

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Occurrence of Maltreatment in Active Duty Military and Nonmilitary Families in the State of Texas

Rentz, E. D., Marshall, S. W., Martin, S. L., Gibbs, D. A., Casteel, C., & Loomis, D. (2008). Occurrence of maltreatment in active duty military and nonmilitary families in the state of Texas. *Military Medicine*, 173(6), 515-522.
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SUMMARY: Data from a national surveillance system were used to compare the rate of occurrence of substantiated child maltreatment, the characteristics of child victims, and the characteristics of their perpetrators between military and nonmilitary populations. Results indicate that overall rates of child maltreatment are lower in military families compare to nonmilitary families; however, rates of child maltreatment in the military increased following deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 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. The rate among nonmilitary families was static over this time period.
- Overall, child maltreatment is lower for children in military families compared to nonmilitary families.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer education to military families (including non-military caregivers) regarding strategies for family functioning and for handling stress during deployment
- Educate military children about maltreatment is and what children should do if they are being maltreated (e.g. talk with teachers, other caring adults, etc.)
- Disseminate information to service providers working with military families regarding how to report child maltreatment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to provide support for programs that help family members who remain behind during deployment separations
- Recommend increased monitoring of family functioning during stressful periods such as deployment
- Recommend collaboration among DoD and community-based programs that support families throughout the deployment cycle to reduce the risks of child maltreatment

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METHODS

- Data were taken from the 2000-2003 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).
- Data included all substantiated cases of child maltreatment in the state of Texas from January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2002.
- This study only included NCANDS data for Active Duty Military and Nonmilitary Families in the State of Texas.

PARTICIPANTS

- Sample size consisted of 147,982 children (1,399 military, 146,583 civilian) between the ages of 0-17 years.
- Children in the sample were 49% male.
- Forty-seven percent of the sample was White (ethnic breakdown for the remaining sample not specified).

LIMITATIONS

- Other unmeasured variables may be influencing results. For example, other ecologic factors (improved child maltreatment reporting systems) or stressors other than deployment may be present in military families.
- Only substantiated cases of maltreatment were used in this study; the actual rate of maltreatment may be higher due to under reporting or lack of substantiation.
- This study only included substantiated cases of child maltreatment in Texas and results may not be generalizable to other states.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore branch specific differences in rates of maltreatment based on changes in deployment, especially Guard and Reserve families experiencing deployment without the same level of access to support services
- Examine individual differences of military families that are adversely affected by the stress associated with deployment
- Investigate whether the trends observed in this study extend beyond 2003

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