

Impact of Parental Combat Deployment on
Children, Spouses and Service Members:
Assessment to Guide Intervention

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If a community values its children,
it must cherish their parents.”

Bowlby, 1951



Early Experience Matters

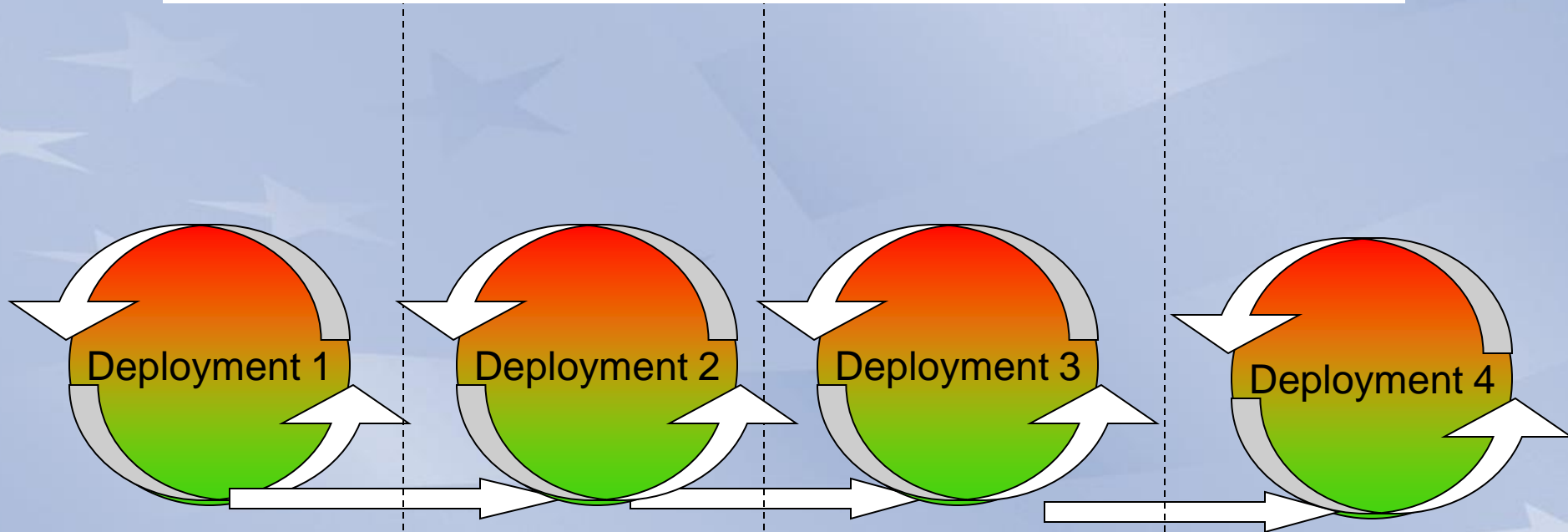
- Role of Relationships in Early Development
 - Brain Development
 - Emotional Regulation and Neurophysiology
 - Security of Attachment

- Adversity During Development: What Research Tells Us
 - Parental Depression
 - Trauma, Loss and Intergenerational Risk
 - Cumulative Stress and Development

Challenges to Military Children and Their Families

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

Deployment Spiral and Children



Research Summary:

Impact of Parental Deployment on Children

- New evidence for child and caretaker psychological symptoms in preschool and school aged children during combat related deployments.
- Parental distress a risk factor for greater psychological distress in the child.
- 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.

Wartime Deployment and Parent Distress: Potential Disruptions to Parenting and Family

- Avoidance/emotional numbing
- Difficulty controlling aggression
- Decreased interactions with children
- Increased mood irritability
- Greater relational conflict; decreased trust/intimacy
- Highly authoritarian/overprotective parenting styles
- Increased risk behaviors: substance misuse and domestic violence

Assessment of School Aged Children Affected by Parental Wartime Deployments

- Increased understanding of the effects of parental wartime deployments on school aged children.
- Designed to provide information to enhance interventions for military children and families facing combat operational stress injuries.

Study Partnerships

- UCLA Partnerships (PI: P. Lester)
 - San Diego Naval Medical Center/Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton (PI: CDR J. Reeves)
 - Madigan Army Medical Center (PI: COL K. Petersen)
- Sites
 - Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton
 - Ft. Lewis Army Base
- Funding Source
 - National Institute Child and Human Development R03 HD049451

Military Child Assessment Study Aims

- To assess behavioral and emotional adjustment outcomes among school age children (ages 6-12) with an Active Duty military parent:
 - Currently deployed to combat theatre
 - Recently returned (last 12 months) from combat theatre
- To assess the impact of parental combat deployment duration on child and family psychological symptoms
- To assess the impact of parental distress on child psychological symptoms

