

Depression in Military Fathers

The association with family functioning and father-adolescent interaction

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Background

PTSD in military fathers is thought to impact the family environment (1), but less is known about the impact of father depression in this context.

Aim: To investigate the association between depression in military fathers, family functioning and father-adolescent interaction.

Methodology

Design: Cross-sectional two-group comparison study.

Data collection: Data were collected online and during home visits.

Participants: 106 military families with 138 adolescents aged 11 to 17 years. Fathers had previously participated in the KCMHR KIDS study (2).

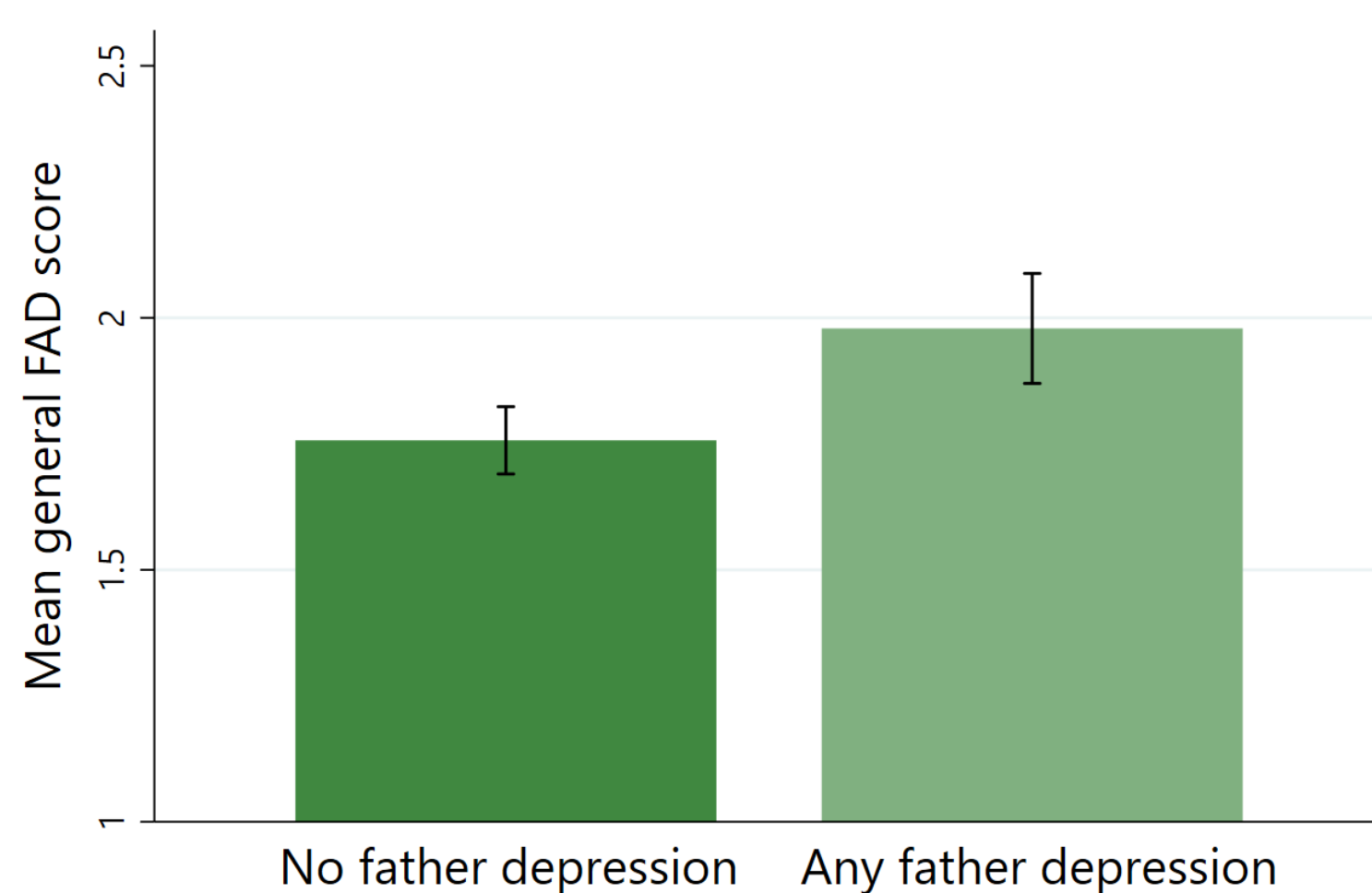
Statistical analysis: Complete-case simple linear regression analysis, adjusted for socio-demographics and paternal military factors (serving status, engagement type, service, rank and deployment status).

