

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Service Delivery Experiences and Intervention Needs of Military Families with Children with ASD

Davis, J. M., Finke, E., & Hickerson, B. (2016). Service delivery experiences and intervention needs of military families with children with ASD *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 46(5), 1-14. doi:10.1007/s10803-016-2706-8

**SUMMARY:** Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are being diagnosed more frequently, which affects both civilian and military families. This study investigated the services children in military families with ASD experience, particularly surrounding relocations. Results indicated that most children experience a gap in services after a relocation and many are in need of additional services.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Most military spouses indicated that their families experienced some problems accessing the services they felt their child with ASD required, including gaps in service around relocations, access to only some necessary interventions, and lack of access to assistive technology.
- Many of these spouses indicated deficiencies in quality of services offered for their child, including lack of continuity services and school programming after relocations resulting in delayed progress.
- The most common needs reported by military spouses for their child with ASD were social skills training, behavior management intervention, and speech, occupational, or physical therapies.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop resources for families with children with special needs who have recently experienced relocation regarding local service providers
- Create support groups for military spouses with children with special needs to encourage informal support and the sharing of information within the community
- Offer workshops regarding the processes used in local schools for the implementation of education plans for children with special needs and how to navigate that process

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration between installation family programs and local community providers to increase the ability to connect families with services quickly after relocation
- Support programs and agencies that are able to provide multiple services to children with special needs (such as social skills training, behavior management, and pediatric therapies in one location)
- Recommend education for professionals working with military families in school settings regarding the importance of continuity in education plans after relocation

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited through groups for military families and families of children with special needs on social media.
- Participants completed online surveys, providing information about demographics, satisfaction with therapeutic services, and barriers to receiving adequate services with relation to relocations.
- Data were examined with descriptive statistics, particularly through an examination of the proportion of people who selected each response to various questions.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 189 military spouses with children (average age 10 years old,  $SD=4.13$ ) with ASD who had experienced on average four relocations ( $SD=1.66$ ).
- Most of the spouses were female (96%), White (91%), and stay-at-home caregivers (66%), with an average age of 37 years old ( $SD=5.83$ ).
- Active Duty parents served in the Army (47%), Navy (24%), Air Force (15%), Marines (8%), or Coast Guard (5%) and were in the enlisted (60%) or officer (40%) ranks.

## LIMITATIONS

- Participants opted into the study; they may differ from those who did not participate in the study in important ways (such as having strong opinions regarding service experiences) that may influence findings.
- Researchers asked participants to retrospectively evaluate the impact of relocations on service experiences, which may produce information that is biased in some way.
- The sample was limited to families of Active Duty Service members, so results cannot be extended to include families of Service members in the Reserve Component.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize a longitudinal design to evaluate changes in service experiences over time, with particular attention to times around relocations and parental deployment
- Evaluate the service experiences of families of Service members in the Reserve Component
- Investigate other factors that may be barriers to positive service experiences and explain why some families are satisfied with services while others are not

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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