



## Predictors of Child Abuse Potential Among Military Parents: Comparing Mothers and Fathers



Schaeffer, C., Alexander, P., Bethke, K., & Kretz, L. (2005). *Journal of Family Violence*, 20(2), 123-129.  
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/w160627365w71011/fulltext.pdf>



*This study examined the unique and common predictors of child abuse potential for both mothers and fathers in a sample of active-duty Army Service members and their spouses who were referred to the New Parent Support Program. The authors used several standardized self-report measures to assess a range of factors known to be associated with physical child abuse (e.g., depression, family conflict, relationship satisfaction, parenting stress, and social support).*

### Key Findings:

- Mothers reported higher levels of depression, as well as larger, but less satisfying social networks than fathers.
- For both mothers and fathers, higher levels of depression, parental stress, and family conflict, were associated with greater child abuse potential.
- In addition, lower perceptions of family expressiveness, characteristic of families in which the father is viewed as the dominant authority figure, was predictive of child abuse potential for fathers only, whereas marital dissatisfaction, low social support, and low family cohesion were predictive for mothers only.

### Implications for Programs:

- Intervention programs for at-risk families may consider the integration of depression screenings and related educational materials and, when appropriate, referrals to other agencies (e.g., mental health providers).
- Given the evidence of unique and common predictors of child abuse potential for mothers and fathers, programs may tailor curricula for mothers and fathers, as appropriate; for example, focusing curriculum on increasing high quality social support for mothers.
- Programs could consider enhancing or developing curricula or services that help parents deal with stress and family conflict, as these factors were predictive of child abuse potential for both mothers and fathers.

### Implications for Policies:

- Given that depression predicted child abuse potential, literature on child abuse prevention and contact information for resources should be widely available and accessible for Service members or spouses who are identified as dealing with depression.
- Financial support should continue to be available for programs that help Service members and their families cope with parenting stress, depression, and family/marital relationships, as improving these factors may decrease child abuse potential.
- Efforts should be made to connect current research with program developers more quickly and consistently, perhaps through some type of centralized repository.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Prospective and longitudinal research would be more effective at identifying risk factors that predict abusive behaviors in mothers and fathers.
- Future research needs to include more fathers to examine *more closely* mother-father differences.
- Future research should also explore the role that parent historical factors (e.g., history of physical abuse, history of neglect) play in predicting child abuse potential.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit <http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu>



## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Analyses of variance were used to compare the initial level of functioning between mothers and fathers. Regression analyses were used to examine the unique associations of multiple individual and family variables to child abuse potential in mothers and fathers, while controlling for demographic variables (e.g., age of parent, education level, and race/ethnicity).
- This article focused on active-duty, Army Service members and their spouses.

### Participants:

- 763 active-duty Army personnel and spouses (589 mothers, 174 fathers) who were referred to the New Parent Support Program completed surveys.
- Ethnic composition:
  - Fathers: 61% Caucasian; 18% African American; 15% Spanish or Hispanic; 6% Other.
  - Mothers: 59% Caucasian; 18% African American; 15% Spanish or Hispanic; 8% Other.

### Limitations:

- Parents who participated in the New Parent Support Program, as well as those who chose to participate in the study, may differ from non-participants in a way that was not measured, but affected the outcome variable.
- Findings were confounded because no distinction was made between gender and military versus civilian status of parents.
- Constructs may have also been confounded by the fact that these families were already participating in an intervention program (i.e., New Parent Support Program).

## Assessing Research that Works

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

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