



NATIONAL  
MILITARY FAMILY  
ASSOCIATION

Together we're stronger

# *Stress on Military Families: Together we're stronger*

Barbara Cohoon, PhD, RN

Deputy Director of Government Relations

National Military Family Association

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

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# National Military Family Association

- The Voice for Military Families
  - Trusted resource for military families and our Nation's leaders for over 40 years
  - Volunteer led
  - Serving all 7 uniformed services and all Components
  - 501(c)(3) nonprofit
- Speak up for Military Families
  - Gather information
    - Use our volunteers to gather information globally
    - Listen to military families
    - Pointy end of the spear
  - Work with policy makers – DoD, VA, and Members of Congress

# National Military Family Association

- Empower Military Families
  - Provide the right resources at the right time
  - Understand their benefits and how to access them
  - Robust website
  - Explain government decisions
  - Know what programs work
- Meet the Needs of Military Families
  - Scholarships for Spouses
  - *Operation Purple*® Camp
  - *Operation Purple*® Family Retreat
  - *Operation Purple*® Healing Adventures – wounded service member has a wounded family

# What you need to know in our 10<sup>th</sup> year of war about our Nation's Military Families

## Service Members

- TBI: 614.6 a month in 2010
- Amputations: 16.4 per month in 2010 versus 7.3 in 2009
- Mental health evacuations outpacing medical evacuations for OIF/OND since 2007
- Married: Active Duty (AD) (53.1%)  
Reserve Component (RC) (44.4%)
- Female: AD (14.3%) RC (17.8%)
- Dual with children: AD (2.8%) RC (1.4%)
- Single with children: AD (5.3%) RC (9%)

(Source: Department of Defense (DoD), *Demographics 2009: Profile of the Military Community* (2009); and *Medical Surveillance Monthly Report*, February 2011 and April 2011).

# What you need to know in our 10<sup>th</sup> year of war about our Nation's Military Families

## Spouses

- 3.1 M family members (Active Duty and Reserve Component)
- Spouses: AD (700,000+) RC (400,000+)
- Increase in alcohol (ETOH) and/or substance use while service member is deployed
- Increase in Mental Health services when service member is deployed

(Source: DoD, *Demographics 2009: Profile of the Military Community* (2009); Mansfield et al., *Deployment and the Use of Mental Health Services among U.S. Army Wives* (2010); and *Medical Surveillance Monthly Report*, April 2011).

# What you need to know in our 10<sup>th</sup> year of war about our Nation's Military Families

## Children

- 1.9 M military children (AD and RC)
- Active Duty Service Members with children (43.7%)
- Reserve Component with children (42.8%)
- 73% under the age of 11
- 210,000 under the age of 18 that have had one or both parents deploy to OEF/OIF/OND
- Approximately 41,000+ have a wounded, injured, or ill deployed parent

# Top ten things Military Teens and Kids want you to know

- Military Teens want you to know
  - War – know realities
  - Transition
    - Move every 2.9 years
    - Attend 9 different schools
    - Furniture and family only constant
    - Say goodbye to more significant people by age 18
  - Community
    - 85% attend public school
    - 65% live in the community
- Military Kids want you to know
  - Worry and loss

(Source: National Military Family Association, *We serve, too.: A Toolkit about Military Teens* (2010) and *We serve, too.: A Toolkit about Military Kids* (2010).

# Lots of Issues Facing Military Families

- Nation still at war
- Determining legacy of ten years of war on military and their families
- Economy in downturn
- Nation's debt rising
- Pressure, pressure, pressure on military families and the Nation
- How do we accomplish two important tasks at once: stimulate the economy AND reduce the debt?

