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Deployments Taking Toll on Military's Children

By [JAMES DAO](#)

After eight years of war, children with parents in the military are reporting signs of emotional wear and tear from long and repeated deployments, a new study shows.

The study by the RAND Corporation found that children in military families were more likely to report [anxiety](#) than children in the general population. The researchers also found that the longer a parent had been deployed in the previous three years, the more likely their children were to have difficulties in school and at home.

Those difficulties included things like missing school activities, feeling that people did not understand their problems, having to take care of siblings and struggling to deal with parents returning from deployment.

The study, which was to be published Monday by the journal *Pediatrics*, is considered the largest on the subject, and was based on telephone interviews with nearly 1,500 children, ages 11 to 17, and their primary caregivers. It was commissioned by the [National Military Family Association](#), a nonprofit support group.

Anita Chandra, the primary investigator, said she was surprised by the correlation between the months a parent was deployed and the problems reported by their children. "We thought the challenges of deployment would wane as the deployment went on," Ms. Chandra said in an interview.

Almost all of the families in the study, 95 percent, said a parent had deployed in the previous three years; those deployments lasted on average a total of 11 months.

The researchers found that children in families that lived on military bases tended to report fewer difficulties related to deployment than children who lived off post.

"Potentially, people living on post are more connected to support services," Ms. Chandra said, adding that 70 percent of military children live outside military bases.

The study also found that many families encountered difficulties adjusting to the return of a deployed parent, a period known as reintegration.

For instance, Ms. Chandra said, the researchers found that caregivers who worked were more likely to report that their children were having problems during reintegration than caregivers who did not work. The vast majority of those caregivers were women.

Ms. Chandra said it was possible that the strain of reintegration was compounded by the stress on the family of a nondeployed parent's job. But being employed is generally considered good for the [mental](#)

[health](#) of a caregiver during deployment, she said.

The study found that girls tended to have more problems than boys during reintegration, and that older children struggled more during and after deployments than younger children. The researchers speculated that the pressure on girls and older children to assume household responsibilities might be one reason for the difference.

Ms. Chandra said the study suggested that the military should consider directing services to families during the later stages of long deployments, when more families report problems.

She said one potential shortcoming of the study was that its subjects were selected from applicants to a free camp sponsored by the National Military Family Association, called [Operation Purple](#). She said it was possible that those families were not representative of the average military family.

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