



Impact of Deployment on Children and Families: Recent Research Updates

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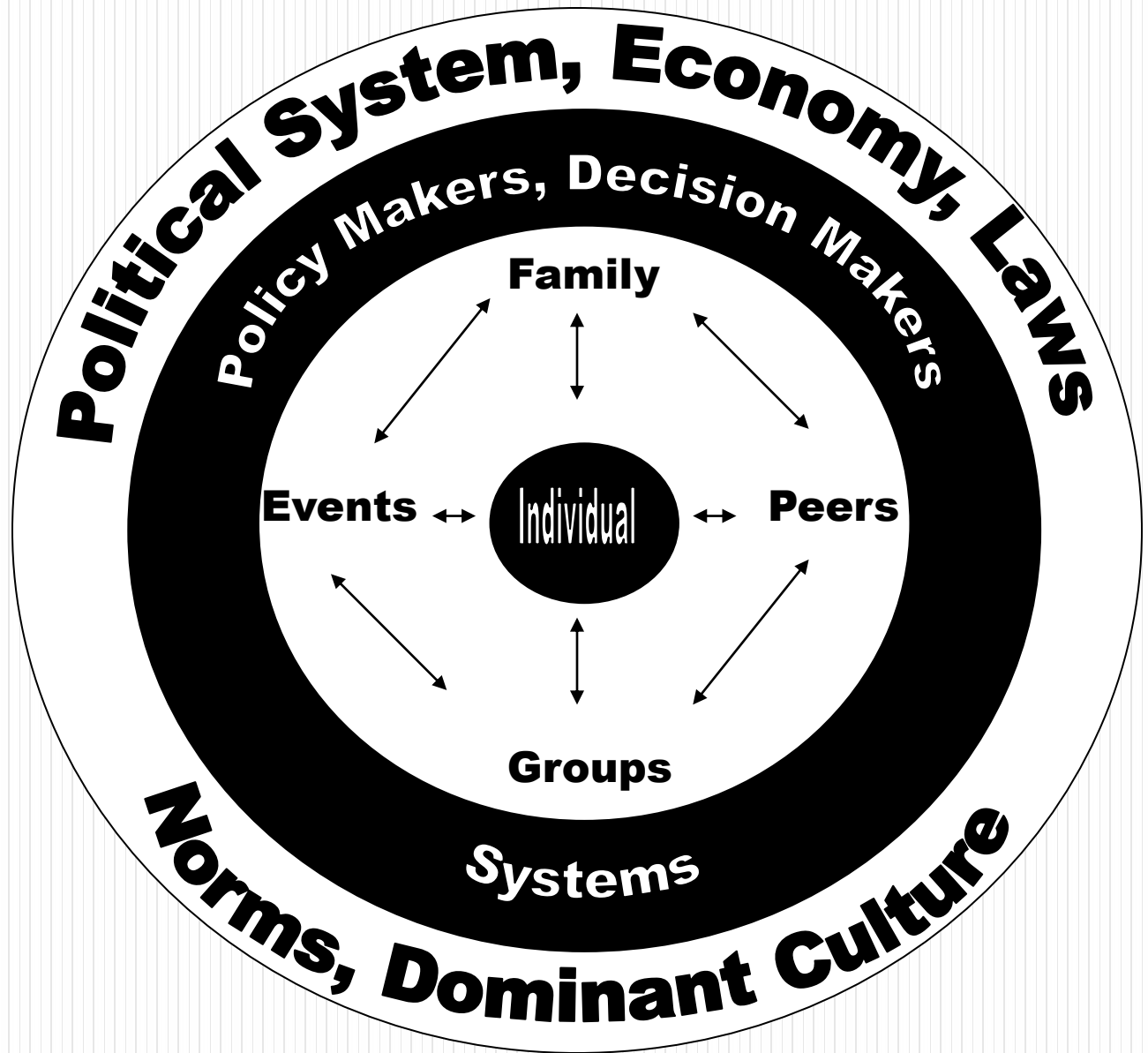
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Overview

- Providing a Road Map
- Setting the Context
- What We Know About Deployment Effects on Children
 - Existing literature
 - My work
 - 2004 study; 2007 study
 - Virginia Pilot Study
- Models of Adjustment & Support
- Implications

