

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Meeting Family and Military Needs Through Military Child Care

Zellman, G. L., Gates, S. M., Moini, J. S., & Suttorp, M. (2009). Meeting family and military needs through military child care. *Armed Forces and Society*, 35(3), 437-459. doi:10.1177/0095327X08330804

SUMMARY: Survey data from military families with children aged 12 years and under were utilized to evaluate the effect of childcare issues on military readiness and retention. Results of the survey revealed that available childcare services might not fully meet the needs of military families, thereby influencing military readiness and retention, particularly for military mothers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Childcare issues including unmet preferences for different childcare arrangements, lack of sufficient childcare, and needing to use multiple child care arrangements negatively affect military readiness (e.g., failure to report for duty, absenteeism, or tardiness) and retention.
- Childcare issues negatively affected readiness and retention among military mothers specifically.
- Single parent and dual-military families with children under five years were most likely to report planning to leave the military due to childcare challenges.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue to provide military parents with childcare options and modifying existing programs based on the identified needs of military families
- Provide support groups for single and dual-military parents that offer childcare service aimed at enhancing parenting skills
- Publicize information to military families regarding the resources and services available to help with childcare and parenting issues

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that offer childcare services to all military families, but particularly for single and dual-parent families
- Encourage the collaboration between DoD and community-based programs to offer military families a variety of childcare options that meet their needs
- Encourage unit leaders to allow for some flexibility (e.g., work from home), if possible, when Service members are dealing with childcare issues (e.g., a sick child who cannot attend daycare)

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METHODS

- Surveys were mailed to 3,000 military families with dependent children ranging from 0-12 years old between February and August 2004.
- The survey was derived from 21 focus groups at 8 military installations across the country and from interviews with directors of child care services at each installation.
- Data were used to evaluate the effect of a variety of childcare issues on military readiness (defined as tardiness and absenteeism) and retention (likelihood of separating from military).

PARTICIPANTS

- One thousand twenty-eight respondents completed the survey.
- Twelve percent of participants were single parents, 44% were dual military, and 43% were military member married to a civilian partner.
- Data were weighed to account for differences in response rate by military service, rank, race, educational level, and gender.

LIMITATIONS

- There was a moderate response rate (34%) that differed by service, rank, race, and gender of the Service member, which could bias results.
- Given the large proportion of dual-military Air Force respondents, results may not readily generalize to families in other military branches or other family configurations.
- The primary outcomes were measured with single questions that were embedded within the survey on child care, thereby creating methodological confounds that potentially influenced the outcomes of interest.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate whether or not individuals who report planning to leave the military due to childcare issues ultimately do
- Survey families from a variety of military branches and with larger samples in order to increase generalizability of results to other military families
- Continue to examine military family's needs and preferences regarding childcare and explore ways the DoD can work with families to meet these needs

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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