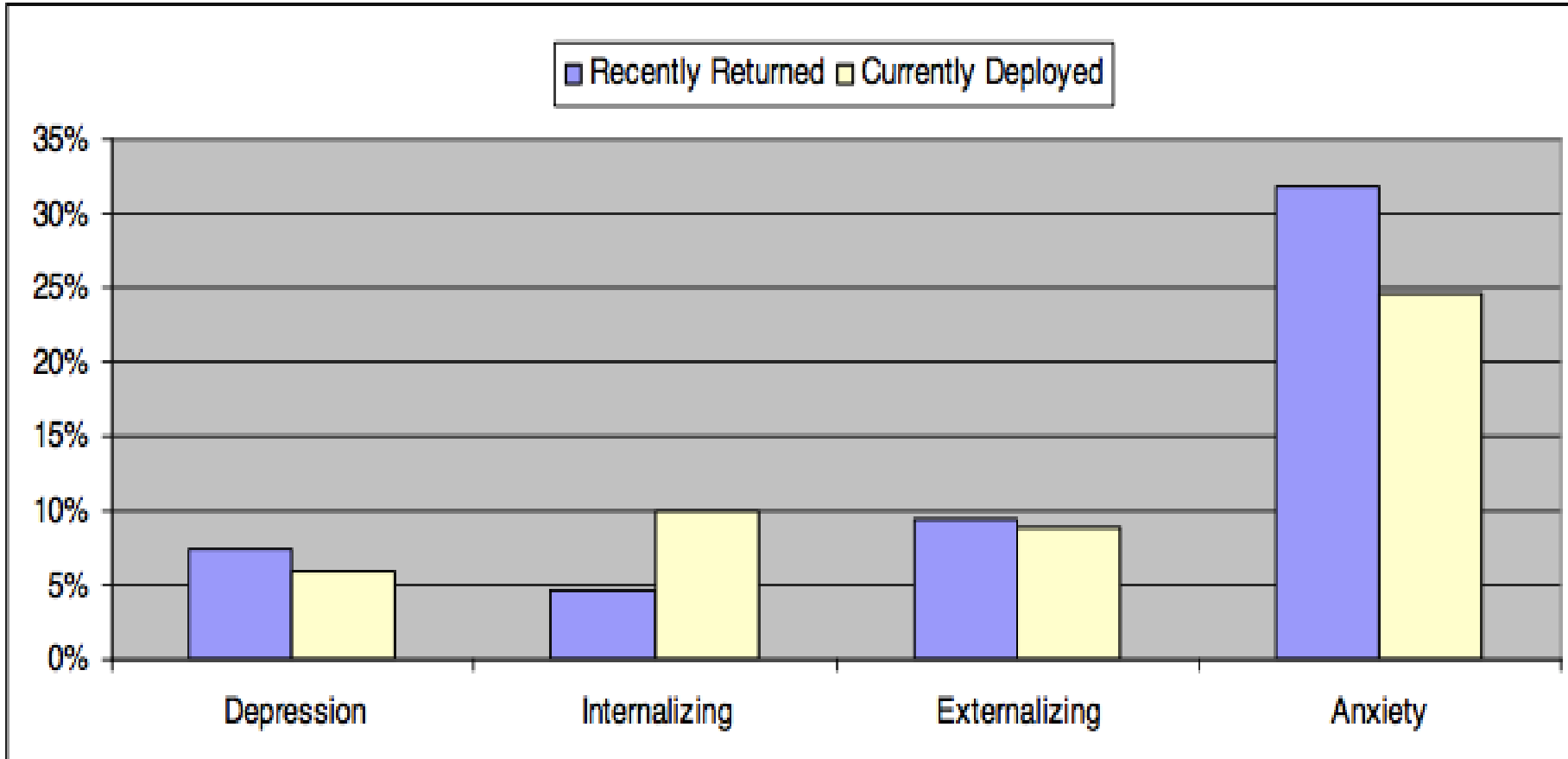
Assessments

- **Child Assessments (Self Report)**
 - Children's Depression Inventory-II (CDI; Kovacs, 1992)
 - Multidimensional Anxiety Score for Children (MASC; March, 1997)
- **Child Assessment (Parent Report)**
 - Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991)
- **Parental Psychological Symptoms (Self Report)**
 - Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983)
 - Posttraumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale (PDS; Foa, 1995)

Study Population: Children

	Recently Returned	Currently Deployed	Total
Children	N=187	N=85	N=272
Child Age Mean (SD)	8.47 (1.9)	8.68 (2.3)	8.53 (2.0)
Child Gender % Female	44%	47%	45%
No. combat-related deployments Mean (SD)	2.09 (1.6)	2.16 (.86)	1.65 (1.55)
Months of deployment Mean (SD)	16.73 (7.8)	16.49 (8.3)	16.66 (8.0)

Child Symptoms: Parent Deployed vs. Recently Returned



Child Outcomes Predicted by Months of Combat Duty and Non Active Duty Parental Symptoms of Distress

Predictor (t-value)	Depression (CDI) n=261	Internalizing (CBCL) n=242	Externalizing (CBCL) n=242
Combat Months	2.46**	NS	3.48***
Parental Symptoms			
BSI Global Severity	NS	6.77****	4.20****
PDS Symptom Severity	NS	5.33****	5.31****

CDI=Child Depression Inventory CBCL=Child Behavior Checklist
 BSI=Brief Symptom Inventory PDS=Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Scale

*p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01 ****p < .001

Discussion: Family Outcomes

- Both Army and Marine Corps children who have experienced any parental combat deployments (current or recent) demonstrate indices of resiliency in emotional and behavioral adjustment compared to community norms.
- However, children affected by parental wartime deployments do have significantly increased levels of anxiety symptoms compared to community norms on self report measures.
- About 1/3 of non active duty parents report clinically significant symptoms of distress when affected by wartime deployment overall, with significantly greater distress reported during spouse deployments compared to recent return.

Risk Factors in School Aged Children Affected by Parental Combat Deployments

- Cumulative months of parental combat deployment during the child's lifetime is significantly associated with both depressive symptoms and externalizing symptoms.
- Parental (both active duty and non active duty) psychological symptoms associated with child psychological symptoms across multiple outcomes.
- These finding underscore the family level implications of combat related deployment, and provide support to a family centered targeted preventive approach for children and families.