< \$28,000	8	7.6
\$28,001- \$34,000	17	16.2
\$34,001- \$44,000	18	17.1
\$44,001-\$55,000	12	11.4
\$55,001- \$70,000	21	21
> \$70,001	26	26.7
Child Age during Deployment		
0-12 months	31	29
13-24 months	15	14
25-36 months	19	17.8
37-48 months	16	15
49-60 months	9	8.4
>61 months	17	15.9

(N = 107)

Descriptive statistics were calculated based on the information obtained from the participants to acquire basic information about the distribution of the population across variables. When examining the overall distribution, means were computed and tests for normality were conducted resulting in the following (with response range included in parenthesis): Child-Parent Relationship Scale $M = 3.06$ (1-5), Positive Subscale $M = 3.81$ (1-5), Conflict Subscale $M = 2.45$ (1-5), Parental Stress Scale $M = 2.36$ (1-5).

Frequency analyses and a histogram revealed a normal distribution for three of the four measures. The scores for the Positive Subscale resulted in a significantly negative kurtosis (-1.173). In an effort to standardize the scores a log transformation was performed (Field, 2009), but did not provide sufficient transformation to provide normality, therefore the original scores were used in these analyses, so results using these scores should be reviewed with caution.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study explored the parent-child relationship of active duty military members and their young child during reunification. The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study:

Q1. How do active duty military members perceive the child-parent relationship during reunification as measured by the Child-Parent Relationship Scale?

Descriptive information in the form of means and percentages are provided in Table 2 for the distribution of scores for the entire sample, as well as demographic subgroups, to provide information about how active duty military members perceive their child-parent relationship using the subscales of Conflict and Positive Aspects Subscales

in the Child-Parent Relationship Scale. Responses on this measure can range from 1-5; however, the mean score for participants on the Child-Parent Relationship Scale conflict subscale in this sample was 2.45 and for the positive aspects subscale it was 3.81. Higher scores on the Child-Parent Relationship Scale subscale for conflict indicated a more negative perception of the parent child relationship and higher scores on the positive relationship subscale indicated a more positive perception of the parent child relationship.

Analysis of the conflict and positive aspect subscales show that female military members reported a more negative ($M = 2.52$) perception of the parent-child relationship than their male counterparts ($M = 2.34$) and a less positive perspective ($M = 3.70$) on the positive aspects subscale than male military members ($M = 3.84$). Members of the National Guard also reported a higher level on the conflict subscale ($M = 2.81$) than military members in other branches of the military. Participants whose rank fell into the E5-E9 category ($M = 2.63$), separated military members ($M = 2.64$), and those military members who hold a Masters degree ($M = 2.47$) also scored higher on the conflict subscale than other military members. Military members who have completed four deployments reported a higher level of conflict $M = 2.63$. Table 2 provides more detailed information regarding group responses to the conflict and positive aspect subscales, including possible ranges of scores.

Table 2
Distribution of Scores on the Child-Parent Relationship Scale

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max	N	%
All participants						
Conflict Subscale	2.45	.76	1.00	4.29	105	100
Positive Relationship Subscale	3.81	.83	2.00	5.00	105	100
Gender						
Conflict Subscale						
Male	2.34	.78	1.00	4.00	58	60.7
Female	2.52	.57	1.00	3.71	32	39.3
Positive Relationship Subscale						
Male	3.84	.85	2.29	5.00	64	60.7
Female	3.70	.74	2.00	5.00	41	39.3
Military Branch						
Conflict Subscale						
Army	2.50	.26	2.14	3.14	11	11.2
Navy	2.33	.79	1.00	3.71	35	33.6
Air force	2.47	.69	1.43	4.00	14	14
Marines	2.59	.75	1.00	3.29	8	7.5
National Guard	2.81	.22	2.57	3.00	3	2.8
Reserves	2.18	.76	1.00	3.57	21	20.6
Positive Relationship Subscale						
Army	3.16	.39	2.43	3.86	12	11.2
Navy	3.95	.88	2.00	5.00	35	33.6
Air force	3.53	.71	2.43	4.43	14	14
Marines	3.61	.72	3.00	5.00	8	7.5
National Guard	3.81	.70	3.00	4.29	3	2.8
Reserves	4.11	.79	2.43	5.00	22	20.6
Total Household Income						
Conflict Subscale						
< \$28,000	2.21	.53	1.29	3.00	8	7.5
\$28,001- \$34,000	2.74	.44	1.71	3.29	17	15.9
\$34,001- \$44,000	2.62	.49	1.00	3.57	18	16.8
\$44,001-\$55,000	2.19	.60	1.29	3.14	12	11.2
\$55,001- \$70,000	2.31	.75	1.00	3.57	22	20.6
> \$70,001	2.33	.93	1.00	4.00	26	26.3

