

## **TITLE: Parent Attitude Outcomes for Military Affiliated Participants in the *Nurturing Parenting Program***

### **Introduction/Goals:**

Child abuse and neglect prevention is an important public policy priority to strengthen families and safeguard the security and well-being of children. Parents are typically the most powerful influence in a child's life and can either create an atmosphere of nurturance or difficulty. For military service members, significant stressors may occur for individuals, partners, and children due to adjustments to training, separation, deployment, service, reunification and other factors (Gewirtz & Youssef, 2016). The *Nurturing Parenting* program is a parent training program based on social learning theory and is designed to assess, treat and prevent or ameliorate abusive parenting attitudes and practices (Bavolek, 2014). The *Nurturing Parenting Program* (NPP) was selected by the state of North Dakota for usage as its primary parent training program with families involved in the child welfare system. For this study, we investigated outcomes for military affiliated participants who completed the program.

In North Dakota, in FY 2014 there were 23.9% ( $N = 911$ ) child abuse and neglect assessments that were referred for participation in parent training programs (ND DHS, 2015). The *Nurturing Parenting Program* is intended to assist in developing positive and nurturing attitudes and behaviors. The key objectives of the program are:

- Increasing parental self-awareness and empowerment
- Developing empathy in responding to children
- Understanding child development and the role of guidance and discipline
- Strengthening emotional sensitivity and communication
- Training parents in positive behavior skills and nurturing routines

It is a 16-week program that involves weekly meetings, group learning and discussion, and repetition of basic parental skills (Family Development Resources, 2015). In 2015-16, 5.6 percent of NPP participants in North Dakota were military affiliated while an additional 6.4 percent were partnered with a military service member.

An evaluation of the experience of military affiliated participants involved in the *Nurturing Parenting Program* was conducted to assess progress in meeting the program's objectives and assisting these families. Research indicates that particular attitudes and beliefs are linked with parental practices that are associated with lower or higher risk of child abuse and neglect (Barth et al., 2005; Cowen, 2001). This study examined parental attitude variables linked with risk of child abuse or neglect among military affiliated participants in the *Nurturing Parenting* program and outcomes associated with program involvement.

### **Methods:**

The evaluation of military affiliated participants in the program used a pre- and post-test design that was limited to actual program participants in order to assess changes in parental attitudes before and after participation in the program. These results were compiled using feedback gathered from program participants who completed an evaluation measure called the AAPI-2. The Adult and Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2) is a valid and reliable instrument designed to measure parenting beliefs and attitudes. The instrument assesses parenting beliefs

and attitudes across five parenting constructs derived from theory and research that are associated with abusive and neglectful parenting behaviors. The entire inventory consists of 40 items to which respondents indicate their level of agreement using a five point Likert scale, from *strongly agree* (1), to *strongly disagree* (5). Bavolet and Keene (1999) reported scale reliabilities ranging from  $\alpha = 0.86$  to  $\alpha = 0.96$ . In order to analyze the five constructs of the AAPI-2, each construct has a score between 1 and 10 that represents a range from high risk (1-3) to average (4-7) to low risk (8-10). One hundred and eleven military affiliated participants completed both the pre- and post-AAPI assessment over a programming period of four years (2012-2016). The scores calculated for participants were mean scores, on the scale from 1 to 10, and the scores for each Parenting Construct from “before participation” were compared with the average scores from “after participation” using a paired sample t-test analysis. Also, effect sizes using the Cohen’s *d* statistics were calculated to assess the overall practical effect of the program on individuals participating at all sites evaluated.

### **Results:**

Findings are presented in Table 1 for all participants who completed both surveys for the program ( $N = 111$ ). The findings show, based on statistical analysis, that participants indicated significant differences on all 5 parental attitude constructs that were measured using the AAPI-2. There are several points to make related to these findings:

- Participants noted moderate to substantial changes in all of the 5 parental constructs measured, with all of the changes showing positive increases (e.g., parents becoming more sensitive and empathic toward a child’s needs).
- The largest difference occurred in Parental Construct C, Use of Corporal Punishment (+1.80).
- The increases that occurred in parental attitudes and beliefs were somewhat higher than would be expected to occur due to random chance, and thus a good indicator that the Nurturing Parenting program is having a positive influence on these military affiliated participants.
- Effect size calculations showed that program impacts ranged from a small positive effect ( $d = .36$ ) to a quite large positive effect size ( $d = 1.04$ ), depending on the construct being assessed.

**Implications:** The data suggest that the NPP is having a modest and positive impact on those military affiliated individuals who participate and complete the 4-month parenting program. In other words, the findings indicated that the *Nurturing Parenting Program* has had a meaningful influence on participants and assists parents toward beliefs and attitudes that are more nurturing and less likely to be at risk for child abuse or neglect. The effect sizes for different participant groups who engage in the NPP program vary significantly, often due to the effect of such contexts as military affiliation or other factors. A basic understanding of how the program affects military affiliated individuals can be useful in making any needed program adjustments to be more relevant to individuals in that context. The findings shared here suggest the overall practical effect of the program on military affiliated individuals participating at all sites in North Dakota has been positive. Key questions to pursue include:

- 1) Should there be a specific focus on military affiliation and parenting attitudes?
- 2) What direction should the research take to achieve such a focus?
- 3) What are other participant attributes that should be emphasized and researched?

**Table 1: Perceived Impacts on Parenting Attitudes of NPP in North Dakota (2012-16)**

<b>Parenting Construct</b>	<b>Before Participation (Mean Score)</b>	<b>After Participation (Mean Score)</b>	<b>Difference Between Mean Scores</b>	<b><i>p</i> value</b>	<b>Cohen's <i>d</i></b>
<b>Construct A – Expectations of Children</b>	5.66 ( <i>SD</i> = 1.59)	6.42 ( <i>SD</i> = 1.60)	.76 (increase)	<i>p</i> = .00	<i>d</i> = 0.48
<b>Construct B – Parental Empathy Toward Children's Needs</b>	5.48 ( <i>SD</i> = 2.04)	7.07 ( <i>SD</i> = 2.07)	1.60 (increase)	<i>p</i> = .00	<i>d</i> = 0.77
<b>Construct C – Use of Corporal Punishment</b>	5.51 ( <i>SD</i> = 1.89)	7.30 ( <i>SD</i> = 1.55)	1.80 (increase)	<i>p</i> = .00	<i>d</i> = 1.04
<b>Construct D – Parent-Child Family Roles</b>	6.82 ( <i>SD</i> = 1.83)	7.57 ( <i>SD</i> = 1.89)	.75 (increase)	<i>p</i> = .00	<i>d</i> = 0.40
<b>Construct E – Children's Power and Independence</b>	6.36 ( <i>SD</i> = 2.01)	7.21 ( <i>SD</i> = 2.25)	.85 (increase)	<i>p</i> = .00	<i>d</i> = 0 .36

### References

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