

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Postpartum Depression in a Military Sample

Appolonio, K., & Fingerhut, R. (2008). Postpartum depression in a military sample. *Military Medicine*, 173(11), 1085-1091. doi:10.7205/MILMED.173.11.1085

SUMMARY: An exploratory study of rates and psychosocial risk factors (e.g., prenatal anxiety and depression, low self-esteem life stress, etc.) of postpartum depression in the military was conducted at Wilford Hall Medical Center with active duty women Service members. Initial results showed higher rates of postpartum symptoms in military population than civilian, however no correlation between symptoms and marital status or military factors.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Results indicated that nearly 20% of Active Duty military Service members disclosed symptoms of postpartum depression, which is higher than current civilian rates.
- Nearly 40% of the sample endorsed pregnancy complications, a factor noted for its contribution to postpartum depression.
- There was no relationship between postpartum symptoms and marital status or military factors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping with postpartum depression and improve female Service members overall health
- Create and promote peer support groups for Service members struggling with postpartum depression
- Encourage military installations to host awareness campaigns regarding postpartum depression, encouraging Service members and their partners to engage in regular self-care and to keep healthcare appointments

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration between medical and mental health providers to form partnerships to care for families affected by postpartum depression
- Recommend that Service members be routinely screened for mood and anxiety disorders prior to and after labor and delivery
- Afford Service members time in their schedules to engage in regular wellness activities and manage mental health symptoms

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METHODS

- A total of 526 participants were recruited via letters, flyers, and informational posters.
- Out of 526 sent letters, 92 participated, five were excluded due to incompleteness/timing, with a total of 87 participants included in analysis.
- Participants completed a 22-item, multiple choice demographic questionnaire, along with two measures, the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, and a modified Postpartum Depression Predictors Inventory-revised.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were all Active Duty military women, who gave birth at Wilford Hall Medical Center.
- The majority of the sample was White (62.1%), with a mean age of 30 years, and an average of 1.7 children.
- Seventy percent of participants were U.S. Air Force, 23% Army, 3.4% Navy and National Guard and Reserve; 63% were enlisted personnel.

LIMITATIONS

- Due to the small sample size and single site of data collection, these results may not accurately reflect the military population as a whole.
- Presence or absence of risk factors were not fully assessed due to expense and time, which could have influenced and confounded results.
- All questionnaire were self-reported and participation was self-selected, which could account for selection bias.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include a larger sample size with a random sampling of sites and branches to produce generalizable results
- Utilize research questionnaires that include expanded military-specific questions to better analyze the impact of wartime status and military environment on mothers mental health
- Examine various prevention programming to determine best practices for postpartum prevention and treatment for community and military providers

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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