(continued)

Table 2 cont'd

Positive Relationship Scale						
< \$28,000	3.84	.89	2.71	5.00	8	7.5
\$28,001- \$34,000	3.30	.59	2.43	5.00	17	15.9
\$34,001- \$44,000	3.55	.65	2.886	5.00	18	16.8
\$44,001-\$55,000	4.01	.84	2.43	4.86	12	11.2
\$55,001- \$70,000	3.98	.86	2.29	5.00	22	20.6
> \$70,001	4.02	.86	2.00	5.00	26	26.3
Military Rank						
Conflict Subscale						
E1- E4	2.39	.53	1.71	2.93	31	29
E5-E9	2.63	.75	1.68	3.71	37	56
O1-O4	2.35	.51	1.57	2.86	15	14.8
Positive Relationship Scale						
E1-E4	3.94	.61	3.25	4.72	30	29
E5-E9	3.56	.84	2.29	4.68	37	56
O1-O4	4.13	.64	3.29	4.71	15	14.8
Ethnicity						
Conflict Scale						
White	2.40	.68	1.00	3.71	61	57
Black or African American	2.33	.73	1.14	3.57	15	15.9
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino	2.40	.78	1.00	4.00	20	18.7
Asian American	2.74	.74	1.71	3.71	5	4.7
Other	2.24	1.08	1.00	3.00	4	3.7
Positive Relationship Scale						
White	3.92	.82	2.29	5.00	61	57
Black or African American	3.78	.64	3.00	4.86	15	15.9
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino	3.51	.78	2.43	5.00	20	18.7
Asian American	3.31	.96	2.00	4.43	5	4.7
Other	4.14	1.13	2.86	5.00	4	3.7
Marital Status						
Conflict Scale						
Single (never married)	2.60	.52	1.29	3.29	18	17.8
Married	2.33	.77	1.00	4.00	70	65.4
Separated	2.64	.64	2.00	3.71	7	9
Divorced	2.36	.62	1.57	3.14	8	9
Positive Relationship Scale						
Single (never married)	3.57	.62	2.71	5.00	18	17.8
Married	3.96	.80	2.29	5.00	70	65.4

continued

Table 2 cont'd

	Separated	2.95	.54	2.00	3.86	7	9
	Divorced	3.77	.93	2.43	5.00	8	9
Highest Level of Education Completed							
Conflict Scale							
	High school/GED	2.46	.56	1.00	3.29	23	21.5
	Some College	2.36	.81	1.00	3.71	33	30.8
	2 year degree	2.40	.78	1.14	.400	20	18.7
	Bachelors degree	2.39	.71	1.00	3.57	17	15.9
	Masters degree	2.47	.71	1.71	3.71	9	10.3
Positive Relationship Subscale							
	High school/GED	3.46	.82	2.43	5.00	23	21.5
	Some College	3.92	.81	2.43	5.00	33	30.8
	2 year degree	3.71	.81	2.29	4.86	20	18.7
	Bachelors degree	4.09	.61	3.00	4.71	17	15.9
	Masters degree	3.80	.92	2.00	4.86	9	10.3
Deployments							
Conflict Subscale							
	1	2.52	.72	1.14	3.57	14	14
	2	2.18	.79	1.00	3.29	17	16.8
	3	2.39	.80	1.00	4.00	26	24.3
	4	2.63	.41	2.00	3.71	19	17.8
Positive Relationship Subscale							
	1	3.96	.81	2.29	4.86	15	14
	2	4.05	.73	2.71	5.00	17	16.8
	3	3.99	.88	2.43	5.00	26	24.3
	4	3.36	.72	2.00	5.00	19	17.8

*A higher score on the conflicts subscale (range 1-5) indicates a more negative perception of the child-parent relationship while higher scores on the subscale for positive aspects of the relationship (range 1-5) indicate a more positive perception of the child-parent relationship.