# Risk Factors

- Individual Augmentee (IA)
- Newly married
- Young mothers
- Special needs
- Dual service
- Pregnant/Birth during deployment
- Single parent
- History of mental health
- Financial issues
- Veteran status

# Healing Adventure *Operation Purple*® Camp Issues

- How to deal with the injury
  - Education about the injury
  - Care for the caregiver
- Mental Health issues
  - Family counseling and support
  - Couple counseling
  - Caregiver counseling
  - Children counseling
- Reintegration following the wound, illness, or injury event

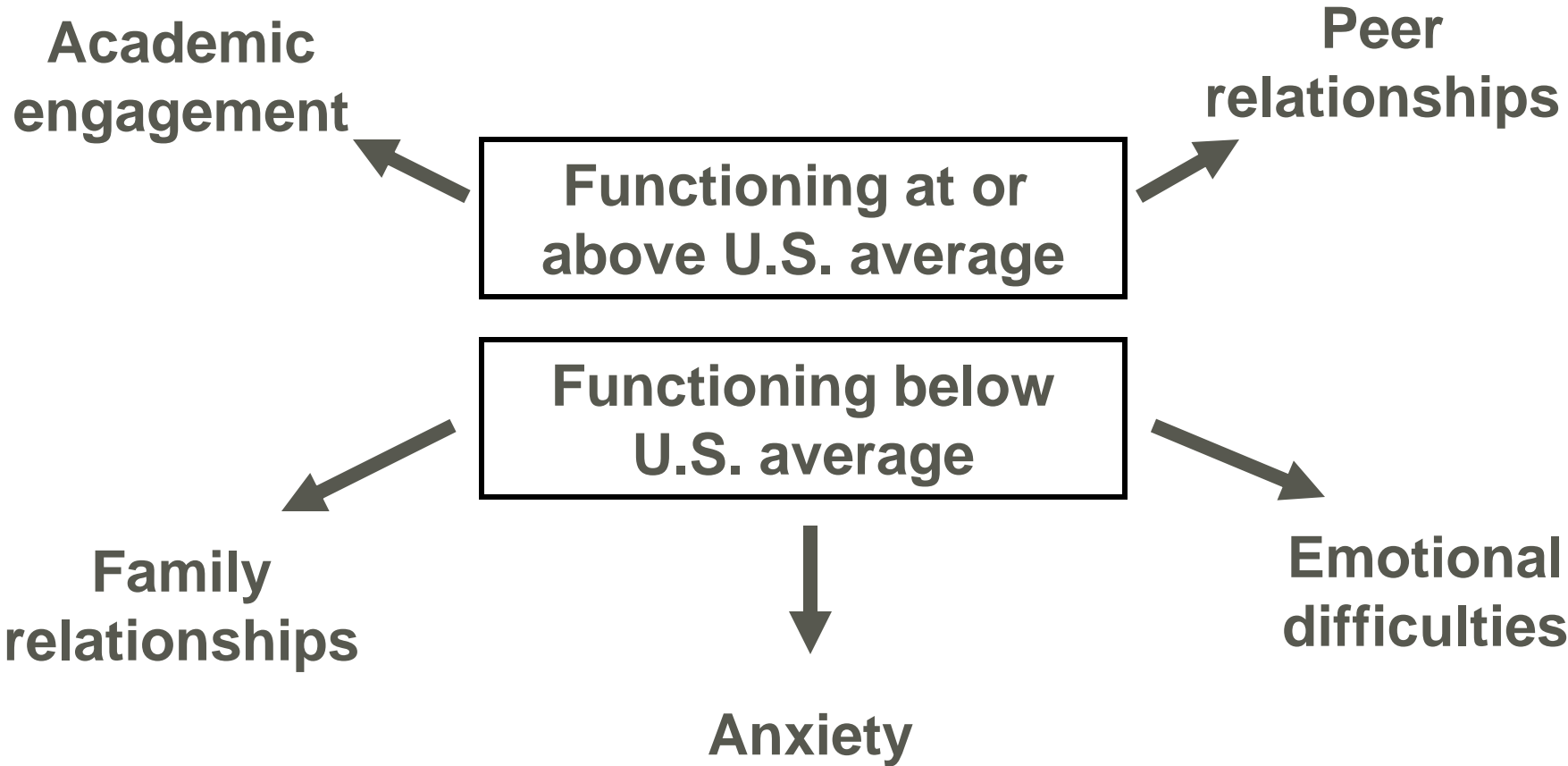
# Healing Adventure *Operation Purple*® Camp Issues