Exposure	Measurement instrument	Completed by
Father depression status	9-item Patient Health Questionnaire depression scale (PHQ-9) (3)	Father
Outcome	Measurement instrument	Completed by
Family functioning	McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD) (4)	All participating family members
Father-adolescent interaction positivity and negativity	Family Interaction Global Coding System (5)	Research team members who observed the father and adolescent engaging in two discussion tasks (planning a holiday, and conflict resolution)

Results

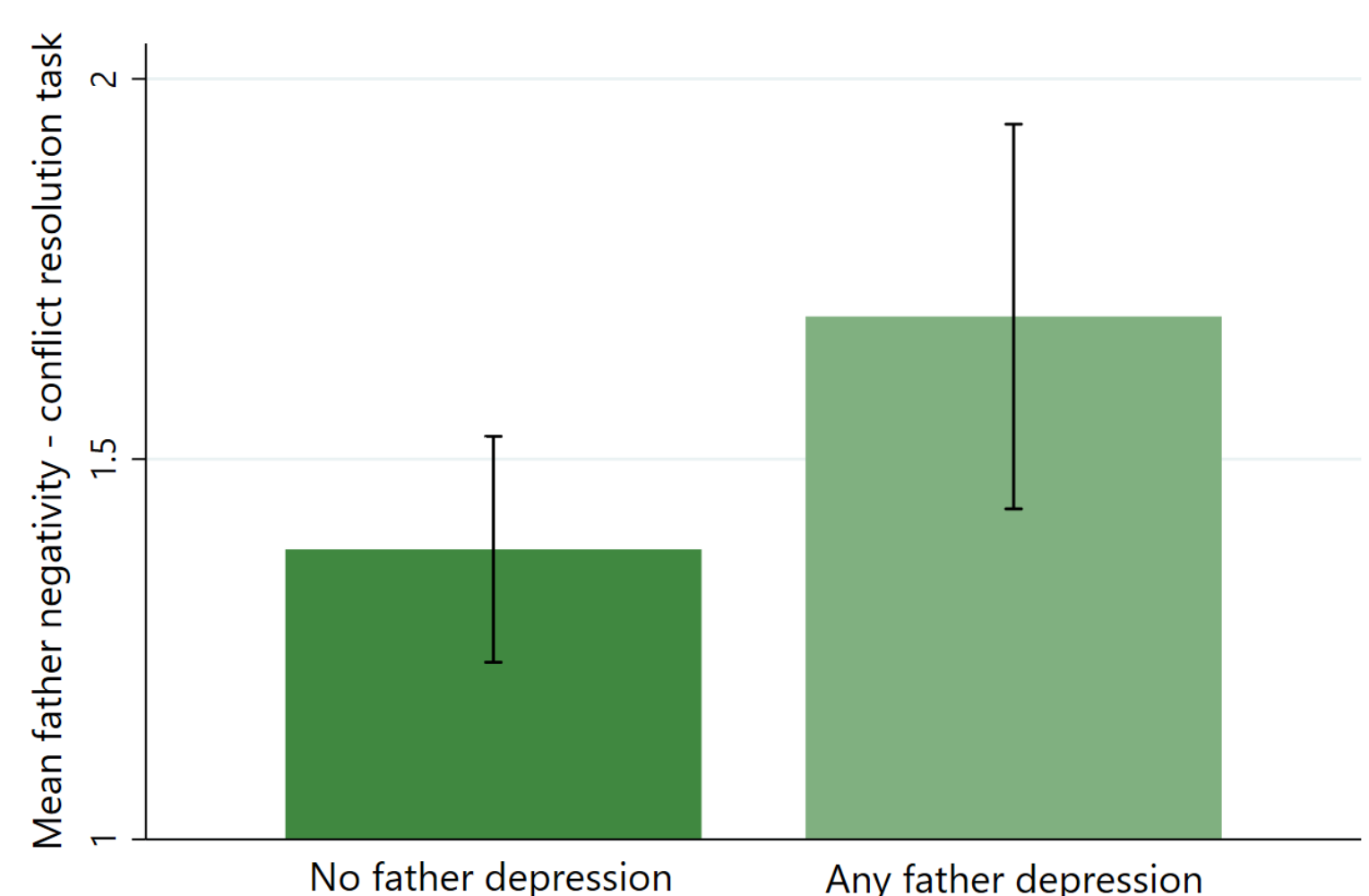
Family functioning

- Mean general family functioning was **significantly poorer** in families where the father met criteria for depression (adjusted coefficient=0.22, 95% CI=0.09-0.35, $p=0.002$).
- However, mean general family functioning **did not meet the cut-off score for unhealthy functioning** in either group (2.0).



Father-adolescent interaction

- In the **conflict resolution task, depressed fathers showed higher levels of negativity**, although this association weakened after adjusting for socio-demographics and military factors (adjusted coefficient=0.22, 95% CI=-0.07-0.51, $p=0.135$).
- Father depression was otherwise **not significantly associated** with father-adolescent interaction.



Conclusions

- Findings support an association between **father depression and family functioning** in UK military families. Father-adolescent interaction requires **further investigation**.
- Accessible support** for military fathers and their families remains critical, especially where fathers may be suffering mental ill-health.

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