

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Differential Child Maltreatment Risk Across Deployment Periods of US Army Soldiers

Taylor, C. M., Ross, M. E., Wood, J. N., Griffis, H. M., Harb, G. C., Mi, L., ... Rubin, D. M. (2015). Differential child maltreatment risk across deployment periods of US Army soldiers. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106(1), 153-158. doi:10.2105/ajph.2015.302874

**SUMMARY:** Family well-being can be greatly impacted by stressful life events; parental deployment can increase that stress. The risk of maltreatment in young children of U.S Army soldiers throughout different deployment cycles was explored in this study. Findings revealed an elevated risk for child maltreatment after deployment in addition to increased child maltreatment rates during deployment.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Soldiers' children that were under two years of age had an increased risk of experiencing maltreatment in the six months after deployment compared to the six months before deployment.
- The rate of maltreatment of young children of Soldiers deployed twice increased substantially during the second deployment compared to the first deployment.
- Maltreatment of young children of Soldiers increased during deployment compared to the six months before deployment.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate community members and caregivers on recognizing the signs of child maltreatment to increase early intervention efforts
- Develop classes and workshops for caregivers on effective parenting methods during deployments and other high-stress life events
- Offer support groups for non-deployed caregivers that promote healthy coping and family well-being

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage training for professionals who work with military families with young children on how to help these families cope with increased stressors around deployment and reintegration
- Encourage the development of programming that helps Service members parent effectively post-deployment
- Continue to support programs aimed at increasing family well-being during the deployment cycle

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## METHODS

- This study used preexisting data on Soldiers and their children ages two years old or younger from the Army Central Registry, Patient Administration Systems and Biostatistics Activity, and the Defense Manpower Data Center.
- Researchers included information on Soldier's deployment dates, demographic information, child maltreatment reports, and medical diagnoses of child maltreatment from the databases.
- The association between Soldiers' deployment and the rate of child maltreatment reports was explored.

## PARTICIPANTS

- All participants were children ages 0 to 24 months old with one parent in the Army with three years of Active Duty service and one or two deployments. The study included a total of 111,309 U.S. Soldiers and their 163,841 child dependents.
- The majority of Soldiers included in this study were male (93%). Ages were not collected or recorded.
- The Soldiers were White (58%), Black (23%), Latino (12%), Asian-American (2%), Native American (2%), and unknown or another race (3%).
- The ranking of the Soldiers were enlisted (86%), officer (13%), and warrant officer (1%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Measuring child maltreatment episodes is difficult due to underreporting, which could alter the accuracy of the findings.
- This study only used data from the Army, limiting the generalizability of the data to other branches of the military.
- Subjects were Soldiers with only one or two deployments, limiting the generalizability of the findings to Soldiers with three or more deployments.
- Only children under two were included in the study, which limits the generalizability of the results to all children.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize samples with children of all ages to determine how the experiences of older children may differ from those of younger children
- Include information on other branches of the military as well as Service members with multiple deployments
- Evaluate the experience of children of female Service members and families in which both parents are Active Duty

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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