Q2. How do active duty military members perceive their level of parental stress during reunification as measured by the Parental Stress Scale?

Descriptive information in the form of means and percentages are provided in Table 3 for the distribution of scores for the entire sample, as well as demographic subgroups, to provide information about how active duty military members in this sample perceived their level of parental stress. Higher scores on the Parental Stress Scale indicate

a higher level of parental stress. Analysis of the Parental Stress Scale showed that female military members reported a higher level of parental stress ($M = 2.51$) than their male counterparts ($M = 2.26$). Army soldiers also reported a higher level of parental stress ($M = 2.66$) than military members in other branches of the military. Military members who fell into the E5-E9 category ($M = 2.52$), separated Military members ($M = 2.70$), Asian-American military members ($M = 2.83$), and those military members who hold a Masters degree ($M = 2.60$) also reported higher levels of parental stress than other military members. Military members who have completed four deployments reported a parental stress level of 2.56. Descriptive information in the form of means and percentages and possible range of scores are provided in Table 3 for the distribution of scores for the entire sample, as well as demographic subgroups, to provide information about how active duty military members perceive their level of parental stress using the Parental Stress Scale.

Table 3
Distribution of Scores on the Parental Stress Scale

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max	N	%
All participants	2.36	.52	1.44	3.83	101	100
Gender						
Male	2.26	.47	1.44	3.33	57	60.7
Female	2.51	.53	1.50	3.72	31	39.3
Military Branch						
Army	2.66	.28	2.33	3.22	11	11.2
Navy	2.29	.55	1.44	3.72	35	33.6

(continued)

Table 3 cont'd

Air force	2.59	.41	2.11	3.72	13	
14Marines	2.31	.47	1.50	2.89	8	7.5
National Guard	2.50	.16	2.39	2.61	2	2.8
Reserves	2.14	.51	1.50	3.39	19	20.6
Total Household Income						
< \$28,000	2.25	.47	1.50	2.83	7	7.5
\$28,001- \$34,000	2.49	.32	1.61	2.89	13	15.9
\$34,001- \$44,000	2.57	.48	1.50	3.39	18	16.8
\$44,001-\$55,000	2.17	.41	1.56	2.78	11	11.2
\$55,001- \$70,000	2.23	.47	1.44	3.00	17	20.6
> \$70,001	2.32	.65	1.44	3.72	22	26.3
Military Rank						
E1- E4	2.31	.39	1.81	2.78	20	29
E5-E9	2.52	.49	1.79	3.38	55	56
O1-O4	2.39	.60	1.83	3.36	9	14.8
Ethnicity						
White	2.27	.46	1.50	3.22	46	57
Black or African American	2.53	.60	1.56	3.72	16	15.9
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino	2.32	.44	1.44	2.89	18	18.7
Asian American	2.83	.55	2.22	3.72	5	4.7
Other	2.07	.55	1.44	2.44	3	3.7
Marital Status						
Single (never married)	2.56	.54	1.50	3.72	15	17.8
Married	2.28	.46	1.44	3.39	58	65.4
Separated	2.70	.48	2.33	3.72	7	9
Divorced	2.22	.63	1.56	3.33	8	9
Highest Level of Education						
High school/GED	2.36	.42	1.50	2.94	22	21.5
Some College	2.24	.50	1.44	3.22	27	30.8
2 year degree	2.32	.37	1.56	2.94	18	18.7
Bachelors degree	2.45	.50	1.72	3.39	13	15.9
Masters degree	2.60	.88	1.67	3.72	8	10.3
Deployment						
1	2.41	.49	1.72	3.33	15	14
2	2.27	.59	1.44	3.72	15	16.8
3	2.16	.53	1.44	3.17	23	24.3
4	2.56	.43	1.78	3.72	19	17.8

(*N* = 101)*For the Parental Stress Scale (range 1-5) higher scores indicate a higher level of stress related to the area of parenting.

Q3. Are perceptions of parenting stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale related to perceptions of the parent-child relationship as measured by the subscales in the Child-Parent Relationship Scale?

