

Children of Citizen Soldiers

The Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Deployment Stress



Survey Conducted: Fall 2011

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This survey was completed to further investigate the importance of extracurricular activities in mitigating specific negative psychological symptoms observed in children of National Guard Service Members during the parental deployment. Additionally, this survey is the third of its type, and was done to test the accuracy and reliability of previous results. Finally, no third-party studies pertaining to extracurricular activities have focused solely on National Guard families. The purpose of this survey was to assess the psychological impact of a military parent's deployment on the children of National Guard families, and the effectiveness of the Our Military Kids grant program in alleviating deployment-related stress and anxiety.

Participants and Methods: Data was collected from Our Military Kids' grant recipients who received funding during a seven-month period, between March 18, 2011 and October 5, 2011. At the time grants were awarded, children were 3-18 years of age and lived in most of the 50 states and Puerto Rico.

Results: Most survey respondents have eleven or more years of service with the Army National Guard, and have deployed at least twice. Afghanistan, Iraq and Kuwait are the most frequent countries of deployment. Over three-quarters of the families live at least 25 miles from the nearest military base, with about 35% living more than 50 miles. Over three-quarters of respondents also reported that the unit to which the Service Member was attached was within the family's state of residence. About 80% of families reported increased stress or anxiety in their children during the deployment, and most reported other psychological symptoms as a result of the deployment. Fortunately, nearly all respondents reported the extracurricular activity paid for by the Our Military Kids grant program was a benefit to their child during the deployment. Nearly all respondents shared the sentiment that the application process was easy, and the grant contributed to improved morale for the entire family. About a quarter of respondents reported they would be unable to enroll their children in activities without the grant from Our Military Kids, and more than half said it would have been a possibility, but with considerable financial strain on the family.

Conclusions: The Our Military Kids program offers a much-needed benefit to families of deployed Army National Guard Service Members by providing grants to cover fees allowing children to participate in extracurricular activities while their parent is deployed overseas. Participation in extracurricular activities helps decrease stress and other psychological symptoms in children and allows them to focus on something positive, thereby distracting them from their parent's absence.

INTRODUCTION

Our Military Kids is a nonprofit organization located in McLean, Virginia. It provides grants of up to \$500 to children of deployed National Guard members that cover up to six months of fees for activities such as sports, fine arts, camps, and tutoring. Previous studies have found that keeping children involved in such activities helps ease the stress and anxiety of having a parent deployed to a war zone.

National Guard families, unlike their Active Duty counterparts, are dispersed throughout the country; consequently, they rarely have access to support services offered on military bases. National Guard spouses and children are generally not accustomed to military life, nor do they possess the requisite resiliency skills to manage the stresses of deployment.

Our Military Kids began in 2004 with a pilot program in Virginia with HHC 3/116 Infantry Regiment of the Virginia Army National Guard deployed to Afghanistan. The organization then operated as a regional program in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia until April of 2006, when it expanded its outreach to National Guard and Military Reserve families nationwide to fill an identified gap in support services to geographically dispersed military families. Since its inception, Our Military Kids has provided more than 33,000 grants totaling over \$13 million to children living in all 50 states and U.S. territories.

This survey was undertaken for the following reasons: 1) to study the effects of deployment on National Guard families, particularly the children; and 2) to determine the effectiveness of the Our Military Kids grant program in alleviating deployment-related stress and other psychological symptoms.

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

Methodology

Data was obtained through an online survey service. The survey consisted of 32 open- and close-ended questions. Survey invitations were sent via email to only one member of the family, thereby preventing repeat responses. The survey was conducted between October 21 and November 1, 2011. The response rate was approximately 32.31%, with 780 families responding to the survey.

Sample

Army National Guard families who received an Our Military Kids grant between March 18 and October 5, 2011 were selected for participation in this survey. Approximately 2,414 families were contacted to complete a survey regarding the psychological repercussions of deployment on children and the effectiveness of the Our Military Kids grant program in addressing these repercussions. Families that did not provide an email address on their grant applications were not contacted.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Geographic Location

The majority of states and territories were represented in this study. Of the 99.6% (n = 777) of participants that responded to the question about what U.S. State or Territory they currently live in, the top four states represented were Minnesota (n = 60), Oklahoma (n = 46), and Utah/Virginia (n = 36). Three participants, 0.4% of the total participants, did not respond.

