

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Considering Child Care and Parenting Needs in Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services

Tsai, J., David, D. H., Edens, E. L., & Crutchfield, A. (2013). Considering child care and parenting needs in Veterans Affairs mental health services. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 39(NULL), 19-22. doi:10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2013.03.003

SUMMARY: Lack of child care may be a major barrier for some military parents seeking mental health services through the Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system. Veterans seeking outpatient mental health services were surveyed regarding their parenting and child care needs. Most Veterans, both men and women, felt that provision of on-site child care services at the VA would be useful, that they would use child care services if they were available, and that lack of child care was a major barrier for Veterans seeking mental health services.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Both male and female Veterans expressed interest in on-site child care services at the VA and agreed that lack of child care was a barrier to accessing services for many Veterans.
- Although Veterans expressed a strong desire for the VA to address parenting needs, they were less interested in attending parenting classes or support groups than having access to child care.
- Many Veterans indicated that they would be relatively comfortable leaving their children with a VA volunteer while receiving care and services.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer military parents child care on-base while they receive DoD or community mental health services
- Disseminate community resource information regarding locations with high-quality, cost-effective child care for military families
- Educate military parents about the effects of mental health concerns on parenting and the importance of receiving services for mental health concerns

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage military professionals to allow parents to bring children while accessing resources, if possible
- Recommend collaboration between DoD programs and community child care programs to provide accessible, inexpensive child care to military parents
- Promote education for professionals about potential barriers to seeking mental health care among military parents and ways to reduce those barriers

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.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Veterans seeking outpatient mental health services at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System were invited to complete a survey while waiting for an appointment or during patient lunches.
- Veterans completed survey questions about demographics, parent status, and for those who had children under the age of 18 years, about their experiences with VA support for child care and parenting needs.
- Questions about experiences regarding VA support for parenting and child care were rated on 1 (never or strongly disagree) through 5 (always or strongly agree) scales, and the averages was calculated.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 147 Veterans (90% male); however, only 36 Veterans (69% male) reported having children and completed all survey questions.
- Participating Veterans who were parents had an average age of 42.9 years (SD = 14.2) and were primarily White (53%) or Black (31%).
- Most parents had one (40%) or two (37%) children, who had an average age of 9.2 years (SD = 5.7).

LIMITATIONS

- Since Veterans were a treatment-seeking sample, those for whom lack of child care was a barrier to seeking treatment were not included; therefore, results may have underestimated the need for child care.
- Of Veterans who were parents, 31% did not complete the survey questions, and participants who completed the survey may have differed from those who did not.
- The sample size was small and restricted to one area of the country; thus, results may not generalizable to all Veterans.
- Results are difficult to interpret given the items were all measured on 5-point scales and resulted in answers with very little variability.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the feasibility, logistical challenges, and impact of offering on-site child care services at the VA
- Examine the challenges to effective parenting for Service members living with mental health problems
- Conduct an extensive survey, with a large, representative sample of Service members who utilize the VA, regarding what parenting and child care support military parents need

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>