Impact of Wartime Deployments on Military Families and Children

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Agenda

- Understand the effects of multiple deployments on military families, including spouses and children
- Discuss resiliency and protective factors
- Identify resources for military children

Service Members

- Over 2.2 million total forces
- 1,070,228 Reserve and National Guard members
- About 1.5 million service members have deployed to OEF/OIF
  - ~500,000 have served 2 tours
  - ~70,000 have served 3 tours
  - ~20,000 have been deployed 5+ times

Demographics 2009: Profile of the Military Community

Military Values

- Honor
- Loyalty
- Excellence
- Commitment
- Integrity
- Courage
- Duty
- Respect
- Service

Military Culture

- More than 70% of Military families live in civilian communities.
- States with highest density include California, Virginia, Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Washington, Hawaii, Kentucky, and South Carolina
- Families serve too!
- Multiple deployments, trainings, trips, missions
- Relocations

Military Culture

- Spouse employment challenges-most want or need to work
- Childcare challenges
- School transitions
- Financial challenges
- Important differences between Active, Guard, and Reserve Components
Military Families: A National Resource

- Health of military children and families
- 44% military members have children
- Military children are our nation’s children, a national resource
- Military children are our future

Military Children

- 1.9 million military children
  - 78% are younger than 11
  - 19,000 have had a parent injured
  - 2,200 have lost a parent
  - 225,000 have a parent currently deployed

Scenario - 1

28 year old Marine mother, 1 month post-reunion after 2 deployments in 2 years:

“...It's the craziest thing... For the first few weeks after I came back, every morning, my 8 year old would stop me at the door and hang onto my leg and wouldn't let me leave. I had to change out of my cammies and get into civilian clothes before she would let me leave the house. Even now, I have to sneak out of the house with my uniform in a paper bag and change on the way to the Base.”

Scenario - 2

10 year old son of a Sailor recently returned from his 3rd deployment:

“...sometimes my Dad gets so touchy, like we were getting ready to go to the beach and we were putting stuff in the car, and then he just got so bossy and mean... he yelled at me and I yelled at him because it wasn't fair and then we ended up not going... But usually he's really nice...”

Scenario - 3

26 year old Marine father, 7 months post-reunion. One of his buddies died in his arms during a fire fight:

“...If my daughter falls asleep when I hold her, and suddenly her head falls, I can't describe what it does to me... I immediately wake her up... I am convinced at that moment that she is dead...”

Challenges of Military Children and Families

- Extended and repeated separations from a primary caregiver in the context of danger
- Altered family roles and responsibilities
- Increased stress on caretaking parent
- Media and communication exposure
- Community level stress/loss
- Impact of combat exposure on returning parent
- Possible parental mental health problems, physical injury, or loss
Impact of Parental Deployment on Children

- Cumulative months of parental combat related deployment and parental distress are risk factors for child psychological distress
- Identified risk and protective factors for children during deployment: parental distress, developmental risk, community factors
- Developmental differences in reactions
- Rise in child maltreatment during deployments and related to separation/reunion
- Rising mental health utilization in military children including both outpatient and inpatient visits since OEF/OIF

Impact of Absence

- Being “Mom” and “Dad”
  - Childcare
  - Home Maintenance
  - “Being in two places at the same time”
  - Emotionally supporting children
  - Coping with worries about spouse

Communication about Children’s Fears

Impact of Departure

- Family “fell apart”: adjusting to new family dynamic
  - Lack of spousal support, communication
  - Worries about shielding children from parent’s sadness

“Why can’t I handle my life right now?”

- Reacting to Reactions:
  - Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, scattered
  - Feeling like a “bad parent”
  - Upset at inability to “handle this”
Developmental Child Reactions During Deployment and Reintegration

Infants & Toddlers
- Infants may cry, fuss, pull away from returning parent, cling to caregiver
- Toddlers may act shy, clingy, not recognize the returning parent, cry, have temper tantrums, return to behaviors they have outgrown
- Poor Regulation: eating, sleep, interactions

School Age Children
- Sadness, anger, separation anxiety, guilt, loneliness
- Confusion over roles/relationships
- Feeling responsible
- Behavior problems
- Somatic complaints
- Attention seeking

Children Ages 3-5
- Confusion, surprise, guilt
- Disruptive behaviors/tantrums
- Regressive behaviors
- Change is stressful
- Take cues from parents

Adolescents
- Feeling of rejection, anger, denial
- Growing older = Growing awareness of danger
- Taking on “parental roles”
- “I don’t care”
- Risky behaviors
- Focus on peers
- Concerns about emerging adulthood/identity/college/work etc.
Resilience & Protective Factors:

- Supportive relationships with parents and adults
- Spending time together as a family
- Authoritative parenting
- Routines and rituals that promote closeness during hardships
- Children with at least one secure attachment figure
- Network of support: family, friends, school, community
- Participation in extracurricular and other activities
- Helpful beliefs and making positive meaning