A majority of families 87% (n = 676) reported that the unit their Service Member was attached to was located in the state where they resided. A small portion of families, 13% (n = 101) reported that the unit was in a different state from where they resided, and 0.4% (n = 3) of families did not answer this question.

Most families live a considerable distance from active military installations; of the 99.6% (n = 777) of participants who responded to the question regarding proximity to a military installation,

- 34.9% (n = 271) live more than 50 miles away
- 25.4% (n = 197) live between 25 and 50 miles away
- 24.7% (n = 192) live between 10 and 25 miles away
- 15.1% (n = 117) live less than 10 miles away
- 0.4% (n = 3) chose not to respond

Financial & Employment Information

Of the total survey participants, 99% (n = 773) completed the question about pay grade. The majority of soldiers, or 64.3% (n = 497), reported to be at the enlisted pay grade, 28.2 % (n = 218) were at the officer pay grade, 7.5% (n = 58) were at the warrant officer pay grade, and 0.9% (n = 7) chose not to answer this question.

Of the total number of survey participants, 96.67% (n= 754) reported how their soldier's civilian pay compares to their military pay; 3.33% (n = 26) chose not to respond. Less than half, 41.6% (n = 314) of families reported that the Service Member's active duty pay was more than their civilian pay, while 23.1% (n = 174) of families reported active duty pay was less than their civilian pay, and 35.3% (n = 266) reported that their civilian pay is the same as their active duty pay.

Of the participants who reported that their military pay was less than their civilian pay, approximately 6.6% (n = 49) reported that the Service Member's civilian employer was providing financial assistance to help bridge the negative pay differential.

Approximately 89% (n = 678) of the 97.56% (n = 761) participants who reported whether deployment had threatened or terminated the Service Member's employment status said there had been no change in their civilian employment status. Fewer participants, 5.5% (n = 42) reported that the Service Member's employment status had been threatened by deployment; and, 5.4% (n = 41) reported that the

Service Member's civilian employment had been terminated as a result of deployment. Of the total survey participants, 2.44% (n = 19) did not answer this question.

Out of the total survey respondents, 99.36% (n = 775) answered a question regarding how deployment affected the non-Service Member's employment status. Recent deployments affected 37.8% (n = 293) of the at-home parent or caregiver's ability to sustain employment outside of the home, while 62.2% (n = 482) reported no impact, and 0.64% (n = 5) chose not to respond.

Deployment

The majority of National Guard members surveyed served more than 11 years cumulatively. Of the total number of respondents, 99.74 (n = 778) answered the question in regards to duration of service; 0.26% (n = 2) did not respond to this question. Of the respondents, 22% (n = 171) had more than 20 years of military service, 25.4% (n = 198), had 16 to 20 years of service, 21.9% (n = 170) had between 11 and 15 years of military service, 15.4% (n = 120) had 7 to 10 years of military service, and 15.3% (n = 119) had less than six years of cumulative military service.

The majority (99.87% (n = 779)) of the survey participants answered the question on where their Service Member's most recent deployment was; 0.13% (n = 1) participants did not respond. Of the respondents, 38.8% (n = 302) were deployed to Afghanistan, 33.2% (n = 259) had been deployed to Iraq, and 20% (n = 156) were deployed to Kuwait. Other countries that were nominally represented were Kosovo, Egypt, Bahrain, Cuba, Qatar, and various African nations.

Out of 98.97% (n = 772) of the families who responded to how long their Service Member was deployed, a majority reported that their most recent deployment was 6 to 12 months (72.8%, (n = 562)) in length, and 24.4% (n = 188) were deployed for more than 12 months. Only 2.8% (n = 22) were deployed for six months or less and 1% (n = 8) families did not respond to the question.

