

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Medication Use by Children During Parental Military Deployments

Hisle-Gorman, E., Eide, M., Coll, E. J., & Gorman, G. H. (2014). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and medication use by children during parental military deployments. *Military Medicine*, 179(5), 573-578. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-13-00334

**SUMMARY:** Children of Service members often experience added stress and disruption during deployment, which can be especially difficult for youth with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The relationship between parent deployment and youth ADHD interventions (e.g., medication, healthcare utilization) was examined. Parent deployment was associated with significantly greater healthcare utilization, and pre-school children had significantly more changes (e.g., dose, number of prescriptions) in medications.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Parental deployment was associated with a significant increase in outpatient overall medical visits and behavioral health care visits in children with ADHD.
- Children on medication for ADHD had a 13% increased mental health appointment rate during parent deployment.
- School-aged children with ADHD had a decreased rate of changes in medication regimens during deployment.
- Pre-school-aged children had an increased rate of changes in medication regimens during deployment.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes for military parents to educate them about the potential emotional and behavioral responses young children can display during deployment
- Offer skill-building classes for parents to teach strategies to assist their children in coping with ADHD symptoms across the deployment cycle
- Collaborate with local civilian pediatricians to provide information about the impact of military deployments on families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development for health care providers about the unique stressors faced by military children
- Continue to support the training of teachers about the unique stressors faced by military children
- Recommend professional development for school personnel about helpful strategies to use with students in military families who have ADHD

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## METHODS

- Retrospective data of military dependents, who were ages 4-8 years and enrolled in the Military Health Care System in 2006-2007, were analyzed.
- Children in the ADHD group had two or more visits during the study period and a recorded diagnosis of ADHD; perscription data was obtained from pharmacy records.
- The association between parent deployment and child ADHD intervention (e.g., mental or behavioral healthcare utilization, outpatient medical care utilization, medication changes) was examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 413,665 military dependents with an average age of 12.1 years (SD = 1.4).
- Of the children who met criteria for a diagnosis of ADHD (8% of the sample), 56% were perscribed ADHD medication.
- Males accounted for 73% of children with ADHD and 49% of children without; no race or ethnicity data were provided.
- Parent service members were 90% male, 91% enlisted, and 90% married, with an average age of 35 years.

## LIMITATIONS

- Other variables (e.g., duration and frequency of deployment, socio-economic status, parent and child co-morbid mental health diagnoses) may have impacted findings.
- Analyses did not differentiate between medication increases or decreases, so no conclusions can be drawn regarding medication amounts as they relate to parent deployment.
- Families with two military parents were not identified, which may have confounded results related to parent deployment.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with children of National Guard or Reserve personnel to better understand how these youth react to parental deployment
- Examine how length of parental deployment and number of parental deployments impact service seeking and medication use for children with ADHD
- Examine how pre- and post-deployment periods impact ADHD intervention use among military dependents

## 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>