Parenting Stress in Military Families: An Integrative Review

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BACKGROUND

- Parenting is a significant stressor in many families, and to date, parenting stress in military families has received little attention in research and practice.
- More than 45% of service members are parents.
- Over 2 million children have a parent who has experienced at least one military deployment since 2001 (Department of Defense, 2013).
- Military parents experience unique stressors such as frequent relocations and separations such as deployment.

OBJECTIVES

- Describe and evaluate the effects of parenting stress on the mental health of military parents, children, and families.
- Review theoretical approaches and instruments used to describe and measure parenting stress.

METHODS

- This integrative review was conducted according to Whittemore and Knaff's (2005) methodology.
- A total of 35 peer-reviewed articles were selected for inclusion in this review.
- Focus on family stress and parenting stress in military families.
- Articles published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Publication in English language.

RESULTS

- Parenting stress is defined as "a set of processes that lead to aversive psychological and physiological reactions arising from attempts to adapt to the demands of parenthood" (Deater-Deckard, 2004, p. 19).
- Several theoretical approaches are used to explore, define, and understand the phenomenon of parenting stress:
  - Parenting Cycle of Deployment (DeVoe & Ross, 2012)
  - The Resiliency Model of Family Adjustment and Adaptation (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989)
  - Social Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
  - Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1983)
  - Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995)

- Parenting stress is associated with increased levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- Parenting stress is one of the strongest predictors of parent and child relationship/adjustment difficulties, suggesting long-lasting effects.
- Parenting stress is associated with adverse mental health outcomes in parents, children, and the overall family unit.
- Understanding and assessing for parenting stress using validated instruments allows the nurse to develop clinical interventions to reduce the amount of stress and subsequent mental health concerns experienced by parents and their families.
- Parenting stress in military families has received little attention in research and practice, and who received mental health treatment had better outcomes, suggesting the importance of adequate treatment.

IMPLICATIONS

- Nurses may encounter military family members in all practice settings and locations.
- Understanding and assessing for parenting stress using validated instruments allows the nurse to develop clinical interventions to reduce the amount of stress and subsequent mental health concerns experienced by parents and their families.
- Parent-Child Relationships are affected by prolonged absences due to training and deployments.
- Parenting stress is associated with increased levels of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance use.
- Early intervention, parenting stress predicted parent and child relationship/adjustment difficulties, suggesting long-lasting effects.
- Families with adequate support systems, coping mechanisms, and who received mental health treatment had better outcomes, suggesting the importance of adequate treatment.

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Figure 1. Staged Review Process for Article Inclusion