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# Supporting Our Troops' Families: The Impact of Family Violence on Military Families

National Health Collaborative on  
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# Are child abuse rates higher in the military?

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## US Army

- ❖ Overall rate 1992-1993:  
**7.4 cases/1000 children**
- ❖ Overall rate 1995-1999:  
**7.6 cases/1000 children**
  - ▶ Army rate of neglect is half that of the civilian rate

## US General Population

- ▶ Overall rate 1992-1993:  
**14 cases/1000 children**
- ▶ Overall rate 1995-1999:  
**14.7 cases/1000 children**

*But Things Can Change...*

# Military Families and Deployments

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- ▶ Over 1.85 million dependent kids
- ▶ Many AD have deployed > 4-6 times from 6 to 18 months at a time over the past 12 years
- ▶ Corrosive effects of multiple deployments
- ▶ 20% of AD are found to need mental health services several months after returning
- ▶ 1 in 5 service members suffer from major depression or PTSD (rand.org)
- ▶ Many military suffer TBI while deployed

# Deployment

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- ▶ Deployments have been linked to
  - ▶ Higher divorce rates
  - ▶ Higher general life stressors
  - ▶ Moderate-severe partner violence
  - ▶ Physiologic changes in military children - increased baseline HR and BP (*VA Barnes, 2007*)
  - ▶ Rentz, 2007: showed link between deployments and child abuse

# Is the incidence of child abuse higher in the military?

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This study by Rentz found that:

- Both ***departures*** to and ***returns*** from operational deployments impose stress on military families
- These stressors can increase the rate of child maltreatment

# Is the incidence of child abuse higher in the military?

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- ▶ Before Jan 03 rates of child abuse were much lower for **military than non-military kids**
- ▶ **Military CA rates increased** in this study in TX, in mid to late 2002 as **operational tempo rose** and escalated after that
- ▶ **Non-military** perpetrators predominant
- ▶ Stress of war extends beyond the active duty member
- ▶ Not a new phenomenon – child abuse rates can go up with natural disasters, recession, etc

*Rentz, American Journal of Epidemiology 2007; 165:1199-1206*

# Is the incidence of child abuse higher in the military?



## Civilian vs military CA rates in Texas 2000-2003

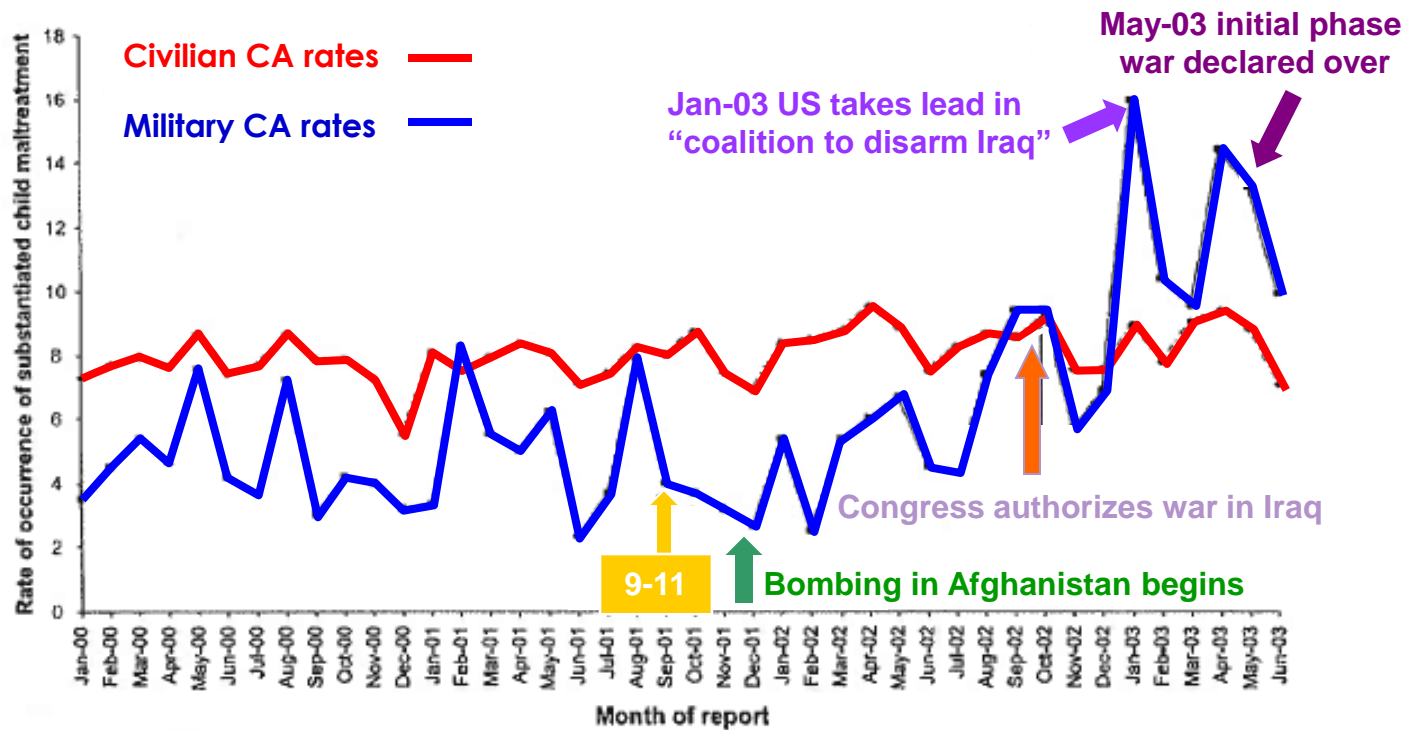


FIGURE 1. Rate of occurrence of substantiated child maltreatment by report month for children of military and nonmilitary families, Texas, 2000–2003. Months are indicated by their first three letters; years, by the last two numbers. US, United States.