- Continued difficulty navigating DoD and VA medical and non-medical benefits and services
- Unaware of available State, Government agency, and Non-Government Organizations programs and services
- Difficulty navigating available networks of care
- Relocation decisions

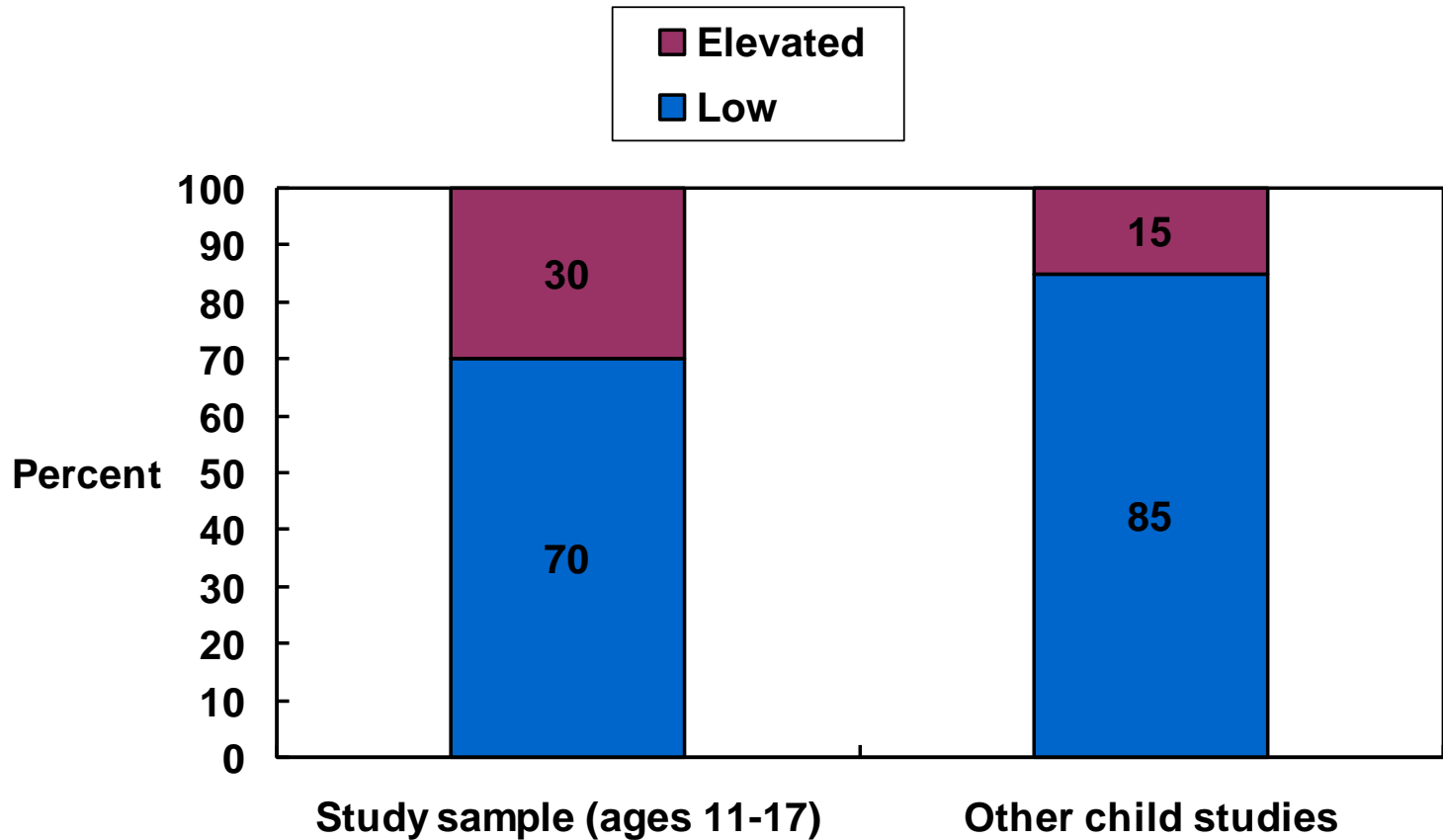
# Our Association with RAND, *Views From the Homefront (2011)*

