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Military Children: Long Deployments Linked To Mental Health Problems



The Huffington Post [Catherine Pearson](#) First Posted: 7/11/11 08:25 AM ET Updated: 9/10/11 05:12 AM ET

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Children with one or more parent on long-term deployment in Iraq or Afghanistan have a higher chance of mental health problems, according to a new study out this month. Recent estimates suggest that more than 44 percent of active duty members have kids.

Using data from more than 300,000 children who had at least one active-duty U.S. Army parent between 2003 and 2006, researchers found that the length of deployment played a significant role in overall mental health. Nearly 17 percent of the [military children](#) studied were diagnosed with at least one mental health issue during the study period, including conditions such as depression and anxiety. The likelihood of a mental health diagnosis increased with the length of deployment, particularly among boys and girls

whose parents were deployed for more than 11 months.

"Children of parents who spent more time deployed between 2003 and 2006 fared worse than children whose parents were deployed for a shorter duration," the study's authors wrote in [The Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine](#), adding that the potential public health impact of that is huge, given that most children will eventually rely on care outside of the military medical system for effects including acute stress disorders, adjustment disorders, behavioral disorders and depression.

Indeed, an accompanying editorial by Dr. Cozza of the Department of Psychiatry at the Uniformed Services University's School of Medicine argued that the study highlights the need for medical providers who work outside of military communities to better understand the role that military deployment can play in mental health.

"Medical providers who don't work in military communities often don't think of them as unique cultures," Cozza told The HuffPost. "There is a tremendous flow of those who were in the military moving into civilian life, so in clinical practices, we need to be asking questions about whether or not anyone in the family has been in the military or has been deployed. There are several stresses related to the absence of a parent that can exacerbate any levels of stress or distress that a child or family might have."

But Cozza added his belief that while this study emphasizes a need to direct attention and resources towards those children suffering from mental health uses related to deployment, most military kids are doing well.

"We don't want to victimize these families," he said. "We don't want to describe them as doing poorly, when in fact that doesn't reflect the hard work they put into staying healthy and successful in spite of the enormous stresses they face. We don't want to lose sight of that."

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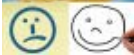
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