Of the survey respondents, 99.10% (n = 773) reported how many times their Service Member has been deployed; 0.9% (n = 7) did not answer this question. Nearly one-third (32.1% , n = 248) of Service Members have been deployed outside of the Continental United States (OCONUS) only once, while 35.8% (n = 277) have been deployed OCONUS twice, and 32.1% (n = 2,454) have been deployed three times or more.

Number of Children

Of the 95% (n = 741) survey respondents who answered the question regarding the number of their children who were eligible (ages 3-18) for a grant during the Service Member's most recent deployment; 43.7% (n = 324) of families reported they had two children between the ages of 3 and 18 years, 27.1% (n = 201) reported one child was eligible, 20% (n = 148) reported three children, and 9.2% (n = 68) reported four or more children between the ages of 3 and 18 years in their household during the most recent deployment; 5% (n = 9) of respondents chose not to answer this question.

Of the 95.51% (n = 745) families who answered the question regarding how many of their children received Our Military Kids grant awards, 44.3% (n = 330) had only one child receive a grant from Our

Military Kids. However, 38.7% (n = 288) received grants for two children, 13% (n = 97) received grants for three children, and 4% (n = 30) of families received grants for four or more children in their household; 4.49% (n = 35) families did not respond to this question.

Of the respondents, 94.87% (n = 740) reported their relationship to the grant recipients while 5.13% (n = 40) did not report on this question; 84.2% (n = 623) were mothers, 14.3% (n = 106) were fathers, 1.4% (n = 10) were the grandparents, and relationships that were nominally represented were step parents, legal guardians, aunts/uncles, siblings.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF DEPLOYMENT ON CHILDREN

In order for the psychological symptoms experienced by children during deployment to be quantified, both age and gender of the child needed to be reported. Of the survey respondents who answered the question pertaining to the psychological symptoms as well as age and gender, there were 1,516 children represented; 46.70% (n = 708) were male, 53.30% (n = 808) were female. The average age of the children represented was 9.67 years.

Of the 95.77% (n = 747) families who answered the question regarding their child's stress/anxiety levels, 80.3% (n = 600) reported an increase in their children's stress or anxiety levels during the most recent deployment, 19.7% (n = 147) reported no increase in their children's stress or anxiety during the most recent deployment, and 4.23% (n = 33) of survey participants did not respond to this question.

Most (85.1% (n = 635)) of the 95.64% (n = 746) of survey respondents who answered the question about whether participation in an extracurricular activity benefitted their children reported that it was a significant benefit to their children. Of the families who responded to this question, 14.3% (n = 107) said participation benefitted their children somewhat and 0.5% (n = 4) said that participation in an extracurricular activity was not a benefit to their children. Few respondents (4.36% (n = 34)) chose not to answer this question. According to survey respondents in an open-ended question, some benefits of having children participate in an extracurricular activity were: allowing the children to focus on something other than the parent's deployment, channeling their negative energy, keeping the child busy, increasing self-confidence and social interactions, improving attention and concentration in school, reducing psychological symptoms such as clinginess, anxiety, stress, fear and anger, giving the child fodder for conversation with the deployed parent via phone or Skype, and making the child feel like they are a part of the deployment and that the military cares about them and their sacrifices.

Survey respondents had the opportunity to select applicable symptoms exhibited by their children during the deployment from 15 pre-determined choices. Out of the 1,516 children represented in this survey, emotional reactivity (mood swings) was the symptom most common across all age groups and genders (46.50%, n = 705). The second most reported symptom was anxiousness/depression (37.40%, n = 567), and the third was clinginess (34.89%, n = 529) Other pre-determined symptoms that were reported were aggression, attention difficulties, bedwetting, changes in appetite, crying, drop in academic performance, fearfulness, headaches, negative or morbid thoughts, nightmares/night terrors,

social withdrawal, and stomach aches (See Appendix A). Survey participants were given the opportunity to select “other” and explain symptoms their children had that were not listed; some of the responses were anger, arguing, emotional withdrawal from service member, difficulty sleeping, defiance, thumb sucking, fear of being left alone, and loss of interest in things they previously enjoyed. Of the 1,516 children represented, 13.98%, (n = 212) were reported to have no psychological symptoms and there was 7.39%, (n = 112) of children that were represented in age and gender but had no response to the question regarding psychological symptoms.

