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EDUCATIONAL TURBULENCE

AND

NEW ZEALAND ARMY CHILDREN

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts in Psychology  
at Massey University*

Daniel Arthur Kewin  
1978

ABSTRACT

Military employment involves a high rate of geographic mobility which, it is often presumed, disadvantages service children educationally. This cross-sectional study was undertaken to empirically evaluate this presumption by comparing, in relation to educational turbulence, the academic achievement and personalities of 84 army and 130 civilian children. Relationships between parental attitudes to military and itinerant employment and the children's academic achievement were also investigated.

The Form II subjects of both sexes attended six selected schools; three predominantly populated by army children and three predominantly populated by civilian children. The civilian and army groups were comparable in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and school environment.

Official school records provided biographic and mobility (number of schools attended) data as well as Progressive Achievement Test raw scores on the Reading Comprehension, Reading Vocabulary, Listening Comprehension and Mathematic tests. The Junior Eysenck Personality Inventory was used to measure the children's degree of extraversion-introversion and neuroticism-stability. A self administered Parent Questionnaire collected educational turbulence data in terms of mobility and the amount of short and long term absence of the father from home. Four attitude scales were constructed within the Parent Questionnaire to measure parental attitudes towards:

- (a) The effects of mobility on education
- (b) The effect of the service environment on the family

- (c) Involvement in their children's education and
- (d) Shifting the family home.

Army children were found to have experienced more than twice as much educational turbulence as the civilian children. There was no evidence however that they achieved less academically than comparable civilian children; nor did the groups differ on the personality dimensions of extraversion-introversion and neuroticism-stability. Furthermore, no strong and consistent relationships between parental attitudes measured and the children's academic achievement were found. There is however some evidence that army children whose parents believe the military environment detrimentally effects the family achieve higher academic results, most apparent in Mathematics Test performance, than those army children whose parents do not. It is suggested that compensatory efforts may be made by some army parents for the perceived deleterious effects of the service environment.

The findings are discussed in relation to previous research and the New Zealand context.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Ross St. George, thank you for your willing practical and scholarly advice throughout this project.

The success of a study of this nature depends upon the co-operation and assistance of many people. I am particularly indebted to the principals and the pupils of participating schools, and of course to the parents who so conscientiously completed the Parent Questionnaires.

I would also like to thank Ms. R. Rosenbrook for her valued clerical assistance, Mrs. P. Masson for administering the JEPI, Mr. C. Reid for his computer instruction, and Mrs. M. McAusland for her diligent attention to the final typescript.

I wish to acknowledge the permission given by Messrs. Mackay and Spicer to adapt some of their survey instruments.

Ruth, your motivating and sustaining support is unvaluable, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF APPENDICES	x
CHAPTER 1	LITERATURE REVIEW
	1
1.1	<i>Introduction</i>
	1
1.2	<i>Turbulence and Children's Academic Achievement</i>
	5
1.3	<i>Turbulence and Children's Personal Development</i>
	12
1.4	<i>Parental Influence on Children's Academic Achievement and Personal Adjustment</i>
	16
1.5	<i>Summary</i>
	19
CHAPTER 2	METHODOLOGY
	24
2.1	<i>Hypotheses</i>
	24
2.2	<i>The Sample</i>
	25
2.3	<i>Variable Descriptions</i>
	27
2.4	<i>Measuring Instruments</i>
	29
2.5	<i>Data Collection</i>
	39
2.6	<i>Data Transformations</i>
	40
2.7	<i>Sample Characteristics</i>
	41
CHAPTER 3	RESULTS
	45
3.1	<i>Hypothesis 1</i>
	46
3.2	<i>Hypothesis 2</i>
	48
3.3	<i>Hypotheses 3</i>
	52
3.4	<i>Hypotheses 4</i>
	54
3.5	<i>Hypothesis 5</i>
	58
3.6	<i>Extreme Attitudes</i>
	60

	Page
3.7 <i>Other Findings Arising From a Study of the Data</i>	68
3.8 <i>Multiple Regression Analyses</i>	75
CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	84
4.1 <i>Summary of Conclusions</i>	93
APPENDICES	95
REFERENCES	121

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
TABLE 1	Correlations Between PAT and Abilities Tests	33
TABLE 2	Percentages of Maoris and Europeans in Army and Civilian Subsets of the Total Sample	42
TABLE 3	Percentages of Males and Females in Army and Civilian Subsets of the Total Sample	42
TABLE 4	Number of Schools Attended by Civilian and Army Children	47
TABLE 5	Statistical Test of Significant Difference Between Mean Number of Schools for Army and Civilian Children	47
TABLE 6	Amount of Father Absence for Civilian and Army Children	49
TABLE 7	Correlations Between Types of Turbulence for Civilian, Army and the Total Sample of Children	49
TABLE 8	Correlations Between Turbulence and PAT Standard Scores for Civilian, Army and the Total Sample of Children	51
TABLE 9	Summary Statistics of PAT Standard Scores for Civilian and Army Children	53
TABLE 10	Correlations Between Attitude Scales and PAT Standard Scores for Civilian, Army and Total Sample Children	56
TABLE 11	Summary Statistics for JEPI Scores for Civilian and Army Children	59
TABLE 12	Summary PAT Statistics for Civilian, Army and Combined Sample Children Whose Parents Hold Extreme Attitudes About the Effects of Mobility on Education (Scale 1)	64



		Page
TABLE 13	Summary PAT Statistics for Army Children Whose Parents Hold Extreme Attitudes About the Effects of the Service Environment on the Family (Scale 2)	65
TABLE 14	Summary PAT Statistics for Civilian, Army and Combined Sample Children Whose Parents Hold Extreme Attitudes About Involvement in Their Child's Education (Scale 3)	66
TABLE 15	Summary PAT Statistics for Civilian, Army and Combined Sample Children Whose Parents Hold Extreme Attitudes About Shifting the Family Home (Scale 4)	67
TABLE 16	Summary Statistics of Civilian Maori and Army Maori Children	69
TABLE 17	Summary Statistics of Civilian European and Army European Children	70
TABLE 18	Summary Statistics for Maori and European Children for the Combined Sample	72
TABLE 19	Summary Statistics for Boys and Girls on Various Dimensions	74
TABLE 20	Matrix of Correlation Coefficients Between PAT Standard Scores and Several Independent Variables	77
TABLE 21	Multiple Regression Analyses - Reading Vocabulary	78
TABLE 22	Multiple Regression Analyses - Reading Comprehension	81
TABLE 23	Multiple Regression Analyses - Mathematics	82

		Page
TABLE A	Summary Statistics of Extreme Groups for the Attitude Scales for Civilian and Army and Total Sample Children	112
TABLE B	Summary Statistics of Extreme Attitude Groups Determined by Parameters of Each Group of Civilian, Army and Total Sample Children	113
TABLE C	Summary Statistics for JEPI Scores for Males	114
TABLE D	Summary Statistics for JEPI Scores for Females	115
TABLE E	Multiple Regression Analyses - Listening Comprehension	116
TABLE F	Multiple Regression Analyses - Neuroticism	117

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page	
APPENDIX A	Parent Questionnaire	95
APPENDIX B	Attitude Scales 1 to 4	108
APPENDIX C	Extreme Attitude Group Summary Statistics	112
APPENDIX D	JEPI Summary Statistics for Each Sex	114
APPENDIX E	Multiple Regression Tables for Listening Comprehension and Neuroticism	116
APPENDIX F	Junior Eysenck Personality Inventory	118