More deficit, more benefit: Emotion regulation as a moderator of the effects of a military parenting program on fathers’ parenting practices

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Introduction

Emotion regulation and parenting among military service members

- Military service members deployed to war zones are at elevated risk for psychopathology and adjustment problems due to war-related trauma exposure (Miltken, Auchtterlonie, Hoge, 2007). The stress of deployment and subsequent adjustment difficulties persist during the reintigration period, and may present substantial challenges to the children in military families.

- As a core internal process underlying various psychopathologies, emotion regulation is central to effective parenting behaviors, especially emotion-related parenting (Rutherford, Wallace, Laurent, & Mayes, 2015).

- Their tendency to dismiss emotions and avoid emotion-related stimuli, may escalate their punitive and controlling behaviors to resolve conflicts, leading to increased rates of coercive parent–child interactions (Dishion & Patterson, 2006).

After Deployment, Adaptive Parenting Tools

ADAPT

After Deployment: Adaptive Parenting Tools

- ADAPT is a parent training program tailored to the specific needs of military families whose goal is to enhance effective parenting practices, thus reducing children’s adjustment problems (Gewirtz, 2014).

- This group-based preventive intervention is designed to target six core parenting practices: positive involvement, skill encouragement, problem solving, monitoring, discipline, and emotion socialization (Gewirtz, Pinna, Hanson, & Dustin, 2014).

The Present Study

- Question 1: Can the ADAPT intervention improve parents’ emotion-related parenting practices?

- Question 2: How parents’ difficulties in emotion regulation might boost or lessen their benefit from the parenting program, especially for male military service members?

Methods

Participants

- This study used a subset of data from the ADAPT study, which included 181 deployed fathers in 2-parent families whose wives are civilians. The fathers are on average 37.76 years old (SD = 6.42), primarily white and non-Hispanic (87.8%). They are relatively well-educated, with 52% having a 4-year college or advanced degree.

Procedure

- online screening → consent and assent → secure and confidential online survey → in-home assessment at baseline → randomization → ADAPT intervention → in-home assessment 1-year post-baseline

Measures

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

- The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS, Gratza & Roemer, 2004) is a 36-item self-report scale assessing individuals’ responses to negative emotional experiences.

Emotion-related Parenting Practices

- Parent-child interactions
- father-child problem-solving
- father-child conflict about discipline

The Macro-Level Family Interaction Coding System (MFICS; Snyder, 2013)

Control variables

- Treatment status (1 for ADAPT intervention condition and 0 for controls)
- Fathers’ deployment-related variables, including number of months the fathers have deployed, and fathers’ combat exposure measured using the Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory
- Years married (average of husband and wife reports of years married to current spouse)
- Child gender (1 for girl and 0 for boy)
- Parent education
- Child age

Data Analysis Plan

- An intent-to-treat (ITT) approach was used to evaluate intervention effects
- Missing data in all models were managed with the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) procedure used by Mplus version 7.4.

Results

Figure 1. Difficulties in emotion regulation moderated the intervention effect on observed reactivity coercion and distress avoidance at 1-year among deployed fathers.

Results showed that the intervention did not directly improve fathers’ observed parenting relative to the control group. However, the intervention did significantly reduce observed reactivity/coercion and distress avoidance among fathers with above average self-reported difficulties in emotion regulation at baseline.

Conclusions and Implications

The intervention has its most benefits on fathers’ parenting by reducing distress avoidance for fathers with more emotion regulation problems. Our findings on the moderating effect of emotion regulation on the parenting program for military families may have important implications for personalized prevention intervention.

Reference


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