Ecological Model

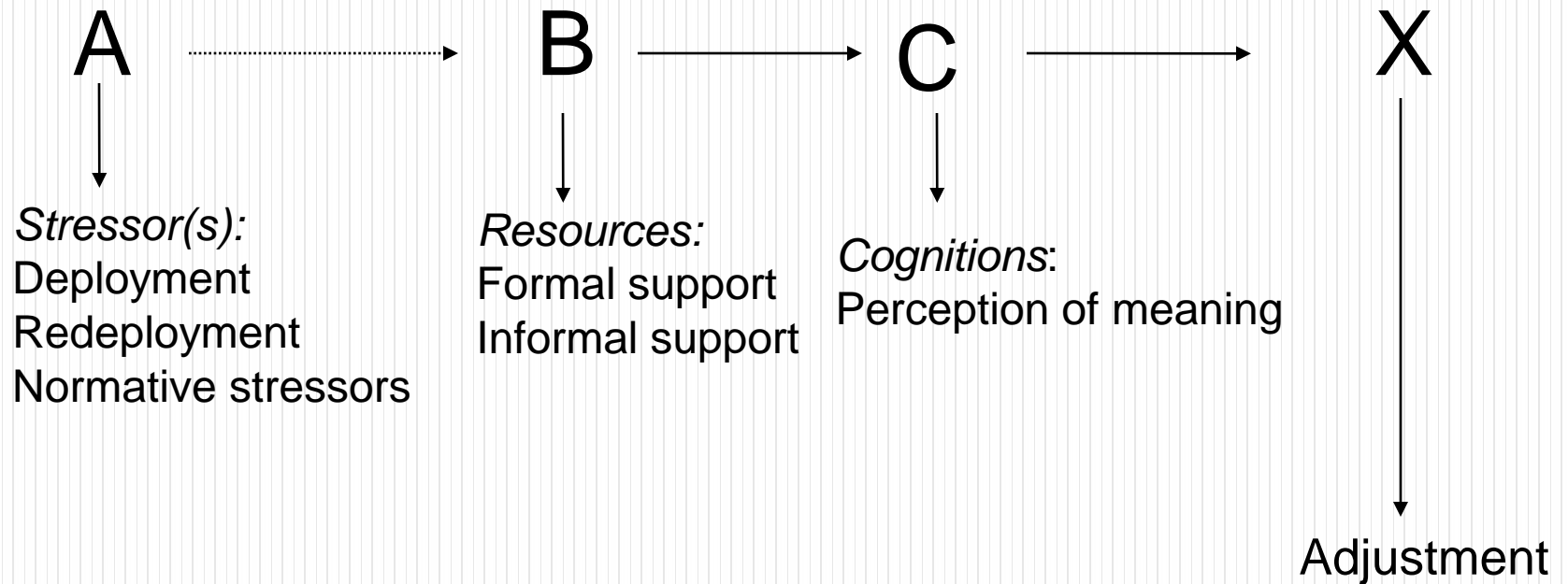
- Level One:
Individual
- Level Two:
Immediate
Setting
- Level Three:
Connections
- Level Four:
Systems
with Power
- Level Five:
Society



Setting the Context

- 55% of active military members are married
 - 43% of those have children (40% under age 5)
- About 1.5 million service members have spent time in Iraq
 - ~500,000 have served 2 tours
 - ~70,000 have served 3 tours
 - ~20,000 have been deployed 5+ times
- State of off-installation housing
- High utilization of National Guard and Reserve Service Members
- Availability of support services
 - Gap in access and actual use

Double ABC-X Model of Adjustment (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983)



Impact on Marriage

- Mixed findings:
 - Less relationship satisfaction (McClelland & Sutton, 2005)
 - More marital stability (Karney s& Crown, 2007)
 - Only ~50% of spouses of enlisted members felt they coped “well” during the most recent deployment (Orthner & Rose, 2006)
 - Of Nat’l Guard/Reserve, only about 34% said they felt well-prepared for the deployment (Caiber Associates, 2003)
 - Best predictor of positive coping and adjustment was a strong marriage

