

Impact of parents' military deployment on children's safety and mental health

March 19 2015

A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* reports that following military parents' return from combat deployment, their children show increased visits for mental healthcare, physical injury, and child maltreatment consults, compared to children whose parents have not been deployed. The same types of healthcare visits were also found to be significantly higher for children of combat-injured parents.

Children of deployed parents are known to have increased mental healthcare needs, and be at increased risk for child maltreatment during period of parental deployment. The ongoing impact of parental deployments following a parents' return, and the impact of parental wartime injuries on children had not previously been studied.

Using healthcare data from the U.S. Military Health System, a group of researchers led by Dr. Elizabeth Hisle-Gorman at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, analyzed healthcare utilization patterns of 487,460 children aged 3-8. The team assessed the rate of post-deployment mental health, injury and child maltreatment visits of children whose parents did not deploy, those whose parents deployed and returned uninjured, and children whose parents deployed and returned injured.

Researchers found that children of previously deployed parents have substantially more mental healthcare and [child maltreatment](#) consults compared to children whose parents did had not been deployed.

Furthermore, visit rates were consistently higher in children of combat-injured parents, compared to children of non-injured parents. Findings suggest that deployment-related risk to children continues into the post-deployment period, and that risk increases when parents return from deployment injured. Increased healthcare visits in the post deployment period also indicate that [parents](#) seek care for children affected by parental deployment and injury. Increased awareness of the impact of parental deployment and combat injury will assist health and mental healthcare providers in effectively identifying [children](#) at risk and providing needed resources where indicated.

More information: *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.12.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.12.017)

Provided by Elsevier

Citation: Impact of parents' military deployment on children's safety and mental health (2015, March 19) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-impact-parents-military-deployment-children.html>

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