To further explore the relationship between military members' perceptions of the parent-child relationship during reunification and their perceived levels of parenting stress during this time, a series of Pearson Product Moment Correlation analyses were performed to measure the association between parenting stress and the parent-child relationship.

A higher score on the conflicts subscale of the Child-Parent Relationship Scale indicates a more negative perception of the child-parent relationship; therefore, it was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between perceived parenting stress and the conflicts subscale of the parent-child relationship. The results revealed a positive correlation of $r = .634$ and $p < .001$ between active duty military members' perceptions of the conflict in their parent-child relationship during reunification and their perceived levels of parenting stress during this time which supports the hypothesis.

Conversely, since higher scores on the Child-Parent Relationship Scale subscale for positive aspects of the relationship indicate a more positive perception of the child-parent relationship, it was hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between the subscale for positive aspects of the relationship and perceived parenting stress during this time. Results revealed a negative relationship ($r = -.691, p < .001$) between military members' perceptions of positive aspects of the parent-child

relationship during reunification and their perceived levels of parenting stress during this time, offering support and confirmation for this hypothesis.

Q4. Are there group differences among military members from different demographic groups (ethnicity, age of child during deployment, gender of participant, total family income, education, branch of the military, rank, type of deployment, number of deployments, and length of deployment) in their perspectives of the parent-child relationship as measured by the Conflict and Positive Relationship Subscales in the Child-Parent Relationship Scale and their levels of parental stress as measured by the Parental Stress Scale?

To investigate this question, a MANOVA was computed with respondents' demographics as the independent variables and scores on the Child-Parent Relationship Scale subscales of conflict and positive relationships and the composite score of the Parental Stress Scale as the dependent variables. Roy's largest root was applied as it represents the greatest difference possible between groups (Field, 2009) and showed significant main effects for education $F(3, 16) = 7.48, p = .002$ and military status, $F(5, 16) = 4.02, p = .015$. However, the significant differences disappeared at between subject tests and in the pos hoc tests, possibly due to a lack of power due to the small sample size.

Although these findings were not statistically significant descriptive statistics showed that female military members reported higher levels of parental stress and conflict than their male counterparts. It is important to consider the different levels of stress and conflict that male and female military members, who are also parents, may

experience. This study also found that Army soldiers reported a higher level on the conflict subscale and a higher level of parental stress than military members in other branches. Again, although they were not statistically significant the differences between genders and military branches show a need for further research in this area.

Summary

A child's ability to cope with parental separation is partly determined by the parent's ability to cope and to protect the child from the stress (Huebner, 2009). In her study of military families, Huebner (2009) developed a theory of attachment systems and adjustment as they relate to military deployment (see Figure 1). According to this theory the adjustment of the spouse who is left behind during deployment directly impacts the attachment of that parent to the child and the family's adjustment to deployment.

Descriptive statistics provides a picture of the perceived levels of stress across groups and draws attention to the differences between mothers and fathers, branches of the military, education levels, and military rank. Statistical analysis supports the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between perceived parenting stress and the conflicts subscale of the parent-child relationship and a negative relationship between the subscale for positive aspects of the relationship and perceived parenting stress during reunification. Despite this relationship military rank was the only independent variable found to significantly affect a parent's perspective of the child-parent relationship and parental stress during reunification. It is important for providers of military family

support programs to consider the different experiences and perspectives between ranks of military members in order to provide effective programs.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The current study explored military parents' perspectives about their relationship with their young children during reunification and their level of parental stress. The study is based on an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and focuses the theories of boundary ambiguity (Boss, 1977) and attachment (Ainsworth, 1978). While the analyses confirmed the hypothesis that there are relationships between parents' perspectives of the child-parent relationship and perceived parenting stress during reunification, there were very little significant differences between groups. One reason for the limited significance of the study may be due to small sample size; however, the study provides new information for the field regarding the effect of military rank on parental stress and the positive aspects of the child-parent relationship and brings to light new areas for future research.

Members of the National Guard reported a higher level of parental stress than military members in any other branch. According to a report by the Congressional Research Service (2008) more than 255,000 National Guard troops have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan in support of the Global War on Terrorism. These military members are not immersed in the military culture as a full-time job, but are transplanted into it as needed. This transition from civilian to military life may cause additional stress to individuals and families and may be a factor in the increased level of parental stress.

