



## Prevalence of Mental Disorder in Military Children and Adolescents: Finding from a Two-stage Community Survey

Jensen, P. S., Watanabe, H. K., Richters, J. E., Cortes, R., Roper, M., & Liu, S. (1995). Prevalence of mental disorder in military children and adolescents: Finding from a two-stage community survey. *Journal for the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 34(11), 1514-1524.



Researchers examined the levels of psychopathology (mental health disorders) in a sample of military children and adolescents living on a military post. Military children and their parents participated in the study (N = 294 families). Overall, results did not support the notion that levels of psychopathology were greatly increased in military families.

### Key Findings:

- The levels of psychopathology (e.g., problem behaviors, depression, anxiety, ADHD) in military children were at or below levels reported in studies of the general civilian population.
- Among these children (N = 104), the prevalence, or the number of existing cases of psychopathology (within the six months preceding the interview) ranged from 15.8% to 26.3%, with the majority of these conditions being ADHD and childhood anxiety disorders.
- The prevalence of psychopathology and level of behavioral problems was not differentiated based on children's age, gender, sibling position, Soldier rank, socioeconomic status, or life stressors. However, mothers' depression scores did differentiate diagnosed vs. non-diagnosed children (i.e., mothers with children who received a diagnosis of a mental health disorder had higher depression scores than mothers whose children did not have a mental health diagnosis).

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs could provide positive youth development opportunities for military children to support their wellbeing, such as summer camps, after school activities, and access to recreation facilities.
- Programs could do outreach to mothers dealing with depression, offering specialized programs to support them in managing life stressors and parenting their children effectively.
- Programs may maintain an up-to-date list of referrals that could be offered to families.

### Implications for Policies:

- Policy makers could provide support for screening of and treatment for mental health concerns among Service members and their families.
- Policy makers could provide resources to programs dedicated to military families experiencing mental health concerns. Specific programs could be developed and funded addressing the impact of maternal depression on military children.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- These findings could be replicated among military children from other branches of the military or those living off military installations.
- Future studies could investigate whether the sources of psychosocial support made available to military personnel and their families (e.g., medical care, pastoral counseling, and youth recreational opportunities) may buffer the onset and course of psychopathology.

## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Standardized psychopathology rating scales and a structured diagnostic interview, the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children version 2.1, were used in a multi-method, multi-reporter, multi-stage study design.
- This study focused on military Service members: 100% Army Soldiers and their children.

### Participants:

- From an initial screening of 645 eligible households, the final study sample included 294 military families.
- Parents: 70% enlisted (median rank: Staff Sergeant or E-6), 30% warrant or commissioned officer corps (median rank: Major or O-4); Median income: \$25,000–\$30,000.
- Children: 54% males; 46% females; mean age = 11.2 years (Range 5.7–17.8 years).
- The ethnic composition of families was: 63% Caucasian, 28% African-American, 8% Hispanic, and 1% Other.

### Limitations:

- Selected participants may differ from nonparticipants in a way that is not measured, but affected the outcome variables.
- The sample size was fairly small; there may have been insufficient power to detect differences based on traditional risk factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status.
- Results may not generalize to those from other backgrounds or serving in other branches of the military.

## Assessing Research that Works

| Research Design and Sample                                                                                      |                                            |                                            |                                            |                                                     | Quality Rating: | ★★★☆☆ |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------|
|                                                                                                                 | Excellent<br>(★★★)                         | Appropriate<br>(★★☆)                       | Limited<br>(★☆☆)                           | Questionable<br>(☆☆☆)                               |                 |       |
| The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was... | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>        | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>                            |                 |       |
| Research Methods                                                                                                |                                            |                                            |                                            |                                                     | Quality Rating: | ★★★☆☆ |
|                                                                                                                 | Excellent<br>(★★★)                         | Appropriate<br>(★★☆)                       | Limited<br>(★☆☆)                           | Questionable<br>(☆☆☆)                               |                 |       |
| The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...                 | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>        | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>                            |                 |       |
| Limitations                                                                                                     |                                            |                                            |                                            |                                                     | Quality Rating: | ★★★☆☆ |
|                                                                                                                 | Excellent<br>Minor<br>Limitations<br>(★★★) | Appropriate<br>Few<br>Limitations<br>(★★☆) | Limited<br>Several<br>Limitations<br>(★☆☆) | Questionable<br>Many/Severe<br>Limitations<br>(☆☆☆) |                 |       |
| The limitations of this study are...                                                                            | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>        | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>                            |                 |       |
| Implications                                                                                                    |                                            |                                            |                                            |                                                     | Quality Rating: | ★★★☆☆ |
|                                                                                                                 | Excellent<br>(★★★)                         | Appropriate<br>(★★☆)                       | Limited<br>(★☆☆)                           | Questionable<br>(☆☆☆)                               |                 |       |
| The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...            | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>        | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>                            |                 |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications                             |                                            |                                            |                                            |                                                     |                 |       |
| Overall Quality Rating                                                                                          |                                            |                                            |                                            |                                                     |                 | ★★★☆☆ |