The Long War and Parental Deployment: Effects on Military Children and At-Home Spouses

- 272 School age children, ages 6-12
- 163 At home civilian parents; 65 Active Duty Parents
- Mean number of deployments 2/17 months
- Currently deployed and recently returned status
- Both parent and child report
- Two Service Branches at highly deployed installations: Army and USMC families/children
- Detailed information about family context, including both parents psychological health when possible
- Examine risk/protective factors: parental distress, deployments, gender, age
- Limitations: Cross-Sectional, Convenience Sample

Prevalence of Clinically Significant Symptoms for At-Home Civilian Parent by Spouse Deployment Status

Prevalence of Clinically Significant Symptoms in Children by Parental Deployment Status

Children on Wartime Deployments
www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment

A Call to Action

- “As America asks more of these families, they have a right to expect more of us. This is our moral obligation.”
  —First Lady Michelle Obama, May 12, 2010 at the National Military Family Association Military Family Summit
- “What I’m asking of communities is to just open up your lenses, to include in your outreach, these [military] families.”
  —ADM Mike Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, comments during a town hall meeting, Chambersburg, PA
Three Target Populations for Prevention Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIVERSAL</th>
<th>SELECTIVE</th>
<th>INDICATED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone in a population</td>
<td>Subgroups of the population at heightened risk</td>
<td>Individuals suffering subclinical distress or impairment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Institute of Medicine (IOM) Taxonomy for Preventive Interventions**

Slide citation, CAPT (Ret) William Nash, MD

**Strengthening Resilience and Protective Factors**

- Teach problem solving skills
- Encourage expression of feelings
- Teach relaxation and self-control techniques
- Foster warmth, limit setting, and consistency
- Help children gain a sense of accomplishment
- Teach cognitive strategies like thought stopping
- Help children identify strengths and positive experiences
- Teach optimistic thinking and perspective taking

*Alvord and Grados

**Resources for Military Children & Families**

FOCUS for Military Families
- www.focusproject.org
- National Military Family Association
- Operation Purple Camps
- Operation Purple Family Retreats
- Spouse Education Support
- www.militaryfamily.org
- Zero to Three
- Coming Together Around Military Families
- Duty to Care trainings
- www.zerotothree.org

**FOCUS World: Resiliency Education and Activities for Military Families**

www.focusworld.org

**Nathanson Family Resilience Center**

Strong Families, Healthy Lives

**Strong Families, Healthy Lives**

Inspiring change for families facing challenge

Promoting family-centered programs throughout health care systems

Achieving national leadership in prevention science
**Strong Families, Healthy Lives**

**Leveraging innovative technology** to improve care quality, enhance engagement and outreach

**Educating future leaders** and researchers dedicated to family prevention

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**UCLA Nathanson Family Resilience Center: Military and Veteran Initiatives**

- "Welcome Back Veterans" Center (McCormick Foundation/Major League Baseball)
- Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health: Training and implementation partnership to support family centered care and prevention for Los Angeles military and veteran families.
- Operation Mend-FOCUS: UCLA and Los Angeles Veteran and Family-Centered Resilience Services and Family Care Management within the Medical/Surgery Setting
- Project FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress): BUMED Implementation for Navy, USMC, Army and Air Force
- FOCUS in Veteran’s Administration: Long Beach VA, Greater Los Angeles VA; VA Training Initiative
- Community and National Partnerships:
  - USC Building Capacity in Military Connected Schools; Zero to Three; National Military Family Association Family Retreats; Uniformed Service University Health Services; Military Family Research Institute

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**Systemic Model to Inform Services and Care for Military & Veteran Families**

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**Utilizing a Systemic Approach to Military and Veteran Public Health Initiatives**

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**Family Centered Prevention in Military Communities: FOCUS Model**

- Traumatic Stress and Developmental Research: Children and Families
- Family Resilience Models
- Evidence Based Prevention Interventions
- Implementation Science: Public Health Prevention

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*MacDermid-Wadsworth and Lester, et al, in press*
**FOCUS Family Resiliency Training**

*Core Components*

Family real time check-up: Customizes services to family needs

Family level education: Combat Operational Stress Continuum, developmental guidance

Family deployment timeline:
- Link skills to family (and child) experience
- Develop shared family meaning
- Bridge estrangements
- Co-parenting

Family level resiliency skills across the deployment cycle:
- Emotional regulation
- Problem solving
- Communication
- Goal setting
- Managing deployment reminders

*Lester et al., 2011*

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**The Family Deployment Timeline**

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**Parental Timeline**

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**FOCUS Skills Build Stronger Families**

