

Mental health diagnoses rise significantly for military children

30 April 2016

Mirroring national estimates, a new study that will be presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies 2016 Meeting found the percentage of children enrolled in the U.S. Military Healthcare System diagnosed with and treated for mental health disorders increased significantly during the past 15 years.

Roughly 1.6 million [children](#) received care in the Military Health System each year from 2001 to 2015, according to authors of the study, "Increasing Mental Health Diagnoses and Visits for Military-Connected Children." The proportion of those with one or more mental health diagnosis, they said, rose from 10 percent in 2001 to 16 percent in 2015, representing a nearly 4 percent increase each year. Over the same period, the researchers said, diagnoses for suicidal ideation, adjustment, anxiety, attention deficit, conduct, cognitive, mood, psychotic, eating and other disorders all increased. The largest of these increases was among youth who had thoughts of suicide, which researchers said rose by 22 percent.

The increase in mental health diagnoses was accompanied by a rise in treatment, according to the study. The number of visits for children with [mental health conditions](#) doubled during the 15-year period, rising from 6 to 12 per year, while the percentage of children on psychotropic medications increased from 8 percent in 2002 to 12 percent in 2014.

The study included all military connected children between the ages of 2 and 18 enrolled in the system. Principal investigator Elizabeth Hisle-Gorman, MSW, PhD, an assistant professor of pediatrics at the Uniformed Services University's F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine, said the military population is a geographically, socioeconomically and racial diverse sample of children that is representative of the U.S. population as a whole.

"These [military](#) results mirror national estimates that 9 percent all children had a mental health diagnosis in 1996-1998, and 13 percent of children had a diagnosis in 2010-2012," Dr. Hisle-Gorman said.

"The results also suggest that there is an increasing need for pediatric mental healthcare professionals to provide the needed care."

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

APA citation: Mental health diagnoses rise significantly for military children (2016, April 30) retrieved 11 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-04-mental-health-significantly-military-children.html>

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