- Gain a better understanding of the phenomena
  - Unprecedented stress on all-volunteer family force
  - Research on spouses and deployment show some negative effects
  - Research focusing on deployment and children
- Study questions
  - How are school-age military children faring?
  - What types of issues do military children and their non-deployed caregivers face related to deployment and reintegration?
- Study sample and methodology
  - 1,500 *Operation Purple*® Camp applicants and their caregivers
  - Longitudinal study
  - Military families want to tell their stories

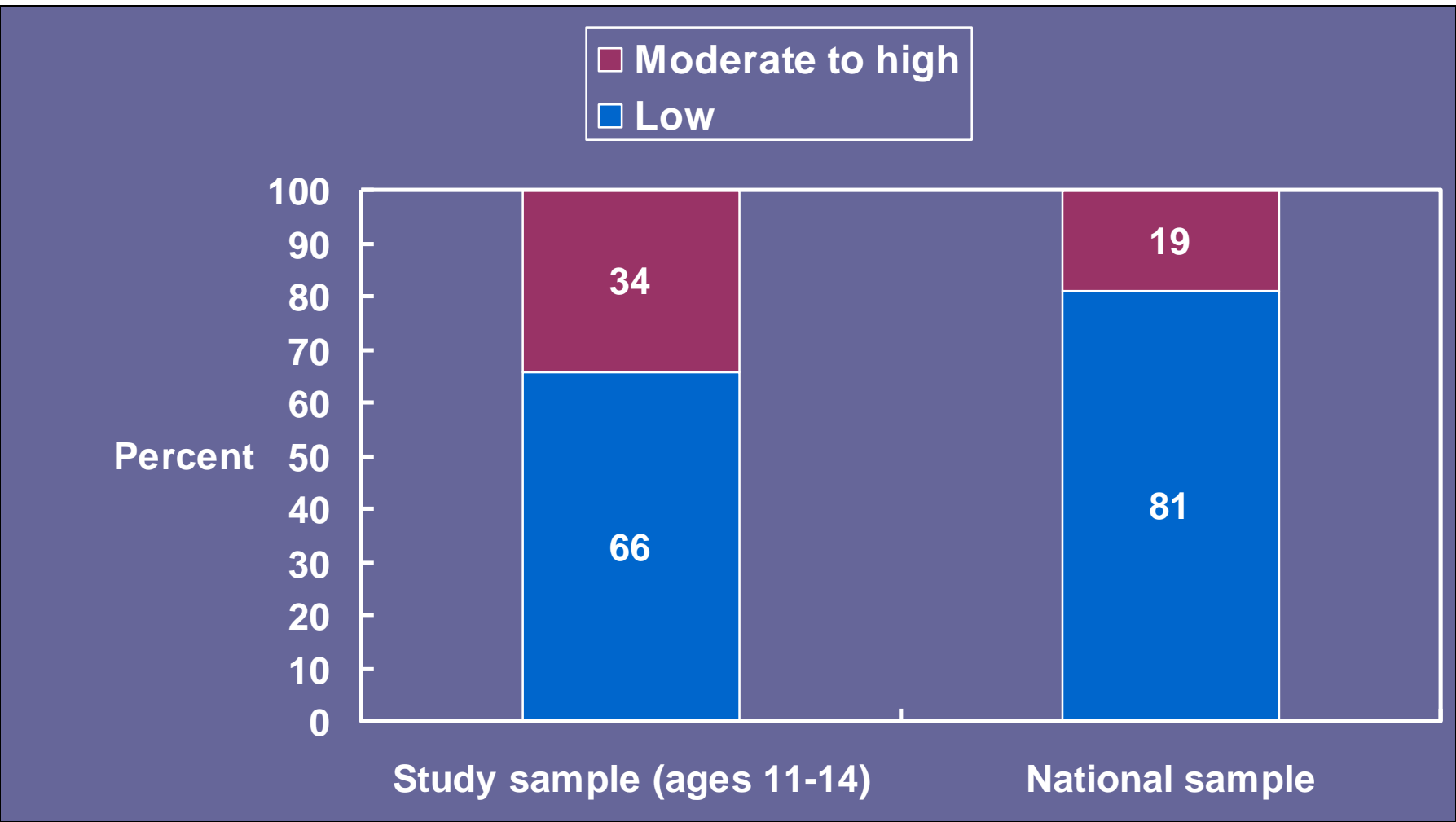
# How Are Military Children Faring Compared to Other U.S. Children?



