

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Help Seeking by Parents in Military Families on Behalf of Their Young Children

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**SUMMARY:** Online survey data were used to examine individual and child well-being, recognition of child problems, and help-seeking behaviors among military parents. Most military families were aware of their child's problems and sought help. However, parents reported several barriers to receiving care for their child.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Seventeen percent of children in the sample were considered high-risk for problematic behaviors based on standardized measures; of those, 84% of their parents indicated their child had a problem.
- The most common problems that parents identified in children included behavioral problems (37%), sleep problems (19%), and anxiety or emotional issues (18%).
- To learn more about their child's problem, most caregivers looked for information online (90%) or talked with family or relatives (87%); 34% sought out community or military-based services.
- Families were more likely to use community-based than military services; however, families who sought out services reported numerous barriers including poorly organized information about resources, long waits for appointments, and lack of available resources in the community.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop and publicize online resources to support parents whose children are struggling emotionally (e.g. early intervention resources, family support groups)
- Offer accessible, non-stigmatizing peer support programs for military children
- Educate community providers about military family issues to help them provide culturally-competent care

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education of community providers regarding how to be culturally sensitive to issues faced by military children
- Disseminate information regarding common childhood difficulties across military contexts
- Encourage awareness campaigns for military families regarding the importance of early intervention for children

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## METHODS

- A subset of data from a larger study were used to examine primary caregivers' help-seeking behavior for their child (n = 267).
- To be eligible for the larger study, participants had to live in the United States, have a child between 0-10 years, and have one parent serving in the military with a pay grade equal to or less than O-6.
- Primary caregivers completed a telephone interview and web-based survey that asked different questions regarding family demographics, individual and child well-being, child behaviors, and help-seeking behaviors.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Eligibility criteria included having a child between age 0-10 and one parent currently in the military with a pay grade of O-6 or lower.
- The majority of participants were married (84%), female (87%), White (78%), and between the ages of 25-34 years (54%).
- Most (75%) were Active Duty families, with over half serving in the Army; a large majority (69%) were enlisted personnel
- Most children (38%) were between 3-5 years old; 51% of children were male.

## LIMITATIONS

- The low response rate (14%) may have introduced biases and limited the generalizability of the findings.
- Parents may over- or under-report their child's problem behaviors, which may influence the results.
- The study only included children who were 10 years old or younger and may not be generalizable to military families with dependent children over the age of 10 years.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the study with a more diverse (i.e. race and branch) sample of military families
- Utilize observations or teacher reports to elicit their perspectives on children's symptoms and behaviors
- Continue to examine barriers to help-seeking for military families with children

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>