

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Military Parents' Personal Technology Usage and Interest in e-Health Information for Obesity Prevention

Jai, T. M., McCool, B. N., & Reed, D. B. (2016). Military parents' personal technology usage and interest in e-health information for obesity prevention.. *Telemedicine and e-Health*, 22(3), 183-190. doi:10.1089/tmj.2015.0078

SUMMARY: A needs assessment on the current level of technology usage and knowledge and attitudes toward health and nutrition of military parents at two military bases was conducted. The outcomes from the needs assessment suggest that most parents have a general understanding of good nutrition and health, but through access to the internet via different technologies (e.g. laptop, desktop, or tablet) they could benefit from increased information on good nutrition and healthy foods for their families. A needs assessment on the current level of technology usage and knowledge and attitudes toward health and nutrition of military parents at two military bases was conducted. The outcomes from the needs assessment suggest that most parents have a general understanding of good nutrition and health, but through access to the internet via different technologies (e.g. laptop, desktop, or tablet) they could benefit from increased information on good nutrition and healthy foods for their families.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants from both bases had similar technology usage patterns in terms of computer and mobile device usage on the Internet
- A majority of the participants noted less than 3 hours a day of use of the Internet via smartphone or personal computer (e.g., laptop, desktop, or tablet).
- At both bases, more than half of the participants reported that they knew about good health and nutrition and were interested in learning more.
- Air Force base parents had a slightly higher knowledge level of nutrition and health information than Army base parents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Support the development of a technology platform (e.g. online modules, app, website) to disseminate health and nutrition information to Service members and families
- Partner with local schools and early learning centers on the creation of a community garden
- Develop online modules that focus on healthy activities military parents can engage in with their children

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend awareness campaigns on the importance of healthy eating for military families and their children
- Continue efforts with each military branch to foster partnerships with community health organizations in supporting the health and nutrition of Service members and their families
- Develop health incentive plans for military families and their children

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METHODS

- Researchers recruited parent participants at child development centers on two bases.
- All participants completed the Technology Usage in Military Family questionnaire.
- Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted on the participant's computer and Internet usage, mobile devices usage, and attitudes toward health/nutritional information.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were Active Duty Service members, spouses, or family members, 18 years of age and older, with a child between the ages of 3 and 5 years enrolled at the child development centers at one of two selected military bases (one Army and one Air Force).
- Participants identified as White (41%), Black (25%) Latino (22%), Native American (4%), Multiracial (4%), Asian-American (3%), and Other (1%).
- Thirty-one percent of participants were Male and 69% were Female with 81% in the Army and 19% in the Air Force.

LIMITATIONS

- The study used a sample of parents from two child development centers at an Air Force and Army military base which is not representative of all military parents.
- The data were collected in two southwestern states; therefore, geographic location or resources available in those specific military bases may be different to other bases.
- The survey asked numerous questions about technology platforms (e.g. search engines, e-mail, browser, social media) that exist currently, with the rapid changes in technological applications this information could be outdated quickly.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the prevalence of obesity among military adults and children and the relationship to parents' nutrition and health knowledge
- Incorporate independent variables that may affect military family members' health behaviors, such as motivational factors related to personal tracking of health behaviors using technology
- Evaluate the components of an effective health and nutrition internet based intervention program for families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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