Impact on Children

- Increase in child maltreatment rates (mostly neglect) during departure to and return from military deployment (Gibbs et al., 2007)
- Children aged 3 years or older with a deployed parent have more negative behavioral symptoms compared to matched group without a deployed parent (Chartrand et al. 2008)
 - E.g. emotional reactivity, anxiousness/depression, somatic complaints and withdrawal; attention difficulties, aggression
 - Important study because it controlled for caregiver's stress and depressive symptoms

Impact on Children

- Increase in symptoms of uncertainty and loss, boundary ambiguity, symptoms of depression, changes in routines and relationship conflict among adolescents with deployed parents (Huebner et al. 2007)
- Higher levels of post-traumatic stress and elevated blood pressure among adolescents with parent deployed (Barnes, Davis & Treiber, 2007)
- Major source of stress seems to be adjusting and readjusting to new roles and responsibilities throughout the cycle of deployment (Mmari et al. 2009)

Impact on Children

- Home Caregivers for children of deployed parents reported higher levels of emotional and behavioral difficulty in children than did those in the general population (Chandra et al., 2008)
- Children from active duty component expressed more anxiety about home caregiver during deployment and more trouble with school work (Chandra et al. 2008)
- Children from reserve component families reported more trouble from interacting with peers and teachers (who didn't get their experience) and more difficulties with parent readjustment after deployment (Chandra et al. 2008)

What do we know?

- Our studies
 - 2004 Focus Groups
 - 14 focus groups; 107 youth, all Services
 - Access via NMFA
 - 2006 pilot study
 - 5 families; mom and target child; National Guard/Reserve
 - Access via Virginia Operation Military Kid (OMK) Liaison
 - Expanded model of adjustment and adaptation
 - 2008 focus groups
 - 11 focus groups; 85 youth; National Guard/Reserve

Study 1: Adolescent Adjustment During Parental Military Deployment

- 2004 Focus Groups
 - 14 focus groups; 107 youth, all Services
 - Access via NMFA
- Participants:
 - 107 adolescents between ages of 12 and 18
 - ~ 61% Caucasian; 17% African-American
 - ~ 46% Females
 - ~ 56% Active Duty military parent (39% Army)
 - ~ 36% National Guard or Reserve military parent (23% Guard)
 - ~ 100% Experienced parental deployment
- Analyses: Atlas.ti software; team approach

Focus Group Question Areas:

- Extent of experience with parental deployment
- Graffiti Wall on deployment feelings
- Everyday life when a parent is deployed
- Personal and family changes
- General life stresses
- Stresses related to deployment
- Support received from others, including family, friends, and caring adults
- Pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment (reunion) experiences
- Overall well-being

Findings: High Adaptation vs. Low

- Higher Adapters:
 - Understood that change and adaptation were necessary.
 - Place their situation in context.
 - Were less likely to internalize stress, handled stress more productively.
 - Were involved in less interpersonal conflict with family.

Quotes from High Adapters

- *Because I look at how other people are living, like some people, both of their parents died, and they're homeless. And I look at my Dad, and at least I know he is still alive."*
- *"Well he is deployed but we try doing a lot of stuff to help out while he's gone, and I go to my friend's house a lot."*
- *"Because there are some, a whole bunch of bad things but there's more good things than bad things happening to me."*
- *"And some of the good things help out, too, like I have really good neighbors that understand the situation going on. And I'm always welcome at my neighbors."*

Findings: High Adaptation vs. Low

- Lower Adapters:
 - Expressed more emotional responses to deployment.
 - Made greater expressions of violence and aggression.
 - Discussed greater levels of conflict with non-deployed parent, usually Mothers
 - Were less likely to feel their friends understand the situation.

Quotes from Low Adapters

- *“When my Dad is there we do lots more stuff than when he’s gone. It’s kind of hard to adjust to things without him when he’s gone.”*
- *“And my Mom is like always stressed out which, you know, is because she has to deal with all of us and like me, she’s kind of mad at, she can’t have like time or calm down or anything.”*
- *“It’s just school and all kinds of people just don’t really care, and they treat you different.”*

Findings: Both High and Low Adapters

- Reported grades suffering as result of deployment worries.
- Reported inappropriate disclosures by adults on war particulars.
- Reported being very distracted by deployment-related worry.