# Military Children Reported Anxiety Symptoms



# Military Children Reported Emotional Difficulties



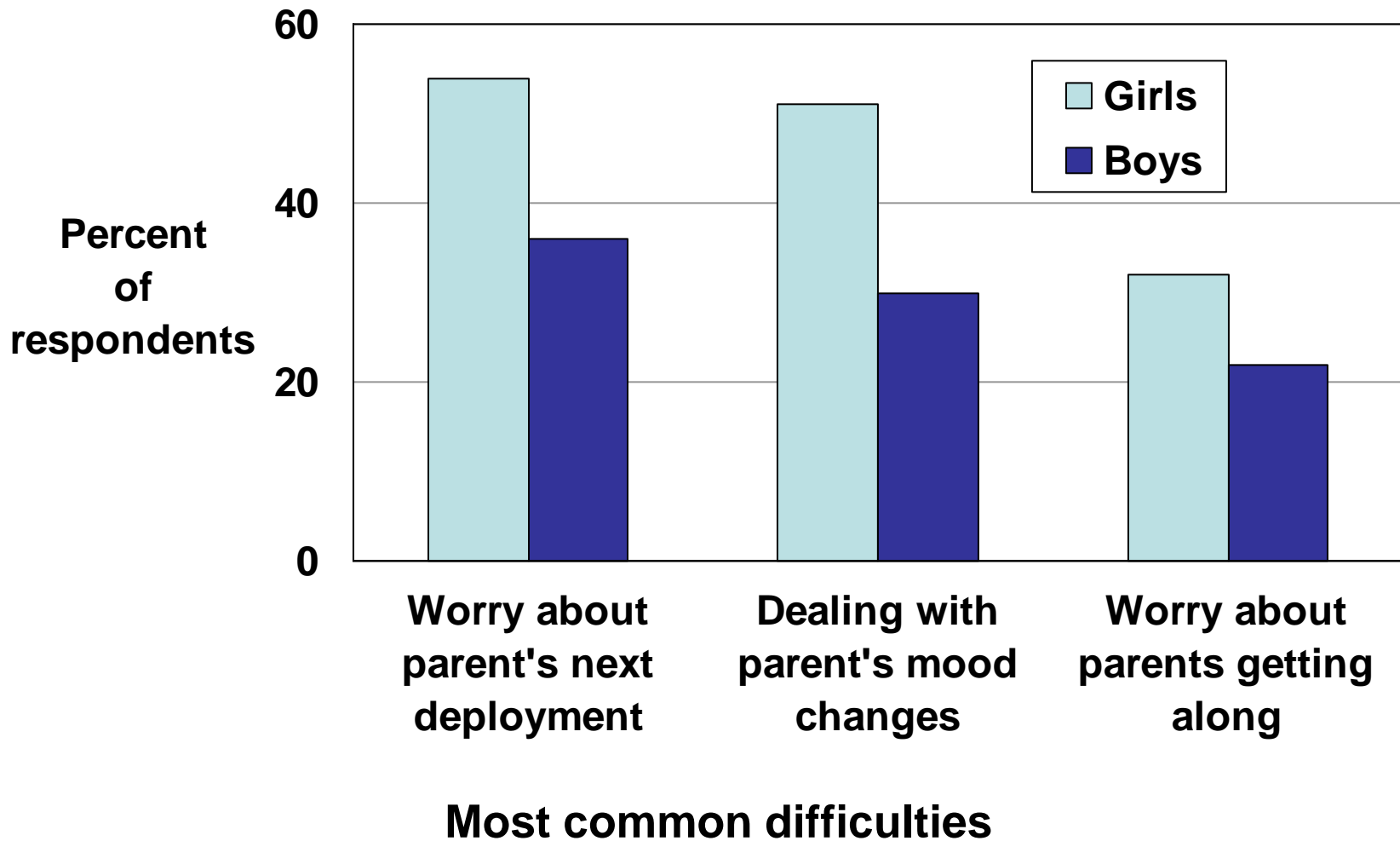
# ***Impact of Deployment***

| <i><b>Risk factor</b></i>     | <i><b>Most at risk</b></i>   |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Age</b>                    | <b>Older teens</b>   |
| <b>Gender</b>                 | <b>Girls</b>   |
| <b>Total time away</b>        | <b>Children whose parents had longer cumulative deployment</b>     |
| <b>Wellbeing of caregiver</b> | <b>Children whose non-deployed parent had poorer mental health</b> |

