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### Research Review: "Transgenerational Factors Associated with Military Service: Comparison of Children of Veterans and Nonveterans in a Nationally Representative Sample"

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## RESEARCH REVIEW | ISSUE 265

## ■ Transgenerational Factors Associated With Military Service: Comparison of Children of Veterans and Nonveterans in a Nationally Representative Sample

**PUBLICATION:** Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

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**KEYWORDS:** Family, mental health, military, parent, trauma

### ABSTRACT:

**“Objective**

While the psychological effects of military service on the children of active-duty personnel have been studied extensively, little is known about the potential effects of military service for children of veterans after service has ended.

**Method**

Using nationally representative data from the 2018-2019 National Survey of Children's Health, school-age children of veteran families ( $n = 4,028$ ) were compared with children of nonveteran families ( $n = 38,228$ ). Owing to large sample sizes, effect sizes (relative risk and Cohen's  $d$ ), rather than  $p$  values, were used to identify substantial differences in caregiver-reported sociodemographic, clinical, and school performance factors between children and caregivers in families with and without a veteran caregiver. Multivariate analyses were used to adjust for socioeconomic factors that could increase health service use.

### Results

Children of veteran families were more likely to have higher family incomes, health insurance, and married caregivers, but were also reported to have higher rates of clinically recognized externalizing behavioral conditions (attention-deficit disorder/attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder or conduct disorder) (17.6% vs 12.7%; relative risk 1.42; 95% CI 1.21-1.66) and adverse childhood experiences; no substantial differences were reported in clinically recognized anxiety or depression. After adjustment for potentially confounding factors, children in veteran families were still more likely to be reported to have externalizing problems (odds ratio 1.34; 95% CI 1.02-1.77).

### Conclusion

After adjustment for socioeconomic advantages that may increase health service use, children of veteran families demonstrate substantially higher rates of clinically recognized externalizing problems. While explanations for this require further study, service systems working with veterans may consider integrating child-focused screening/services.”

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- The study examined the potential transgenerational effects of military service on children by comparing characteristics of children and families of veterans with those of nonveterans using data from the 2018-2019 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH).
- The research findings suggest that children of veteran families exhibit higher rates of clinically recognized externalizing behavioral conditions, such as ADD/ADHD and conduct problems, compared to children of nonveteran families.
- The findings underscore the need for targeted services and support for the children of veterans, potentially through integrated programs within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) system.

## Implications

### FOR PRACTICE

The findings underscore the need for targeted services and support for the children of veterans, potentially through integrated programs within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) system, paying particular focus on addressing clinically recognized externalizing behavioral conditions such as ADD/ADHD and conduct problems. Healthcare providers should also look at integrated programs that cater to both veteran parents and their children may be beneficial. These programs could provide mental health services for children while also addressing the needs of veteran parents, potentially improving adjustment and well-being for both.

### FOR POLICY

Policy efforts could focus on implementing screening programs within healthcare systems, especially within the VHA, to identify child mental health problems and parenting challenges among veteran parents. Early identification could lead to timely interventions and support for families. Policy initiatives should be aimed at improving healthcare coverage, particularly for behavioral health services. Additionally, Policy decisions regarding funding allocation within healthcare systems should consider the unique needs of veteran families, including the provision of resources for targeted services and integrated programs.

### FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Results from this study suggest that further investigation is needed into unmeasured factors that may impact the risk of clinically recognized externalizing mental health problems in children of veteran families. This could include factors such as caregiver health literacy, social support, and geographic mobility. Further research is also needed to understand the specific factors contributing to these higher rates of mental health problems in veteran families and to inform strategies to support veteran parents and their children. Moreover, Comparative studies comparing children of veteran families with those of nonveteran families could provide insights into the unique risk factors and protective factors associated with military service. This could inform the development of tailored interventions for veteran families.

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