Programs targeting National Guard and their families should take these differences into account in providing support services for these service members and their families.

Additionally, the results of this study revealed that Army soldiers reported a higher level of child-parent conflict than military members in any other branch. According to Orthner (2003), 90% of Army spouses surveyed had been separated from their spouse for at least one week in the previous year, 33% were separated for at least 17 weeks in the previous year, and many of these soldiers are also parents. These separations can have a profound impact on families (Chartrand, Frank, White, & Shope, 2008) and may be associated with an uncertainty about family member roles, responsibilities, and relationships upon the military member's return. The results of this study suggest that the Army may also need more individualized supports than relying on a global military view on supporting families during reunification. Identification of specific types of stress experienced by Army soldiers who hold the rank of E1 – E3 may be different than the stress experienced by Army soldiers who hold the rank of E4 – E9.

The mean scores of this study show a difference in the level of parental stress experienced by some groups of military members who have deployed. Although there were no significant differences in the parenting stress and parent-child relationships scores between mothers and fathers it is important to discuss the differences in the mean scores for gender. On the conflict and positive aspects subscale and the Parental Stress Scale mothers reported more conflicted and stressful parental relationships than fathers. By applying the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) this finding may stem from cultural values (macro-level influence) of a mother's role as a parent. The process

of renegotiating parental roles and responsibilities (Boss, 1977) may be a factor in female military member's stress levels and levels of conflict. In addition, mothers who are deployed by the military may experience a strain on their attachment relationships upon reunification which may result in increased levels of stress and conflict. These findings, coupled with those discussed previously, reiterate the importance of moving away from a "one-size-fits-all" strategy for assisting returning military members with their reunification and reintegration process.

Limitations and Future Research

While the current study lacked sufficient power to make broad generalizations to larger populations due to its small sample size, the results provide useful information, nonetheless. While 176 individuals began the online survey, only 107 completed the survey in its entirety. This suggests that the recruitment efforts may not have been the weak link in this process, but rather the method in which participants were required to participate. In this study, participants accessed the online survey and had to complete it once it was begun, without the option for returning later. This limitation is duly noted and lends itself to future research implications, including recruitment issues facing researchers seeking to work with this specific population. For example, when using an online survey it may be more effective to incorporate strategies that allow participants to complete the survey or questionnaire in multiple sittings, rather than all at once with no option to return to it later.

A second limitation of the study is the unknown condition of the parent-child relationship prior to the deployment. If the relationship between the deployed member

and his or her child was tenuous prior to the deployment the findings may be more reflective of a stressed relationship rather than the impact of the deployment. Future researchers may consider a longitudinal study to include military members who are expecting a child in order to gauge the pre-deployment relationship as well as the post-deployment relationship between parent and child. Additionally, official Department of Defense support may help researchers contact a larger number of military members by incorporating data collection tools in processing paperwork both pre- and post-deployment. This recruitment technique may not only yield increased participation, but also result in longitudinal data that would further broaden our knowledge about how parent-child relationships may be influenced by a parent's deployment, thus addressing both of the major limitations inherent in this study. Regardless of these limitations, it is believed that the results of the study support the need for further research in the area of child-parent relationships during reunification. Further research can only benefit military members and their families, military commands, and communities through more effective support systems for military families. By providing educational opportunities about parent-child conflict and parental stress for groups of military members (ex. parental role or military rank) family readiness programs and military commands may see an increase in parental readiness when service members return from deployment.

The results of study also highlight several new avenues for future research. A longitudinal study examining parental stress levels before the military member deploys and again at reunification would eliminate the reliance on participants' memory. Researchers would be able to examine the parent-child relationship before deployment to

determine a baseline for parental stress and parent-child conflict, thus eliminating the limitation of unknown parent-child relationship prior to deployment.

Future research should also include a comparison of the family readiness programs offered by each military branch. While the Military Family Research Institute provides reintegration programs for National Guard members in Indiana, these programs are limited to families with children between the ages of 5 and 17. It is important to examine the types of support provided by each branch and determine their effectiveness and possible replication among other branches. Future research should also investigate both military and non-military families in this regard to investigate if military members differ significantly from their civilian counterparts in regard to their parenting stress and perceptions of the parent-child relationship.

