

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Family Characteristics Associated with Child Maltreatment across the Deployment Cycle of U.S. Army Soldiers

Strane, D., Lynch, K. G., Griffis, H. M., Taylor, C. M., Harb, G. C., Mi. L., ... Rubin, D. M. (2017). Family characteristics associated with child maltreatment across the deployment cycle of U.S. Army Soldiers. *Military Medicine*, 182(9/10), e1879-e1887. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-17-00031

SUMMARY: Deployment can bring extra stress for military families with young children; however, little is known about how Service members' and children's characteristics may influence the potential association between deployment and child maltreatment. This study analyzed the child maltreatment data of 73,404 young children and the deployment history of children's Soldier-parents between 2001 and 2007. Results indicated that certain family characteristics and deployment periods were associated with higher child maltreatment risk than others.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Children were most likely to experience maltreatment six months following their parent's deployment.
- Children who were born prematurely, had early special needs, or had a Soldier-parent diagnosed with mental illness were most likely to experience maltreatment.
- During the six months before deployment, children of female Soldiers or Soldiers with mental illnesses were more likely to experience maltreatment compared to other time periods.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information regarding useful resources for military families with young children
- Offer workshops during reintegration to help military families adjust to Service members' return
- Provide parenting workshops for military families to minimize the risk of child maltreatment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to raise awareness through media campaigns on military bases regarding the risk of child maltreatment in military families across the deployment cycle
- Encourage the development of programs that reduce the risk of child maltreatment in military families
- Recommend collaboration among DoD programs and community-based child protection organizations to support optimum child development

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Data were obtained from Patient Administration Systems and Biostatistics Activity, Army Central Registry, and Defense Manpower Data Center between 2001 and 2007.
- Measures included child's maltreatment episode and history of premature birth or early special need, and Soldier's deployment history and mental health.
- Data were analyzed to examine the associations between family characteristics and child maltreatment.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 73,404 children under the age of two years old; each child had one parent who was an Active Duty Soldier and one civilian parent; and 48% of the children were female, 50% were male, and 2% of the children's gender was not reported.
- The race/ethnicity and average age of the children were not reported; 647 of the children suffered from child maltreatment during the study period.
- Most of the Soldier parents were male (91%) and White (59%); the characteristics of the civilian parents were not reported.

LIMITATIONS

- All children were under the age of two years old, so results of the study do not apply to older children.
- The design of the study made it difficult to examine the causal relationship between deployment, family characteristics, and child maltreatment.
- The study was conducted in the Army, so caution must be taken to generalize the results to other military branches.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the risk of child maltreatment among children who are over two years old and have parents in other military branches
- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationship between deployment and child maltreatment
- Explore other family characteristics that are associated with child maltreatment in military families

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