# JAMA – 1 AUG 2007

## Vol. 298, No. 5 (Gibbs et al)

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- ▶ CA rates 42% higher **during** deployments
- ▶ Severity of abuse during deployments higher as well
  - ▶ **67.7% rated as moderate to severe during deployments**
  - ▶ **59.4% when AD at home**
- ▶ **During deployments – civilian mothers had:**
  - ▶ **Overall child abuse rate 3x higher**
  - ▶ **Neglect 4x higher**
  - ▶ **Physical abuse 2x higher**





Other findings:

- ▶ Rate of **CA** was greater when it was a ***civilian mom*** at home as compared to a civilian dad at home with an AD wife deployed
- ▶ Rate of CA during deployment was greater for ***non-Hispanic whites*** than for black and Hispanic parents
- ▶ Results c/w other studies that military CA rates sharply increasing since 2001 – reversing a decade long downward trend



# What can we take away from this?

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1. When operational tempo rises, we should anticipate crises and have appropriate resources at hand to address a rise in child maltreatment
2. When operational tempo is low, historically there has been a low child neglect rate in the military family
3. Track and confirm that it decreases as operational tempo decreases



# What Can We Take Away from This?

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1. Deployment of a parent is a high risk time for child maltreatment
  - ✓ Policies and practices need to be reviewed with this in mind
  - ✓ Services and resources to this group may be necessary
2. Culture shift necessary - perpetrators of child maltreatment are often not who society thinks or suspects

# Abusive Head Trauma in the Military

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**Two older studies in NC → incidence of AHT higher in military families than civilian families**

- ▶ The Shaken Infant: a military connection, Jan 89 – Feb 93 Gessner & Runyan. 1995
  - ▶ < 1 yo with admission to UNC - ICU with dx AHT were **3.5 more likely to be a military child than civilian child**
- ▶ A population based study of inflicted traumatic brain injury in young children, JAMA 2003, Keenan and Runyan
  - ▶ odds ratio for **AHT 4.7 for military dependents as c/w civilians**

**This lead to overall concern that a major risk factor for AHT was being the child of a military member**

# Abusive Head Trauma in the Military

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## Newer study published a few months ago:

- ▶ *Infant Abusive Head Trauma in a Military Cohort*
- ▶ DOD wide study using DOD birth and infant health registry and DOD FAP data *Gumbs, Keenan, Lloyd, Runyan et al, Peds 2013*
  - ▶ **Rate of substantiated AHT in military kids 34/100,000 LB**
  - ▶ **Consistent with civilian populations using same definitions**
  - ▶ Overall risk factors:
    - ▶ Male \* **Lower military sponsor rate/rank**
    - ▶ Premie \* **Mother on active duty**
    - ▶ Birth defects
    - ▶ Young mom (< 21 yo)



# Military Families

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- ▶ Isolation – emotional and geographic
- ▶ Lack social support network
- ▶ Low income/ financial stress/ debt
- ▶ Marital dissatisfaction (often marry young)
- ▶ Possible dysfunctional family of origin
- ▶ Adverse childhood experiences
  
- ▶ *Now, add the stressors of deployment*



# “The Army’s hidden child abuse epidemic”

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- ▶ Army rate of CA in 2011: *(Army FAP data)*
  - ▶ **4.5 victims/1000 kids**
- ▶ DOD rate CA in 2012: *(DOD FAP data)*
  - ▶ **5.4 victims/1000 kids**
  - ▶ Civilian rate: *(HHS.gov data)*
    - ▶ **9.6 victims/1000 kids** in 2007-2011
    - ▶ Writer raised concern that there has been a recent spike in the # military cases from 2008-2011
- ▶ Although numbers are a little higher for the military, it is not an epidemic and is still ~ half the civilian rate



# Protective Factors

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- ▶ Most military kids are resilient
- ▶ They have strong adaptive skills
- ▶ Extreme poverty unlikely, given at least one parent with full employment
- ▶ Free health care including mental health services
- ▶ Free housing or subsidy for off base housing
- ▶ Military members meet basic screening requirements
- ▶ Low drug use in military population comparatively
- ▶ Many resources to counter stress available (on base child development centers, counseling, parenting classes, free legal services, financial planning)





# Protective factors

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- ▶ Military members are held accountable by their commands
- ▶ Service members can be ordered to comply with recommendations, non-military spouses can only be encouraged to do so
- ▶ Time given off with no reduced pay to attend parenting classes, MH counseling, etc
- ▶ Many military resources to help families in crisis which will be addressed by DOD FAP

# What do military docs do when child abuse is suspected

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## Mandatory reporting by civilian laws/regulations:

- ▶ Report to CPS in county where you suspect abuse occurred
- ▶ Report to military and/or civilian law enforcement
  - ▶ If you contact MCIO (NCIS, AFOSI, CID) they can assist with reporting to civilian law enforcement or one can call both
  - ▶ Jurisdictional issues are VERY complicated on military bases

## Mandatory reporting by military regulations:

- ▶ Report to Family Advocacy Program in the service of the military sponsor

# What do civilian docs do when child abuse is suspected

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If you work in an area near a military base...

Mandatory reporting by civilian laws/regulations:

- ▶ Report to CPS as you normally would
  - ▶ CPS in areas near military bases work well with FAP and should know to call them
- ▶ Report to civilian law enforcement
  - ▶ They have MOUs with military law enforcement and will make sure the correct contacts are made
- ▶ No required reporting to military Family Advocacy as civilian physicians
  - ▶ However if you have worked with FAP before, it is always appreciated when you contact FAP
- ▶ **ASK YOUR FAMILIES IF THEY ARE IN THE MILITARY!**