

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Impact of Geographic Mobility on Military Children's Access to Special Education Services

Jagger, J. C., & Lederer, S. (2014). Impact of geographic mobility on military children's access to special education services. *Children & Schools*, 36(1), 15-22. doi:10.1093/cs/cdt046

SUMMARY: Focus groups and interviews were conducted with military families who have dependents with disabilities enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) as well as the providers serving them. Results provide summaries of challenges that families face and resources available to them during Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves that often entail changes to the availability or implementation of special education services.

KEY FINDINGS:

- EFMP parents experienced concerns and frustrations with quality of services, unmet expectations, and conflict with destination/gaining schools.
- Difficulties often stem from navigating the inconsistent state and local approaches to special education and fulfillment of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) during PCS transfers.
- EFMP parents reported uncertainty regarding details of future place of residence and lack of preparation by destination/gaining schools as barriers to smooth PCS transitions.
- EFMP and School Liaison Program were identified by participants as valuable and useful (although sometimes inconsistent) in facilitating changes between school systems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Assist military families when transferring records and services between schools
- Provide education to EFMP military families regarding the difference among special education services offered so that difference in services are less frequently perceived as a deficit
- Disseminate information regarding the services and resources available to EFMP military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for service providers regarding the PCS experiences of EFMP military families
- Encourage collaboration among DoD service providers and school personnel to support EFMP military families following a PCS
- Continue to support programs that help EFMP military families following a PCS

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METHODS

- Twenty-seven focus groups and 10 individual interviews were conducted in 2011; interviews and focus groups included participants from one service branch and took place on U.S. installations with the highest concentration of military families.
- The service branch and local points of contact identified eligible EFMP enrollees living on base or near installations in three U.S. states (two east coast, one west coast).
- Adult caregivers of individuals with disabilities, adults with disabilities, and service providers were recruited for participation via an introductory letter, an invitation, and a follow-up invitation.

PARTICIPANTS

- Caregiver group consisted of 39 parents of 60 children with disabilities, all enrolled in EFMP and mostly spouses of service members.
- Service provide group consisted of 62 experienced professionals, most with advanced degrees and greater than five years of experience working with people with disabilities and the military community.
- No ethnicity, age, SES, or military rank information was provided for the participants.

LIMITATIONS

- The single service branch included in the study was undergoing a transformation of its EFMP at the time of the study, an atypical situation that may have influenced results.
- Program and study participants were all living on or near large installations and therefore may have had more access to resources and services than other military families living further from an installation.
- Single, time-limited contact with participants did not allow for long-term findings or follow-up.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include additional branches of the military to assess potential variation
- Expand this inquiry to a random sample of all EFMP enrollees, including perspectives of families other than those on or near large installations
- Explore whether the type of identified disability (e.g., emotional/behavioral, chronic health condition), affects the PCS experiences of EFMP families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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