Eight of the 15 symptoms showed a strong negative correlation between a younger age and the symptom reported, including aggression (r = -0.828), attention difficulties (r = -0.741), fearfulness (r = -0.868), changes in appetite (r = -0.715), bed wetting (r = -0.895), clinginess (r = -0.955), crying (r = -0.958), and nightmares or night terrors (r = -0.937). These relationships are shown below in figures 1.1-1.8.

Our Military Kids Grant Program

Yellow Ribbon events and other pre-deployment events were the most popular method by which families learned of the Our Military Kids program, with 58.5% (n = 427) of families reporting this method. Other popular ways that families learned of the program were through their family readiness group (FRG) leaders (35.1%, (n = 256)) and through their Service Members (31.6%, (n = 231)). Other nominally reported methods of learning about the program include other National Guard families, state program director/FAC coordinators, the National Guard Bureau website, internet searches, GX Magazine, and service providers respectively. Of the families surveyed, 6.41% (n = 50) chose not to answer this question. Nearly all (98.8 %, (n = 741)) respondents found the grant application process easy; 1.2% (n = 9) did not and 3.85% (n = 30) did not respond to this question.

Over half of families (55.4%,(n = 413)) of the (n =745) families who answered this question said they consider the availability of the Our Military Kids grant program to be a valued benefit when making a re-enlistment decision. Other families (36.4%, (n = 271)) were neutral, and 8.2% (n = 61) of families said the availability of the program would not be a valued benefit when making a re-enlistment decision. Of the families surveyed, 4.49% (n = 35) chose not to respond to this question.

A majority of families, 89.4% (n = 665) of the 744 families who responded to this question said that it would be extremely beneficial for their child if the grant program were extended through the reintegration period; 10.1% (n = 75) said an Our Military Kids grant would be somewhat helpful during the reintegration period, 0.4% (n = 4) said it would not be helpful during reintegration, and 4.62% (n= 36) did not respond to this question. Most families, 75.3% (n = 557) of the 740 families who responded said that extending the grant program through the reintegration period would be extremely helpful for their Service Member to reconnect with their children, 21.8% (n = 61) said this would be somewhat helpful to the Service Member in reconnecting, 3% (n = 22) said it would not be helpful and 5.13% (n = 40) did not respond to this question.

Of the 747 families that responded, 84.7% (n = 653) felt that having a second grant to cover extracurricular activities for the entire length of a year-long deployment would have been extremely beneficial to their child; 11.6% (n = 87) said it would have been somewhat beneficial, 0.9% (n = 7) said it would not be beneficial, and 4.23% (n = 33) did not respond to this question.

Of the (n = 749) families who responded, 62.2% (n = 466) said enrollment in extracurricular activities might have been possible without the availability of the Our Military Kids grant, but would have created financial strain on the family; 28% (n = 210) of families would not have been able to enroll their children without the assistance of Our Military Kids grants. Thirty-one families did not respond to this question.

A majority (85.1%, (n = 635)) of families think the Our Military Kids grant program significantly contributed to the overall well being of their family, 14.3% (n = 107) reported that it somewhat contributed to overall well being, 0.5% (n = 4) said it did not contribute to overall well being at all, and 4.36% (n = 34) did not respond to this question. Nearly all families (98.1%, (n = 728)) of those (n = 742) that responded, reported that the Our Military Kids program contributed to improved morale for the deployed service member, 1.9% (n = 14) said it did not improve morale for the soldier, and 4.87% (n = 38) did not respond to this question. Of the (n = 748) families that responded, 100% (n = 748) believe the Our Military Kids grant program should be continued and made available to other families of deployed Service Members.

Figure 1.1. Relationship between age of children with a deployed parent and aggression reported.

