

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Trends in US Army Child Maltreatment Reports: 1990-2004

McCarroll, J. E., Fan, Z., Newby, J. H., & Ursano, R. J. (2008). Trends in US Army child maltreatment reports: 1990-2004. *Child Abuse Review*, 17(2), 108-118. doi:10.1002/car.986

SUMMARY: The victim rates and severity of child maltreatment in U.S. Army families by the sex of the child and parent from 1990-2004 were presented. Data were drawn from the Army Central Registry (ACR), which is a complete list of all substantiated child maltreatment incidents. Overall, while neglect rates ebbed and flowed, emotional abuse had wider fluctuations, physical abuse rates decreased, and sexual abuse remained the lowest over the study time period.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Neglect rates were highest for the youngest children and decreased as age increased.
- Emotional abuse rates were similar for boys and girls up to age 11 years old, but the rates for older girls were higher.
- The rates of physical abuse and neglect were generally higher for boys than for girls up to the 11 years old when the rates reversed.
- Male offenders were more likely to maltreat children (even excluding sexual abuse) than were female offenders and offenders of both sexes were more likely to abuse male children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide activities for Service members that focus on relationship building with their children especially during their teenage years
- Develop curriculum for Service members and their partners that focuses on the inclusion of targeted prevention of child neglect and abuse strategies
- Offer additional child-care support during times of stress for Service members and their partners

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Build awareness across military branches around the importance of supporting and promoting effective parenting for Service members and their partners
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families (e.g., child caregivers, mental health, and education professionals) on the different types and subtypes of child maltreatment
- Promote collaboration between DoD programs and local community organizations to support programs for Service members and their families that address healthy parent-child relationships

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METHODS

- Data collected from the ACR of child and spouse abuse were organized by victim, offender, sex of both child and parent, and type and severity of maltreatment by year.
- Population data were obtained from the Family Data Base (U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center).
- Statistical analysis identified the severity by type of maltreatment, and compared cases of maltreatment by the sex and age of the victim and the sex of the parent perpetrator.

PARTICIPANTS

- Ninety percent of child maltreatment perpetrators were parents: 56% of parental perpetrators were male and 44% were female.
- Analyses of offenders included only parents of maltreated children.
- Between 1990 and 2004, there were 47,473 child maltreatment victims, 50,327 cases of child maltreatment and 54,341 total maltreatments of the child victims with 91% of the child victims only having one case.

LIMITATIONS

- Only the U.S. Army registry was analyzed; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to child maltreatment in other military service communities.
- The focus of this study was on substantiated cases of child maltreatment which limits the understanding of risk and protective mechanisms among non-substantiated cases of maltreatment.
- Data for this study were from cases filed between 1994-2004, a time of low reintegration; which could bias the outcomes.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the effects of military branches increased support of the military family on rates of maltreatment
- Identify the contingencies that need to be changed across military branches to reduce child neglect during deployments and in other stressful circumstances
- Establish the interaction of protective influences and chronic violence exposure in military-connected children of differing ages

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