The current study also established a correlation between parent-child conflict and parental stress; however, the directionality of these factors has not been determined. Future research should include an investigation into the directionality of these relationships. For example, does the increased parental stress lead to increased conflict in the parent-child relationship or vice versa? In order to truly impact programs for military families, this question needs to be more fully explored.

Implications

Suggestions for Military Family Readiness Programs

It is imperative that Family Readiness Programs provide effective programming to help military members who are parents of young children prepare for reunification. It is necessary to examine the support systems that are available across military branches in

order to understand the factors that may be more effective in preparing military members for deployment and reunification. The Military Family Research Institute provides support for military reserve members and their families regarding the stages of deployment. Considering that respondents in this study who are military reserve members reported the lowest level of child-parent conflict and parental stress a comparison of reserve and Army support programs may provide guidance on developing effective programs. Pittman, Kerpelman, & McFadyen (2004) explain that the more support military families feel they receive from the military command (an exo-level influence), the better they are able to adapt to military life overall.

It also appears that different strategies may be needed for mothers and fathers, varying ranks, and those who have completed multiple deployments rather than a one-size-fits-all plan. It may not be enough that military members participate in reunification training; helping families may require a more tailored approach that is specific to gender and the different roles of mothers and fathers, experiences of enlisted versus officers, and those who have completed one deployment or three. More differentiation among the unique backgrounds, roles, and experiences of military member and families should be applied when developing family readiness plans.

Considering the relationship between child-parent conflict and parental stress, family readiness programs should also increase opportunities for parents to develop strategies for understanding children's behavior and managing parental stress. Although in the current study a causal relationship was not established between parent-child

conflict and parental stress, reducing child-parent conflict and parental stress will benefit the child and support important attachment relationships and optimal child development.

Summary

It was unexpected that there were no factors that significantly influenced the perceived levels of conflict or stress between the child and parent who had been deployed. It appears parents' perceptions of the child-parent relationship are not negatively impacted by length of deployments, number of deployments, or age of the child at the time of reunification however, future research with an increased sample size would provide increased confidence in the findings . Although the present study has limitations, it adds to the current research available regarding military families and provides valuable information for researchers and practitioners regarding the future of military family support programs, as well as suggesting avenues for future research.

In summary, there are many factors in the typical family that affect parent-child conflict and parental stress and it is important to understand these dynamics when creating programs and policies designed to assist families with healthy functioning. This is even more imperative for families that may experience additional stressors not experienced by typical, civilian families, like those who face combat or non-combat deployments that take them away from their family unit for extended periods of time. Despite its limitations, this study offers information that may be useful to professionals and researchers interested in improving family functioning for America's military population.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire

The completion of this questionnaire constitutes your informed consent to act as a participant in this research.

Families in the Military: The relationship between young children and their military parents during reunification

Kimberlee Spencer
3900 Rochester Dr
Keller, TX 76248

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The attached questionnaire includes questions about your background, and your relationship with your child during reunification. While there is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions, all information is collected anonymously and participant's confidentiality will be maintained as we will not collect any identifiable information. Only the principal investigators will have access to the collected data. Please keep in mind that the return of your completed questionnaire constitutes your informed consent to act as a participant in this research. Participation in this study is voluntary. This study and the researchers are not affiliated with a U.S. Military command and a decision to participate or not participate will not adversely nor positively affect your relationship with the U.S. military. There will be no penalty should you choose to participate, decline to participate, or discontinue participation in the study. The questionnaire has been formulated to be as short as possible while still obtaining the necessary information. The entire questionnaire should take no more than 15-20 minutes to complete. The information you provide to us is very important. We are grateful for your time.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Some of the questions in this booklet ask you to write in your response. There will be a blank where you can write your response. For other questions, you will be asked to check a single number under a short list of answers like this:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
Outdoor activities (running, biking, etc.) are a great way to stay in shape?					

SECTION A

The first section of this questionnaire asks about your background and who you are.

1.

What is your age?	What is your gender? (M/F)

2.

