

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Effects of Respite Care for Children With Developmental Disabilities: Evaluation of an Intervention for at Risk Families

Cowen, P. S., & Reed, D. A. (2002). Effects of respite care for children with developmental disabilities: Evaluation of an intervention for at risk families. *Public Health Nursing, 19*(4), 272-283. doi:10.1046/j.1525-1446.2002.19407.x

SUMMARY: Respite child care programs can be a beneficial social support intervention for families of children with developmental disabilities. Families of children with developmental disabilities receiving respite services were assessed for parent stress level at pre and post, sociodemographic factors, level of respite services and child maltreatment rates. Respite services decreased parental stress levels; furthermore, some sociodemographic characteristics and parental stress scales were associated with child maltreatment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parental stress levels significantly decreased following respite care services.
- Relationships between sociodemographic factors and parental stress scales were found. Specifically, as the health of the mother and social support increased, parental stress decreased.
- Increased levels of parental life stress and decreased social support were factors associated with an increase in child maltreatment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with civilian respite service providers to make the service more accessible for military families of children with developmental disabilities
- Examine ways to increase social support for military families that have children with special needs

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Distribute information about available respite services to military parents of children with special needs
- Provide activities for military parents of children with special needs to increase their social support network

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration between DoD programs and community organizations providing respite care services
- Continue to support programs and activities for reducing stress in military families

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METHODS

- Families of a child with developmental disabilities receiving respite care services were recruited from rural community agencies.
- Sociodemographic and health characteristics of the parents and child were collected. Parental stress was also measured at the start of respite services, and after respite services were implemented. Of the 148 families recruited, 87 (59%) completed the parental stress measure at both times.
- The sociodemographic characteristics were used to determine factors affecting parental stress at the start of services. The change in stress levels following respite services was used to determine if respite services decreased parental stress.

PARTICIPANTS

- The participants included 148 families and their 265 children with developmental disabilities.
- The mean age of mothers was 33.3 years (SD=7.9) and the mean age of fathers was 36.3 years (SD=8.3).
- The child participants included 165 boys and 100 girls, and the mean age of all children at admission was 6.6 years (SD=4.8).
- The majority of mothers (97%) and fathers (91%) in the sample were White. Race and ethnicity data were not provided for other family members.

LIMITATIONS

- The article did not indicate how developmental disability was defined for participants in the study or the level of severity, so the results may not be applicable to all developmental disabilities.
- In most cases, the parental stress level instrument was completed by the mother, so the decrease in parental stress levels resulting from respite services may not generalize to fathers.
- A large portion of the sample did not complete the follow-up assessments. Therefore, the decrease in parental stress levels may not be representative of the original sample of parents.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the long-term impact respite care has on maltreatment rates and parental stress levels
- Assess the impact of respite care on stress level for all members of the family
- Compare whether respite care services reduce stress on families of children with developmental disabilities of varying severity

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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