Summary: High v. Low Adaptation

- All focus group participants had experienced parental deployment, consequently the stressful event was mainly the same for all, but reported *perceptions* of the event different
- Lower adapters tended to be less mature about understanding what was happening around them, and about how to marshal resources for their benefit.
- Higher adapters seemed to be better connected with others, including family and friends.

Findings: Ambiguous Loss

- Overall perceptions of uncertainty and loss
 - Meaning associated with deployment
- Boundary ambiguity
 - Roles & responsibilities during deployment
 - Reintegration of returning parent
- Changes in mental health
 - Depression & anxiety
- Relationship Conflict
 - Greater intensity in overall family emotions
 - “lashing out” response
 - Noticed changes in relationship at-home parent

Overall Perception of Uncertainty & Loss

- Meaning Associated with Deployment:

“I just didn’t know how long they would be gone and when they would come back, because plans change a lot. And we just didn’t know like how long we would have to go without our parent.”

“I wouldn’t say I felt mad, but it’s kind of confusing about why he would want to go and put himself in that position.”

Boundary Ambiguity

- Roles & Responsibilities
- Routine Changes
- Reintegration of Returning Parent

“...and it was a lot harder for us...to get into the routine of having him than it was for him to leave...Because there were responsibilities taken up by each of us and then when dad came home, we didn't have the responsibilities anymore but we were used to them and so that caused a change also. And so it's just like, 'Okay, what do we do now?' We can't go back to being who we were because we're not that anymore. We have to move forward, but it's also something you have to do as a family.”

Changes in Mental Health

- Depression & Anxiety

“I can’t go to sleep. Because they are up and doing something and you can’t like, you’re thinking about what they are doing.”

“The worst time is when the phone rings because you don’t know who is calling. They could be calling, telling you that he got shot or something.”

“I could tell my mom was getting like really depressed and since she wouldn’t talk, I wouldn’t talk. And so everyone around the house was just kind of depressed for a little while...”

Relationship Conflict

- Greater intensity in overall family emotion
 - “I was angry at everybody...”*
 - “I felt enraged. Just means he got taken away from me—they took my dad away from me.”*
 - “[It’s hard] not having a dad to depend on for like two years, and now my mom is always upset when we talk about him.”*
- “Lashing Out” response
 - “Sometimes I—like, not because I mean to or anything—but I get snappy, sometimes because the stress just leaps onto other people.”*

Relationship Conflict

- Noticed Changes in Relationship with Mom

My mom acts different when my dad's gone. It's like she's not her normal self. She's kind of like stressed out and her 'stressed out' effects me too."

"It's just a lot more stress on her. Like she hold her stress up pretty well, but she's just like, if me and my sister are acting up, she gets mad a lot easier."

"When my dad was gone—the entire time he was gone—my mom, she just didn't try hard."

Relationship Conflict

- Reintegration of returning parent

“Well when my dad left, everything’s going one way, and when he comes back he’s starting out right where he left off so...there’s just a big clash and that starts lots of problems...Like he forgets that he’s been gone for like a year... So he thinks we’re a lot younger and while he was gone we matured a lot over the year. And he’s still trying to treat us the way we were treated a year ago.”

Formal and Informal Support Networks

- Informal Supports
 - Sources: parents, grandparents, friends both with and without military ties
 - Helpfulness: Provide a chance to release tension or by diverting their attention from a situation over which they had no control
 - Drawbacks: Not always helpful. Sometimes felt inauthentic or voyeuristic
- Formal Supports
 - Sources: youth centers, church youth groups 4-H, school
 - Helpfulness: mixed reviews; wanted those who really understood what they were going through

Informal Support Quotes

“And I sort of feel like my best friends and their families become part of my family, and we treat each other like extended family.”

“I’ve got one friend that will actually talk about it because she has a brother being deployed soon. But all the rest of my friends don’t, it sort of makes them uncomfortable for me to talk about it, and that makes me uncomfortable too.”

“I won’t talk to my family about it because they just make it worse.”