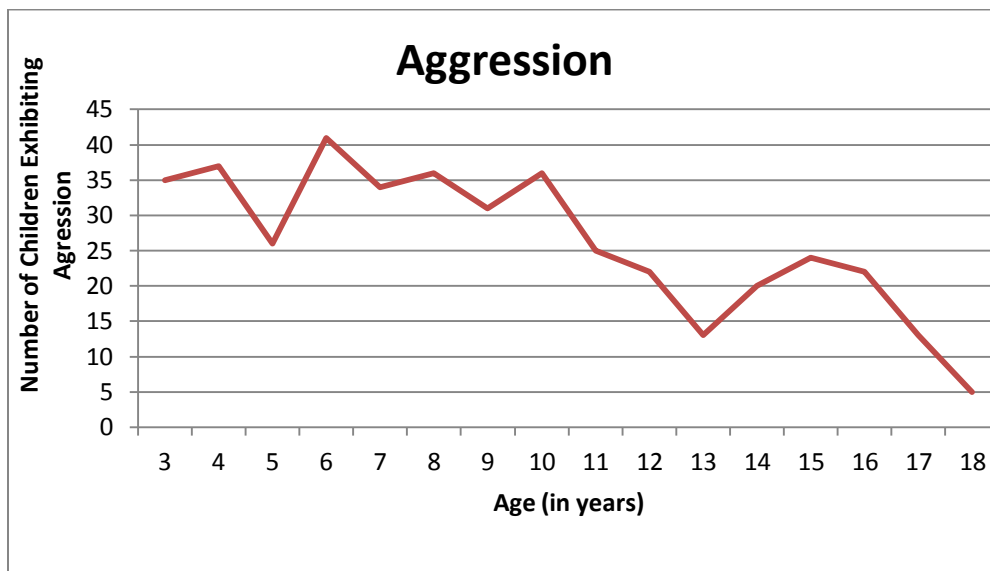


Figure 1.2. Relationship between age of children with a deployed parent and attention difficulties reported.

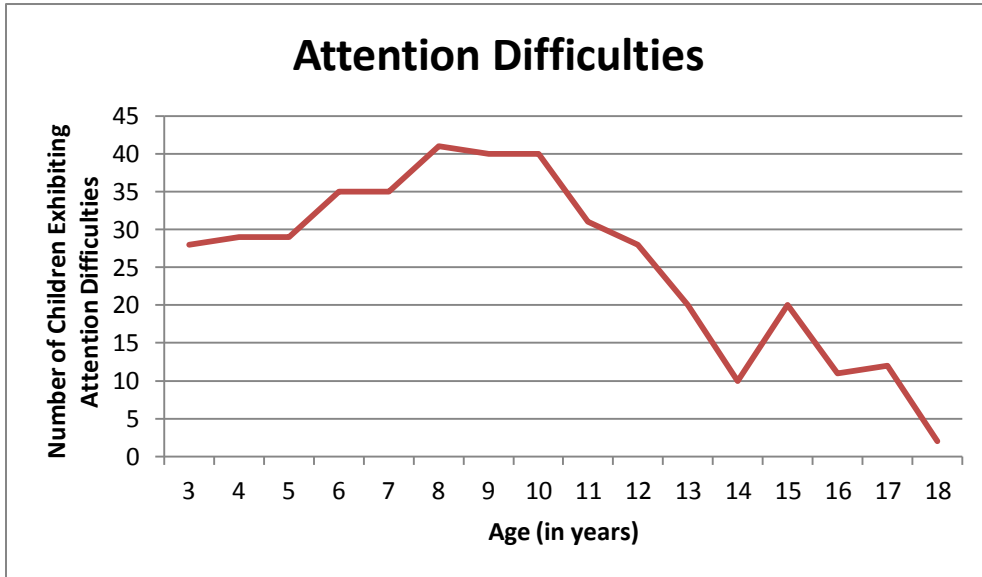


Figure 1.3. Relationship between age of children with a deployed parent and fearfulness reported.