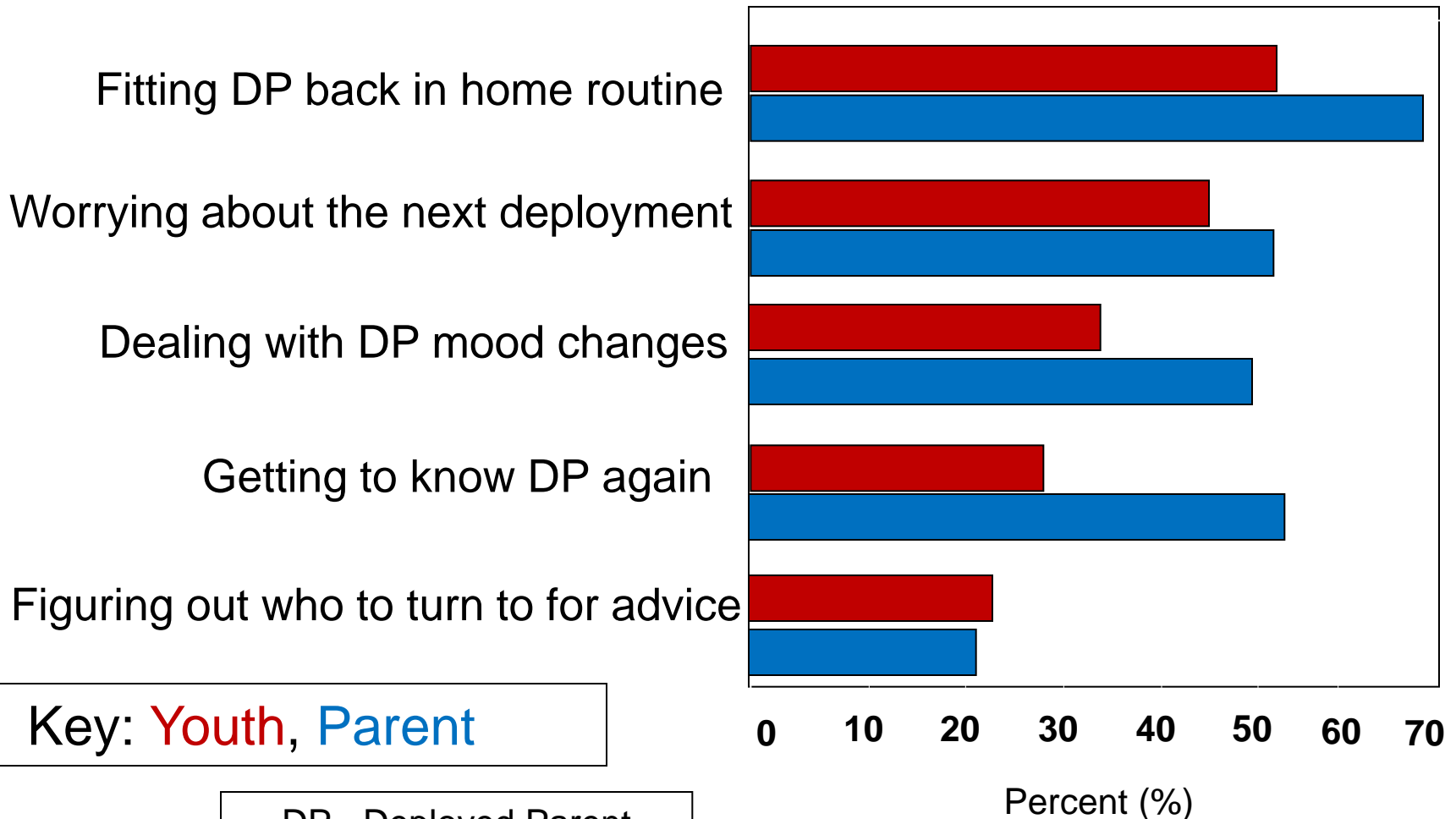
# Deployment Challenges

- Length of parental deployment
  - As months increased, so did challenges
  - Total months away mattered more than number of deployments
  - No differences by current deployment, location, or military role
- Active Duty
  - Youth – academic, life without SM, no one to talk to
  - Parent/non-deployed spouse - increase responsibilities, dealing with life without SM
- National Guard and Reserve Members
  - Youth - community doesn't understand them, away from military
  - Parent/non-deployed spouse - MH issues, household hassle

# Girls Reported More Difficulties During Reintegration



# Youth and Parent Reported Reintegration Challenges



# Non-Deployed Parent's Mental Health Mattered

- Children whose non-deployed parent reported better mental health experienced fewer:
  - Challenges during and after deployment
  - Emotional difficulties
  - Peer and family functioning issues
  - Challenges with academic engagement
- Caregivers who reported better emotional well-being also reported fewer relationship and household hassles



# Quality of Family Communication

- Children who reported *difficulties communicating with non-deployed caregiver* also reported more:
  - Emotional difficulties
  - Anxiety symptoms
  - Academic problems
- Caregivers who reported *difficulties communicating with child* reported more:
  - Child emotional difficulties, peer, and family difficulties
  - Household and parenting issues

# Some Improvement Over Time

- Child emotional difficulties remained higher than the national average at each phase of the study, but average problems decreased slightly from sample time to sample time
- Average caregiver emotional well-being improved slightly at each study phase with most staying within the normal range

# *Views From the Homefront*

## Research Findings

- Difference between military and civilian children
  - Anxiety, family relationships, and emotional difficulties
- Deployment and Reintegration Challenges
- Cumulative months of deployment
- Mental health of non-deployed parent/caregiver
- Quality of family communications

(Source: Chandra et al., *Views from the Homefront: The Experiences of Youth and Spouses from Military Families* [Technical Report], RAND (2011).