Formal Supports Quotes

- *“I really do not like that stuff [formal supports]. I like dealing with it myself. But for other people that do like need the support I think it would be a lot better if it was someone who actually went through it and is like not their age but around there somewhere so they could relate to them more. Because I tried that before, tried to do the one-on-one thing, and it was some old dude that pretended he knew how I felt but I knew he didn’t. So it really frustrated me that he thought he could do anything.”*
- *“I feel like my teachers are more understanding and you know, more apt to give me an extension on my homework because they know about my family. Because I had this one teacher whose dad was deployed and he died while he was over there. And you know, she just took me under her wing and was like my counselor throughout the rest of the year.”*

Study 2: Exploring Attachment and Family Adjustment During Deployment

- Virginia Pilot Study
- N=5 families (National Guard or Reserve only)
- 45-60 minute interviews
- 2 extreme cases presented here (qualitative portion only)
- Attachment theory:
 - Strange situation
 - Attachment and internal working models
 - Attachment security is most at risk during times of high stress.
 - Attachment as resource activated during stress

Pilot Study: Maggie

- Case 1:

Maggie is a Caucasian 31 year-old mother with two children, a son (age 5) and a daughter (age 18 months). She and husband have been married for eight years. She currently works full time as a teacher. At the time of the interview, her husband had completed 14 out of his 15 month deployment to Iraq. The husband has been with the National Guard for thirteen years but this was his first deployment to an active war zone. Husband was senior enlisted, and wife had a post-graduate degree.

Pilot Study: Rebecca

- Case 2:

Rebecca is a Caucasian 34 year-old mother with two daughters (ages 7 and 9). She and husband have been married for 13 years. She currently works part time. At the time of the interview, the husband had completed 9 of his 15 month deployment. The husband was on active duty status for six years, and has been on reserve status for the past 8 years. Husband was a senior officer, and wife had a postgraduate degree.

Indicators: Attachment to Spouse

Maggie: *“I think I have realized how much I love him and need him and how good we are together. You know, how we are a team and I actually also think I’ve realized how much he actually cares for me. Cause you know, I’m not one of the wives who calls up and you know, and says, “It’s great.” I’m like, “Honey, this sucks.” ...if it’s not okay I’m not going to pretend like it is. And he listens to me and he supports me, and when he was here I guess I took it for granted and now I realize how important he is.”*

Rebecca: *“...there would be some nights they [children] were just so constantly crying, if he would call I’m like, “You deal with it.” I don’t know what to do. I mean, “I don’t know what to tell ‘em anymore. I don’t know when to tell them you are going to be home. I don’t know what to tell them you are going to be doing. I don’t know.” ... and I told him, I said “If this is way it’s going to be for leave, don’t come home.” I said, “I don’t want you to come home.”*

Mother's Adjustment

Maggie: *"...I call it a cycle. I actually cycle through the emotions where, like during the week or like for two or three weeks I'm ok, I'm happy, I'm upbeat, and then one week it hits me, and I realize I'm by myself. This is horrible. Then I get down and you get the cycle of being upset ..."*

Rebecca: *"It's like I can't do... and I finally called the doctor and I said, "I've got to have some anti-depressants."... I said, "I just...I can't deal anymore..."*

Mother-Child Relationship

Maggie: *“I guess in a way, like the other day, I guess [son] was just poking...you know, wanting something and wanting something... I keep telling myself, you know, I need to just give him a second to calm down or do something and I thought, “Wow, I’m doing a really bad job.” And I know I have a choice, but I also think in my head, “When he [husband] comes home, it’ll get better.” And that’s all I can do.”*

Rebecca: *“(younger daughter) She really never expressed that she was concerned. If she did it would be very rare...there’s a lot of times when they just close me up, you know, “How’s your day?” “I don’t want to talk about it.”*