	White	Black or African American	Spanish/Hispanic/Latino	Asian	Other (please indicate):
What is your ethnic background?					

3.

	High school diploma/GED	Some college	2 year Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree
What is the highest level of education you have completed?						

4. Please provide the following for each child in your home

Age	Gender (M/F)

5.

	Single (never married)	Married	Separated	Divorced	Widowed
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What is your marital status?					
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6.

	(Example) Navy	Marine	Navy	Army	Air Force	National Guard	Active Reservist
Which branch of the military are you a member of and what is your current rank?	E-5						

7.

	Marine	Navy	Army	Air Force	National Guard	Active Reservist	Civilian
What is your spouse's current military status?							

8. What was the length of your last deployment?

9. What are the number and lengths of the deployments you have completed as a parent?

10. How old were your children at the time of this deployment?

11.

	Up to 28,000	28,001 - 34,000	34,001 - 44,000	44,001 - 55,000	55,001 - 70,000	70,001 and up
What is your combined household (yourself and spouse, if applicable) income?						

APPENDIX B

Child – Parent Relationship Scale

Please reflect on the degree to which each of the following statements currently applies to your relationship with your child. Using the scale below, circle the appropriate number for each item.

Definitely does not apply 1	Not really 2	Neutral, not sure 3	Applies, somewhat 4	Definitely applies 5
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1. I share an affectionate, warm relationship with my child. 1 2 3 4 5
2. My child and I always seem to be struggling with each other. 1 2 3 4 5
3. If upset, my child will seek comfort from me. 1 2 3 4 5
4. My child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me. 1 2 3 4 5
5. My child values his/her relationship with me. 1 2 3 4 5
6. When I praise my child, he/she beams with pride. 1 2 3 4 5
7. My child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself. 1 2 3 4 5
8. My child easily becomes angry at me. 1 2 3 4 5
9. It is easy to be in tune with what my child is feeling. 1 2 3 4 5
10. My child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Dealing with my child drains my energy. 1 2 3 4 5
12. When my child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day. 1 2 3 4 5
13. My child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly. 1 2 3 4 5
14. My child is sneaky or manipulative with me. 1 2 3 4 5

15. My child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me. 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX C

Parental Stress Scale

The following statements describe feelings and perceptions about the experience of being a parent. Think of each of the items in terms of how your relationship with your child or children typically is. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following items by placing the appropriate number in the space provided.

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Undecided 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

- ___ 1. I am happy in my role as a parent.
- ___ 2. There is little or nothing I wouldn't do for my child(ren) if it was necessary.
- ___ 3. Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give.
- ___ 4. I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my child(ren).
- ___ 5. I feel close to my child(ren).
- ___ 6. I enjoy spending time with my child(ren).
- ___ 7. My child(ren) is an important source of affection for me.
- ___ 8. Having child(ren) gives me a more certain and optimistic view for the future.
- ___ 9. The major source of stress in my life is my child(ren).
- ___ 10. Having child(ren) leaves little time and flexibility in my life.
- ___ 11. Having child(ren) has been a financial burden.
- ___ 12. It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child(ren).
- ___ 13. The behavior of my child(ren) is often embarrassing or stressful to me.
- ___ 14. If I had it to do over again, I might decide not to have child(ren).
- ___ 15. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent.
- ___ 16. Having child(ren) has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life.

____ 17. I am satisfied as a parent.

____ 18. I find my child(ren) enjoyable.

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Flyer

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT

The experiences of military families during reunification?

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

We are interested in finding out about your perspectives on your relationship with your child under 6 years of age after deployment.

WHO WE ARE

A doctoral student and faculty member at Texas Woman's University, Department of Family Sciences in Denton, TX interested in studying children, development and family relationships. We are not affiliated with a U.S. military command in any way.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

Military service members who have completed a deployment and are parents to children age 6 and younger.

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Simply log on to www.psychdata.com and complete a brief anonymous survey (it will take about 15-20 minutes of your time).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU

This is your opportunity to share your perspectives about your parent-child relationship and potentially help others better understand the experiences of military families.

QUESTIONS?

Contact Kimberlee Spencer at 817-800-2117 or kspencer3@mail.twu.edu

READY TO GET STARTED?

Log on to www.psychdata.com and complete the survey!