# Other Research Reinforces Findings

- *Deployment and Mental Health Diagnoses Among Children of US Army Personnel* by Mansfield, Kaufman, et al. (2011)
- *Deployment and the Use of Mental Health Services among U.S. Army Wives* by Mansfield, Kaufman, et al. (2010)
- *The Effects of Multiple Deployments on Army Adolescents* by Wong and Gerras (2010)
- *The Long War: Deployment Effects Children and Families* by Lester, Peterson, et al. (2010)
- *Health Promotion Risk Reduction Suicide Prevention Report* by the U.S. Army (2010)
- *The Challenge and the Promise: Strengthening the Force, Preventing Suicide and Saving Lives* by the Department of Defense Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide by Members of the Armed Forces (2010)
- *The War Within: Preventing suicide in the U.S. Military* by RAND (2011)

# Military Family Research

- *Combat-Injured Service Members and Their Families: The Relationship of Child Distress and Spouse-Perceived Family Distress and Disruption* by Cozza, Chun, et al. (2010)
- *Military Women's Perceptions of the Effect of Deployment on Their Role as Mothers and on Their Adolescents' Health* by Ternus, Mona P. (nd)
- Study on combat injured families by Dr. Stephen Cozza (briefing DCoE conference *Trauma Spectrum Disorder* conference Dec 7, 2010)
- *PROCEEDINGS :Workgroup on Intervention with Combat Injured Families* by the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (2009)

# Gaps Remain

- Programs exist to help military families cope, but knowledge to inform program content is limited
  - So many programs
  - So many websites
- Lack of seamless transition of programs and benefits for military families
- Inconsistent across recovery phase(s)
- Inconsistent from active duty to veteran status

# Gaps Remain

- More research needed
  - Timing of injury and well-being of family member/unit
  - Include children and caregiver perspective
  - Longitudinal study on the impact of wounded/illness of service member on the family unit
  - Transition impact on service members and their military families from active duty to veteran status

# What keeps me up at night!

- Long term impact on military families after 10 years at war
- Access to mental health services
  - Children now grown adults with their own families
  - Parents
  - Divorced/separated spouses and their children
- Not assessing military family members' well-being before permanently leaving the military
- Caregiver burnout
  - Provider
  - Spouse and family member
- Sandwich generation

# What is Our Association Doing?

- Enhanced our programs
- Held our Summit
- Developed a Community Toolkit for communities to use
- Engaging in a national conversation focused on military families

# Community Toolkit for Action Items

- Broaden and strengthen civilian community engagement
  - Partner with military installations and hospitals
  - Partner with the VA medical centers
  - Partner with your local schools
- Create programs that reflect your local families
- Educate yourself and your community
- Strengthen support for targeted military services
  - Screening
  - Mental health
  - Family readiness
- Anti-stigma campaign
- No wrong door

# Implications for helping Military Families

- Healthy family = healthy wounded family
- Focus upstream while still on active duty on preventive services and benefits for families
- DoD must build and maintain strong military families
  - Provide military families the skills to handle whatever comes their way
  - Provide opportunities for a portable career
  - Resilience training

# Implications for Helping Military Families

- Families facing longer deployments may need targeted support
  - Older teens
  - Girls
- Supports need to be in place across entire deployment cycle, including reintegration
- Some non-deployed parents may need targeted mental health support
- Communities must show they care



# Key State Quality of Life Issues Supporting Service members and Families

- Increase support to National Guard, Reserve members, and their families
- Coordinate State-wide public-private support
- Increase providers taking TRICARE
- Remove licensure impediments
- Add military family curriculum requirement
- Minimize school disruption during transition and deployment
- Increase quality, affordable child care
- Ensure deployment separations do not affect/determine child custody issues

# Contact Us

Barbara Cohoon, PhD, RN

Deputy Director of Government Relations

National Military Family Association

[BCohoon@MilitaryFamily.org](mailto:BCohoon@MilitaryFamily.org)

703.931.6632 ext. 322

- [www.MilitaryFamily.org](http://www.MilitaryFamily.org)
- [www.militaryfamily.org/publications/community-toolkit/](http://www.militaryfamily.org/publications/community-toolkit/)
- [www.militaryfamily.org/publications/teen-toolkit/](http://www.militaryfamily.org/publications/teen-toolkit/)
- [www.militaryfamily.org/publications/kids-toolkit/](http://www.militaryfamily.org/publications/kids-toolkit/)