Child Adjustment

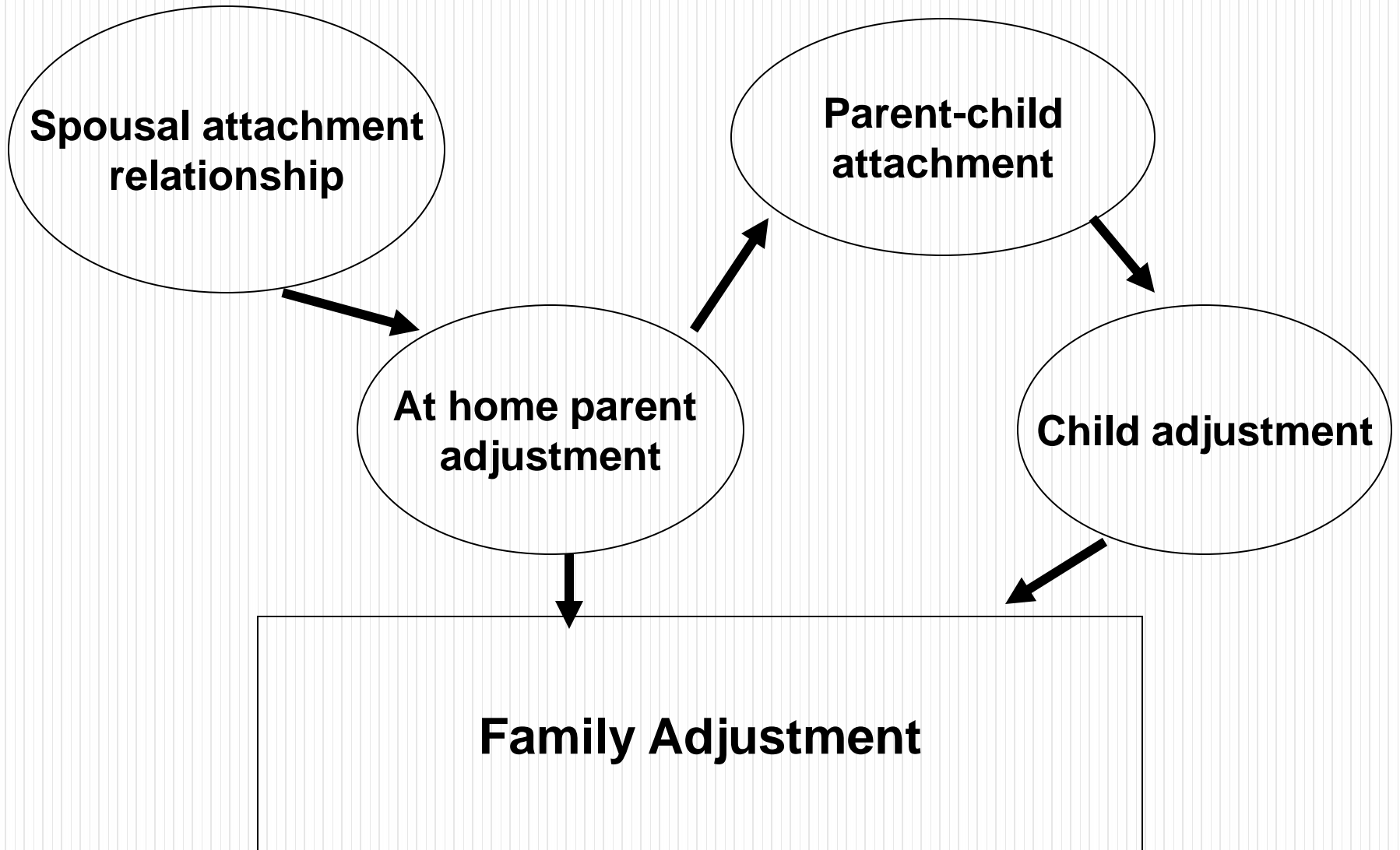
Maggie: *“I was throwing up in the bathroom and he came in to check on me. And he’s five, and he said, ‘Are you ok, Mommy?’”*

Rebecca: *“...we’ve had a lot of battles lately. I lot of out of the blue, you know “You don’t love me. You don’t care. You wish you never had us.” I mean it’s just been really rude, really disrespectful behavior...”*

Summary Findings:

- The adjustment of a mother during deployment appears to be related to her attachment relationship to the deployed spouse.
- The adjustment of the child appears to be related to the mother-child relationship.
- Mother-child relationship is impacted by the mother's intentionality and this *intentionality* seems to be related to her ability to depend on her husband's support during the deployment.
- All family members appear to experience a degree of difficulty with the deployment, but the attachment relationships seem to influence the family's ability to cope.

Model of Attachments and Adjustment



Study 3: Impact of Multiple Deployment

- Focus groups conducted with National Guard and Reserve Teens at OMK camps summer 2008
 - 85 teens: Florida; Ohio, Maine, North Carolina
 - 11 focus groups
- Preview of emerging themes:
 - Is the differentiation of deployment phases still relevant?
 - Disclosure of deployment to child
 - Experience of backlash for war participation
 - Attachment as a resource
 - Distraction/denial as coping strategies

Is the differentiation of deployment phases still relevant?