**Managing Feelings:**
Managing stress and emotions using coping strategies

**Goal Setting:**
Setting and achieving realistic goals

**Communication:**
Effective communication using FOCUS skills

**Problem Solving:**
Solving problems using FOCUS strategies

**Coping with Deployment Reminders:**
Handling reminders and maintaining routines
**FOCUS on Problem Solving**

- Problem Solving is a SNAP!
  - Step 1: Define the problem
  - Step 2: Write the goal
  - Step 3: All possible solutions
  - Step 4: Pick the best one and try it out

**FOCUS Family Level Goal-Setting**

- Ease transitions
- Provide a common family language
- Teaches:
  - Planning
  - Perseverance
  - Self Discipline
- Reinforces:
  - Emotional Regulation
  - Communication

**FOCUS on Goal Setting**

**FOCUS on Managing Deployment Reminders**

**FOCUS Suite of Services**

Public Health Strategy for Implementation
Community Outreach and Education

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community/ Group Briefings</td>
<td>4,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS Workshops</td>
<td>1413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS Consultations</td>
<td>1,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS Skill Building Groups</td>
<td>1,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS Individual Family Resiliency Training Multi Session Training</td>
<td>3,872 Adults*</td>
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*Includes all enrolled family members, including in-progress.

Participation in FOCUS Services Through December 31, 2011

FOCUS Project Evaluation

- Real-time family check-up:
  - Entry, Exit, and follow-up
  - Assessment-driven intervention
  - Customized to individual family goals and needs
  - Feedback on the Military Stress Continuum Model
  - Flagging system for Suicide Risk

- Program evaluation:
  - Perception of change
  - Psychological Functioning
  - Multiple reporters
  - Impact over time
  - Evaluation of Non-Completers


Prevalence of Parental Distress and Family Adjustment Difficulties Before and After FOCUS

Prevalence of PTSD Symptoms on the PCL by AD Status and Military Branch

McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD)

The Family Assessment Device (FAD) measures family adjustment such as problem solving, communication, roles (Epstein et al, 1983).
FOCUS Improves Healthy Family Functioning

**FAD: Family Assessment Device**

*** p < .001

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intake</th>
<th>Post-Intervention</th>
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<tr>
<td>Service Members</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civilian Parents</td>
<td>60%</td>
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Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) measures child behavioral, emotional symptoms, and prosocial behaviors at FOCUS intake and follow up (Goodman, 1999)

FOCUS Reduces Child Distress


*** p < .001

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intake</th>
<th>Post-Intervention</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
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FOCUS Impact:
Child Conduct Problems Over Time

Both boys and girls showed a significant reduction in conduct problems on the SDQ from intake to post-FOCUS (p < .001) and maintained low symptoms at the follow-up assessment. Overall, boys showed a significantly greater number of conduct problems than girls (p < .05).

SDQ = Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

FOCUS Adaptations

Serving Military and Veteran Families in Civilian Communities: From Deployment to Reintegration
Welcome Back Veterans
UCLA Family Resilience Center
Enhance family-centered, trauma informed services for Veteran families across existing systems of care through outreach, education and training service

Goals
• Develop and evaluate a continuum of family-centered interventions to mitigate stress and promote resilience in Veterans and their family members
• Support the dissemination of evidence-informed, family-centered educational services and care in partnership with community systems of care

National Military Family Association Operation Purple Family Retreats-FOCUS Curriculum
• Since 2009, partnership between UCLA FOCUS team and NMFA
• Standardized Retreat Curriculum integrated into wilderness retreats

OPERATION MEND
Healing the Wounds of War

UCLA Operation Mend
Family Centered Care and Resiliency Services
• Real time FOCUS Family Check-In: Resilience and Psychological Health
• Family Centered Resiliency Consultation and Brief Services
• Family Centered Care Management
• Psychological Health Assessments

Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health / UCLA FOCUS Partnership to Serve Veterans and Community Military Families
• 2011 Pilot Training FOCUS for DMH Clinicians
• Partnerships with California National Guard, Veterans’ Administration, Veteran Serving Organizations
• GIS mapping of Veterans and Services
• 2012 Tiered FOCUS Training based on Public Health Model
  - Peer Navigators
  - School Based Providers
  - Clinician Based Prevention
  - Web based resilience check-in

Operation Mend-FOCUS Teleprevention Initiatives
• VTC FOCUS consultation and resilience Training Services
• mFOCUS- Mobile phone/tablet application to support Teleprevention
FOCUS Online Learning Center: Adaptation for Specific Communities

FOCUS Resilience Skill-Building Groups
Parents, Children and Providers

USC Military Connected Schools-UCLA NFRC Partnership
School Based-FOCUS Resilience Building

- Building Capacity Military Connected School Program in Southern California
- FOCUS School Based Skills Group Training for Military Social Work Students
- Pilot Training Evaluation
- Proposed Tiered Training Model: Military Connected Students, Parents and School Personnel

FOCUS-Veteran Parents Training Initiative:
Veteran’s Administration-UCLA NFRC

Thank You!

For more information:

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