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

National Health Collaborative on Violence and Abuse
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Are child abuse rates higher in the military?

**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...*

1992-93 data from Raiha, 1995-99 data from McCarroll
Military Families and Deployments

- 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 suffer service members suffer from major depression or PTSD (rand.org)
- Many military suffer TBI while deployed
Deployment

- 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?

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

*American Journal of Epidemiology 2007; 165:1199-1206*
Is the incidence of child abuse higher in the military?

- 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.

American Journal of Epidemiology 2007; 165:1199-1206
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?

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?

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

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

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
    - Premie
    - Birth defects
    - Young mom (< 21 yo)
      - * Lower military sponsor rate/rank
      - * Mother on active duty
Military Families

- 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”

- 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

- 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

- 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

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

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!