“When he came home from, like, his training or whatever when he was supposed to leave, but he had been gone for like a month, but it was still like you know were excited to see him or whatever. It almost felt like you didn't, like, connect again, like, he was home like physically, but he wasn't because you didn't want to get like re, like, attached to him again. So, like, there was a lot of stuff like, oh, this happened, you had so much to tell him, but like it was like you didn't want to get so attached again that it was emotional, like, leaving again...”(17-year-old White female, National Guard)

“...I think like he's in the Retired Reserves, but I think he's going to go back. Like they're going to say, ‘Oh, yeah, just before you retire, oh yeah, you're going to go back.’” (12-year-old White female, Reserves)

Disclosure of Deployment to Child

“I found out from our answering machine because a guy from my dad's office had called, and my parents had been acting strange so I just listened to the messages, and I found out and kind of blocked them off for a couple of days.” (14-year-old Bi-racial female, Army)

“My dad when he was going to leave for Iraq, he had, he told my mom first and then one night they decided to tell us, so they had a group meeting . . . We went to our family room, and they just talked about it. He knew when he was leaving. He told us when he was leaving... Like a couple of days before he left we threw a party for him for when he was leaving. It was kind of sad, but then ... It was actually kind of cool. He left for the first six months to go train in D.C. and like pretty much all over, and when he was in D.C. and then Florida, we drove down there to see him... One time we just stayed for a month with him while he was training.” (12-year-old White female, parents in multiple branches of military)

“Yeah. But he pretty much just told us, and we spent time together, but we kind of kept our distance because we didn't want to like, you know, hold on too much. I mean, like, it was kind of like hope for the best, but expect the worst, you know, but we're a really close family.” (16-year-old White female, Marines)

Experience of Backlash for War Participation

“Everyday at school someone would always say, ‘oh, your dad's not doing anything over there. He's just sitting around killing innocent people,’” and almost everyday I'd get in a fistfight, and it just kind of hit me hard. . . . During the deployment...I always used to be able to walk into the school with a strong head knowing that my dad is doing the right thing, that he is fighting for my freedom and that he will defend me at any cost.” (15-year-old White male, Army)

“My friends don't support me in anything. They don't believe me. Like, I tried telling them when my mom left. And they were like, ‘No, you're just saying that for attention.’” (13-year-old White female, parents in multiple branches of military)

Attachment as a Resource

“I usually feel a lot closer to my mom because I know that if something like happens, like, a snake was in the backyard or something and it's like more than three foot, I'm not going to be able to take it, because it will be able to strike me even from six feet away from it, it'll still be able to strike me. I know my mom will know what to do and how to handle it.” (11-year-old African-American male, Marines)

“Like with my mom like I guess she kind of had a mental breakdown completely. So I guess I was more of a mom there, like having dinner and stuff . . . She just didn't do anything . . . I didn't talk to her much. I talked to my older brothers a lot though.” (14-year-old White female, National Guard)

“My mom was in school so she really didn't have time for her kids like we really like, I can't speak for like my brothers and sisters, but from what they kind of showed, like, my mom grew distant from them. Like, she'd lock herself in her room at night and like for hours she wouldn't come out and just cry.” (16-year-old White female, Marines)

Distraction and Denial as Coping Strategies

“I know this is weird to say this, but it was like he was dead.” (14-year-old White female, National Guard)

“...I really don't like show my feelings, I just hide it, let other people see, hey, if he's not afraid that his dad is going to get hurt because he knows his dad is strong then why should I be afraid?” (11-year-old African-American male, Marines)

“Well, I try. Every time they do the web cam I try not to be around or nothing because I don't really want to see him like that.” (13-year-old African-American female, Army)

