**Child Maltreatment and Military Families**

Child maltreatment is defined as a child’s welfare if harmed or threatened due to neglect or abuse (e.g., physical, sexual or emotional) by a caregiver.\(^1\) Risk factors associated with child maltreatment include, but are not limited to, substance abuse and domestic violence.\(^2\)

**Current Research\(^3\)**

- Although research shows that the occurrence of substantiated cases of child maltreatment is lower in military families (compared to their civilian counterparts)\(^4\), the highest rates of child maltreatment in military families has been associated with increased periods of operational deployments and combat missions such as Operation Iraqi Freedom.\(^5\) Although a more recent study showed that overall neglect rates decreased between 1991 and 2004, authors showed an increase in neglect rates among Army soldiers during 1991 and between 2000-2004 (i.e., during two long-lasting deployments).\(^6\)

- *Army Families.* In families with one substantiated child maltreatment report, the rate of child maltreatment was 42% greater during periods of deployment than non-deployment.\(^7\) Rates of child maltreatment among civilian female spouses was three times higher during periods of deployment, with child neglect rates greater than physical and emotional abuse (see Figure 1).\(^8\)

**Figure 1. Incidents of Child Maltreatment by Civilian Female Spouses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>During Deployment</th>
<th>During Non-Deployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Neglect</em></td>
<td>85.1%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Physical abuse</em></td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Emotional abuse</em></td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Much of the literature on child maltreatment and the military is limited to Army samples, and therefore, may not be generalizable to other branches of the military.


\(^8\) Ibid.
• In another study of active duty soldiers, researchers found that 13% of child maltreatment offenders had abused alcohol or illicit drugs at the time of the incident. The odds of the offender abusing substances nearly tripled in incidents with co-occurring spouse abuse. Children were most likely removed from the home in cases (13.6%) that did not involve substance abuse or spouse abuse. Offenders were most likely removed from the home (49.7%) when the child maltreatment incident involved both substance abuse and co-occurring spouse abuse.

• In a study of married Army soldiers, researchers found a significant difference between types of abuse perpetrated by dual versus single offenders. Results suggest dual offenders were less likely to commit acts of physical abuse than single offenders (16% vs. 42%, see Figure 2), as well as acts of sexual abuse (1% vs. 11%). Dual offenders, however, were more likely to commit acts of emotional abuse, in comparison to single offenders (45% vs. 12%). Neglect was the most common type of abuse across both groups.

Figure 2. Types of Abuse Perpetrated by Married Male Soldiers

- Air Force Families. In the first study on active-duty United States Air Force (USAF) parents, findings showed forms of child maltreatment differed pre- and post-deployment, with severe types of child maltreatment more common post-deployment than pre-deployment. Findings suggest a need for support services upon returning from deployment for military families.

Family Advocacy Program (FAP) Data

FAP, falls under the Department of Defense (DoD), and focuses on preventing domestic abuse and child abuse through workshops, the New Parent Support Program (N PSP), counseling, and public awareness campaigns.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Martin, S.L., Gibbs, D.A., Johnson, R.E., Rentz, E.D., Clinton-Sherrod, M., Hardison Walters, J.L., & Sullivan, K. (2009). Male soldier family violence offenders: Spouse and child offenders compared to child offenders. Violence and Victims, 24, 458-468. Note. Dual offenders were soldiers who had substantiated incidences for both child maltreatment and spouse abuse, whereas single offenders were soldiers who had substantiated incidences for child maltreatment only.

13 Severe incidents were defined as physical incidents requiring medical treatment and/or emotional abuse incidents involving repeated or chronic exposure to emotional harm.


16 More information about FAP can be found at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/phases-military-leadership?content_id=266712
Below is a summary of key findings from the fiscal year (FY) 2013 FAP data on child abuse/neglect (CAN) and spouse abuse.  

- **CAN Data.** In FY 2013, 15,346 CAN incidents were reported, with a rate of 14/1000. Of these reports, 6,989 met the DoD criteria for abuse, with a rate of 6/1000. Figure 1 shows that 73% of CAN incidents were classified as emotional abuse or neglect. Over half of the alleged abusers were identified as an Active Duty parent (see Figure 2).

- **Spouse Abuse Data.** In FY 2013, 17,295 incidents of spouse abuse were reported, with a rate of 24/1000. Of these reports, 7,935 met the DoD criteria for spouse abuse, with a rate of 11/1000. Figure 3 shows that the majority of spouse abuse incidents (84%) were classified as physical abuse. Nearly 60% of the alleged abusers were identified as Active Duty members (see Figure 4).

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18 Reports were defined as the number of incidents of abuse (i.e., physical violence, and/or sexual violence, and/or emotional abuse, and/or neglect). Multiple reports may have been submitted on a single victim.