

# Military families may need help with mental health

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Photo courtesy: U.S. Army

Depression, anxiety and sleep problems can arise during long deployments of loved ones.

(HealthDay)—A leading pediatricians' group is highlighting the plight of children in military families in a new report.

Tours of duty can last up to 18 months, and studies have shown that one in four children of active-duty service members has [symptoms of depression](#). One in three children experiences excessive worry, and half of children have trouble sleeping, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) report.

These problems can be even worse when there are other psychological issues in the family, according to the report, which was published online May 27 and in the June print issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.

During deployments, preschoolers could become anxious and withdraw. Children between 5 and 17 years old also are at greater risk for emotional and behavioral problems, the report said. And the situation can get worse when kids' parents are on extended deployments.

Meanwhile, the AAP advised that parents or caregivers who remain at home also are under greater stress. This could, in turn, affect the mental health and well-being of children.

Because half of all children of active-duty [military service members](#) are taken care of by nonmilitary pediatricians before, during and after deployment, the AAP emphasized that all [health care providers](#) must recognize the mental-health needs of their patients with deployed parents, and those of other family members.

"By understanding the military family and the [stressful experiences](#) of parental wartime deployment, all pediatricians—both active duty and civilian—and other health care providers can be the front line in caring for U.S. [military children](#) and their families," report co-author Dr. Benjamin Siegel said in an AAP news release.

"In the past 10 years, more than 2 million children in the U.S. have experienced the emotional and [stressful event](#) of being separated from a loved one deployed for active duty," report co-author Dr. Beth Ellen Davis said in the release. "Most children cope and adapt quite well, but all children experience a heightened sense of fear and worry during a parent's deployment. It's important for pediatricians caring for these families to be aware of their family's situation so they can guide them appropriately."

**More information:** Visit the U.S. National Institutes of Health for more about [military family health](#).

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