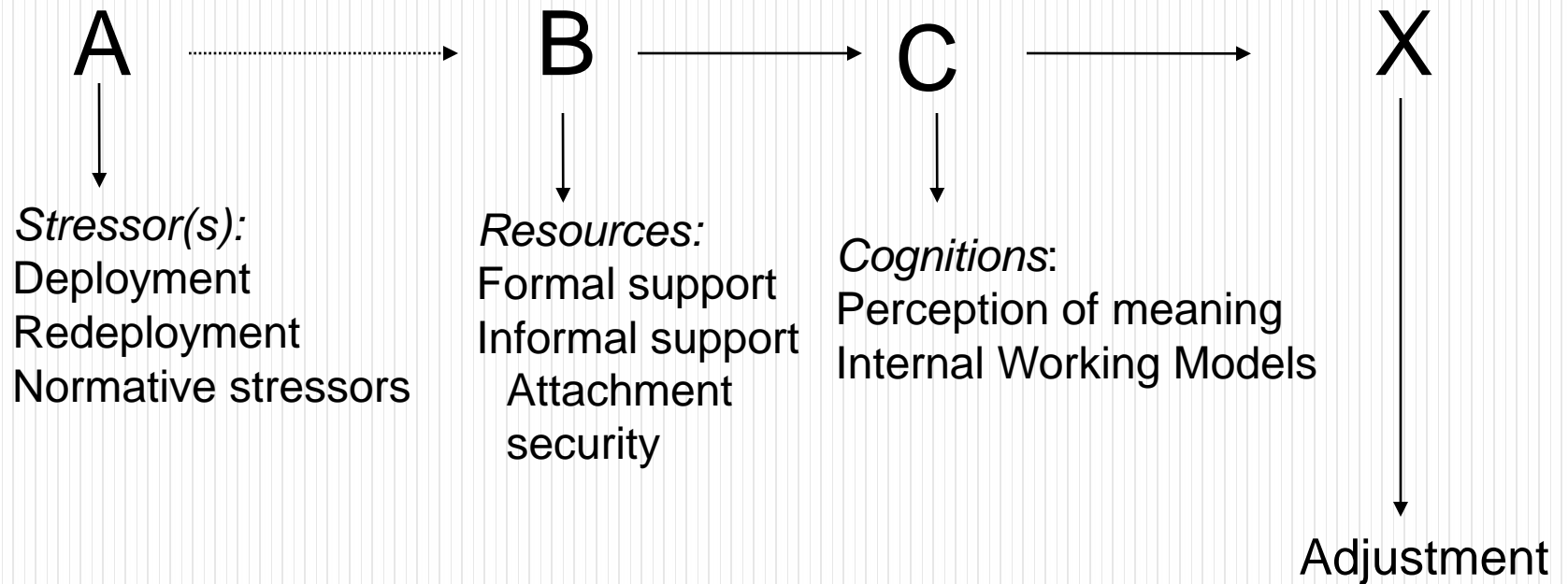
Child as a Resource

“My dad, my brother was too young. He was just about...one, around that age, and so my dad really all he said was ‘I’m leaving it up to you, you need to take care of them, take care of your mother and your brother.’ Which kind of... I know he had that respect, but I didn’t know he would ever drop it on me, which kind of gave me that good, but bad feeling like yippee, oh, crap.” (15-year-old White male, Army)

What does all this mean?



Expanded Model of Adjustment & Adaptation



Implications for professionals

- Support for Youth:
 - Increasing knowledge and awareness about deployment related issues
 - Increasing knowledge of and vigilance around depression and stress symptoms
 - Increasing opportunities for connection and support
- Support for Parents:
 - Recognizing reactions to deployment related stress
 - Becoming intentional about providing consistency in family routines and rituals
 - Providing and accessing informal support systems
 - Invitations—personal relationships

Where are the gaps?

- Don't have a clear understanding of the processes through which child/family adjustment is enhanced or hindered
 - Limited understanding of these nested models of attachment
 - Systems perspective
- Don't have a clear understanding of how multiple deployments influence families—beginning to be studied
- Don't have a clear understanding of the contextual effects of National Guard/Reserve versus Active Duty influence adjustment—beginning to be revealed

Future Directions

- Need more whole unit/whole family research
 - Self-report from single family members are insufficient
- Need longitudinal studies
 - Enhances ability to explore processes and make causal inferences about relationships

Resources

- Huebner, A. (in press). Exploring processes of family stress and adaptation: An expanded model. Forthcoming Chapter in: J. Mancini & K. Roberto (Eds.) *Human Development Across the Lifespan: Antecedents, Processes, and Consequences of Change*. Lexington Publishers.
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