

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Through Children's Eyes: Children's Experience of Living With a Parent with an Acquired Brain Injury

Butera-Prinzi, F., & Perlesz, A. (2004). Through children's eyes: Children's experience of living with a parent with an acquired brain injury. *Brain Injury*, 18(1), 83-101. doi:10.1080/0269905031000118500

SUMMARY: Researchers explored the experiences of four children living with fathers with a brain injury. Although small in scope, this study's primary aim was to provide information to families, therapists, rehabilitation counselors, and policy-makers in the area of brain injury. Another aim was to raise awareness of the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of at-risk children following a parental brain injury.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Results suggested children experienced emotional and behavior symptoms that included anxiety, hyperactivity, low self-esteem, depression, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships.
- In comparison to previous research studies, all four children in the current study reported being directly abused by their fathers or traumatized by witnessing severe physical or verbal abuse.
- The children identified the support of others (e.g., grandmothers) as important in their coping, yet reported abandonment by family friends, extended family, and others (e.g., health care professionals).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Attend trainings about brain injuries to become a better resource for military families who have a family member who has experienced a brain injury
- Offer support groups for families of Service members who have a brain injury to increase the kinship among those families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Maintain supportive services for families after treatment for brain injuries because family members have reported violence and other problems that began after treatment ended
- Help families educate children about brain injuries from the onset of their parent's injury and ensure children are provided age-appropriate updates of their parent's health condition

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend programs develop a protocol of services and referrals for families, especially children, of Service members with a brain injury
- Encourage the collaboration between military-based and community-based services to provide Service members with brain injuries comprehensive care

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METHODS

- The sample was recruited from a family therapy clinic in Victoria, Australia.
- The four participants were from three families and were selected for participation in the study because they were the first three families to volunteer for the study.
- This was a qualitative study where the children participated in one, 1-1.5 hour interview that was later transcribed and coded based on patterns and themes that emerged from their responses.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of four children (three girls and one boy) from three different families. Therefore, two of the children were siblings.
- The children's ages ranged from 7 -12 years old. There were no data provided about the children's race or ethnicity.
- All children were from two-parent households (with opposite sex parents) and in each family, it was the father who had the brain injury.

LIMITATIONS

- This study did not provide enough demographic data about the children and their families to determine how applicable the findings were with other families who have a parent with a brain injury.
- The authors used data from facilitators' observational notes of the children while they participated in a program offered at the family therapy clinic, which was separate from the research study. As a result, there are concerns with validity of the authors' data and conclusions.
- The authors did not mention a process of obtaining inter-rater reliability of the qualitative data, which limited the reliability of the data.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study with a larger sample, only data gathered by researchers, and procedures to ensure the reliability of the data
- Explore relationships between brain injuries and reports of marital satisfaction among Service members and their spouses
- Gather longitudinal data about potential developmental concerns over time of children with a parent who has a brain injury

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