

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Air Force

Identifying High-Needs Families in the U.S. Air Force New Parent Support Program

Travis, W. J., Walker, M. H., Besetsny, L. K., McCarthy, R. J., Coley, S. L., Rabenhorst, M. M., & Milner, J. S. (2015). Identifying high-needs families in the U.S. Air Force New Parent Support Program. *Military Behavioral Health, 3*(1), 74-82. doi:10.1080/21635781.2014.995253

SUMMARY: The risk for child maltreatment may be higher among families who experience high levels of stress. To better understand this risk in U.S. Air Force (USAF) families, the degree to which new or expectant mothers' level of needs predicted future child maltreatment were explored. Level of needs were determined by the USAF New Parent Support Program (NPSP) service providers' clinical judgement as well as by a screener. Findings suggest different types of needs classification are associated with child maltreatment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Among low-needs mothers, 523 (0.6% of the sample) had a founded maltreatment incident after the assessment, while among high-needs mothers, 584 (2% of the sample) had a subsequent founded maltreatment incident.
- When NPSP staff's clinical assessments differed from that of the screener, changes in classifications from low-needs to high-needs improved the prediction of subsequent maltreatment. However, changes in classifications from high-needs to low-needs did not impact prediction of maltreatment.
- The odds of a maltreatment incident by high-needs mothers was significantly greater than low-needs mothers for physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (but not sexual abuse).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for military parents who are not new parents and are identified as having high-needs
- Continue to educate military families about healthy parenting behaviors and coping with parenting stress
- Provide professionals who work with military families advanced training in assessment of factors that contribute to families with high levels of needs and distress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that focus on the identification and prevention of child maltreatment in military families
- Recommend partnerships among military-based and community-based programs to improve prevention of child maltreatment among military families
- Continue to support programs that teach military families about developmental, social, and psychological consequences of child maltreatment

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METHODS

- Mothers were referred by medical personnel, Family Advocacy Program (FAP) staff, a Commander, or another source to participate in the USAF New Parent Support Program (NPSP).
- Once enrolled in NPSP, mothers' risk factors associated with child maltreatment were assessed via a screener and classified as either low-needs or high-needs based on their responses.
- NPSP staff conducted clinical assessments of the family's needs and these assessments were compared against the responses on the screener and, when discrepant, needs classifications based on staff's clinical assessments were used.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 112,478 new or expectant mothers (68% civilian) who resided on USAF installations worldwide.
- Most mothers (75%) were referred to the NPSP through an obstetric orientation or clinic.
- No information on mothers' race/ethnicity or age was provided.

LIMITATIONS

- There was limited information about what comprised the NPSP staff's home visits, which limits the ability to understand any differences between the screeners and clinical decisions.
- No data were presented about differences in maltreatment incidents between mothers who were referred through obstetric-related services and those through other sources.
- The lack of demographic data limits the ability to identify patterns of needs classifications by factors such as age, Service member rank, or race/ethnicity.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the components of clinical assessments used by NPSP staff to better understand how high-needs and low-needs classifications are determined
- Collect data about needs from military fathers to analyze the predictive value of needs classification in that population
- Explore whether the relationship between needs classifications and maltreatment incidents is influenced by factors such as age or race/ethnicity

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