

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Impact of Parents Wartime Military Deployment and Injury on Their Young Children's Safety and Mental Health

Hisle-Gorman, E., Harrington, D., Nylund, C. M., Tercyak, K. P., Anthony, B. J., & Gorman, G. H. (2015). Impact of parents wartime military deployment and injury on their young children's safety and mental health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 54(4), 294-301. doi:10.1016/j.jaac.2014.12.017

**SUMMARY:** Young children of Active Duty military parents participated in a study assessing the impact of parental deployment and combat injury on children's mental health, injuries, and maltreatment. Young children of deployed and combat-injured military parents had more ambulatory care visits for mental health, injuries, and child maltreatment after their military parent returned from deployment.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- In the post-deployment period, visits for mental healthcare, child injuries, and child maltreatment were elevated in children whose parents deployed relative to children of non-deployed parents.
- Relative to the deployment period, children of deployed parents (injured and non-injured) had higher rates of mental health and injury visits post deployment.
- Children of injured parents had higher rates of child maltreatment care in the post-deployment period than during the deployment period.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups during reintegration to help families of Service member who experienced combat-related injuries
- Provide concrete information to military parents and school personnel regarding normative versus problematic child responses to deployment
- Disseminate information regarding how combat-related injuries can influence Service members' mental health and military family functioning

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that help combat injured Service members and their families adjust
- Support the development of in-home help for combat injured parents immediately post-deployment
- Continue to support programs for identification and prevention of child maltreatment in military families

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## METHODS

- Children's healthcare utilization data and records of parent combat injuries were obtained from the TRICARE Management Activity database.
- Injury visits were limited to new injuries and child maltreatment, and mental and behavioral health visits were identified by the international classification for disease code.
- The Defense Manpower Data Center supplied data on start and stop dates for all military deployments and demographic information on military parents.

## PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 487,460 youth between the ages of 3-8 years were included in the sample (51% male).
- Twelve-percent of participants had a parent who deployed in 2006 and about 17% of deployed parents sustained a combat-related injury.
- Service member parents who deployed (injured and uninjured) were more likely to be male, younger, and have younger children compared to parents who did not deploy.
- No information regarding military branch was provided.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study used diagnostic codes that were assessed by individual providers; such diagnoses may include some biases.
- The study period was limited (fiscal year 2006), which may underestimate the impact of deployment on children's mental and physical health.
- Dual military families were not included which may limit the generalizability of these findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the impact of parental mental versus physical health injuries on children's wellbeing
- Explore factors that protect children and promote resilience in military families impacted by deployment
- Conduct interviews with families in which the Service member experienced an injury to more fully explore their experiences and needs

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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