

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Effect of Deployment on the Occurrence of Child Maltreatment in Military and Nonmilitary Families

Rentz, E. D., Marshall, S. W., Loomis, D., Casteel, C., Martin, S. L., & Gibbs, D. A. (2007). Effect of deployment on the occurrence of child maltreatment in military and nonmilitary families. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 165(10), 1119-1206. doi:10.1093/aje/kwm008

**SUMMARY:** Child maltreatment may be more likely when a family is experiencing significant distress, and military deployment may be one stressor that increases risk for child maltreatment. Child maltreatment rates for both military and civilian families were gathered from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) from 2000 to 2003. Military rates were significantly higher when deployment rates were greater, with a 30% increase in military child maltreatment for each 1% increase in departing or returning Service members.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall, child maltreatment is lower for children in military families compared to nonmilitary families.
- The rate of occurrence of substantiated child maltreatment in military families was twice as high in the period after October 2002 (the one year anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks) compared to the period prior to that date.
- Among military families the rate of child maltreatment increased by approximately 30% for each 1% increase in Active Duty personnel departing or returning from operation-related deployment, while the rate among nonmilitary families was static during that time.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops that teach families and caregivers (including non-military caregivers) strategies for enhancing family functioning and handling stress during deployment
- Offer classes for children about what maltreatment is and what children should do if they are being maltreated (e.g., talk with teachers or other caring adults)
- Educate community leaders (e.g., teachers, child protective services, law enforcement, local government officials) regarding how to make informed decisions about military child maltreatment issues in policy and practice

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide programs that support family members who remain at home during deployment and have mental or emotional health issues
- Encourage collaboration between military and community professionals and programs (e.g., Family Advocacy Program, Child Protective Services, physicians, teachers) to ensure that all potential child maltreatment cases are reported
- Promote research and development of evidence-based programs designed to reduce child maltreatment among military families

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## METHODS

- Data were gathered from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS; i.e., data on child maltreatment occurring from 2000-2003), the Defense's personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) data set (i.e., rates of military deployment), and the U.S. Census Bureau (i.e., child population data).
- NCANDS child maltreatment data are submitted annually from each state's Child Protective Services agencies and include data regarding the military status of the victim's family.
- Rates of child maltreatment over time were calculated for children who did and did not live in a military family.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 147,982 children (1,399 military and 146,583 civilian) from ages 0-17 years.
- Victims in military families were 51% female and 47% White.
- Victims in civilian families were 47% female and 38% White.

## LIMITATIONS

- Other unmeasured variables, such as changes in child maltreatment reporting and investigating procedures, may be influencing results.
- Only substantiated cases of maltreatment were included, and the data likely underestimate child maltreatment rates, partially due to under-reporting and cases that cannot be substantiated.
- Deployment data were reported at the state level, so the research was unable to determine whether child maltreatment occurred before, during, or after an individual Service member's deployment.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate differences in rates of maltreatment across branches and between Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve families
- Explore risk factors associated with child maltreatment among families who experience a Service member's deployment
- Examine how child maltreatment rates may differ before, during, and after a Service member's deployment

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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