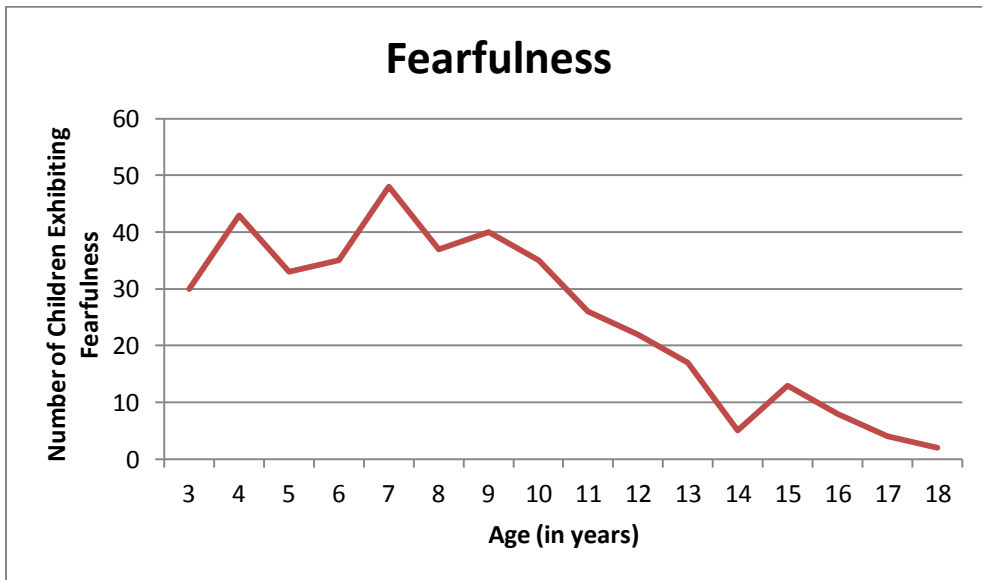


Figure 1.4. Relationship between age of children with a deployed parent and changes in appetite reported.

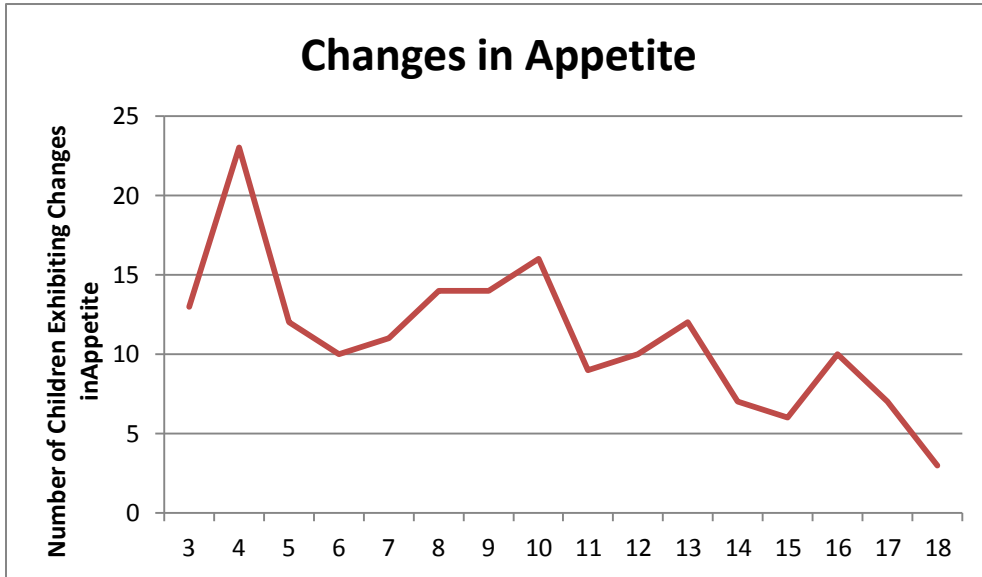


Figure 1.5. Relationship between age of children with a deployed parent and bedwetting reported.

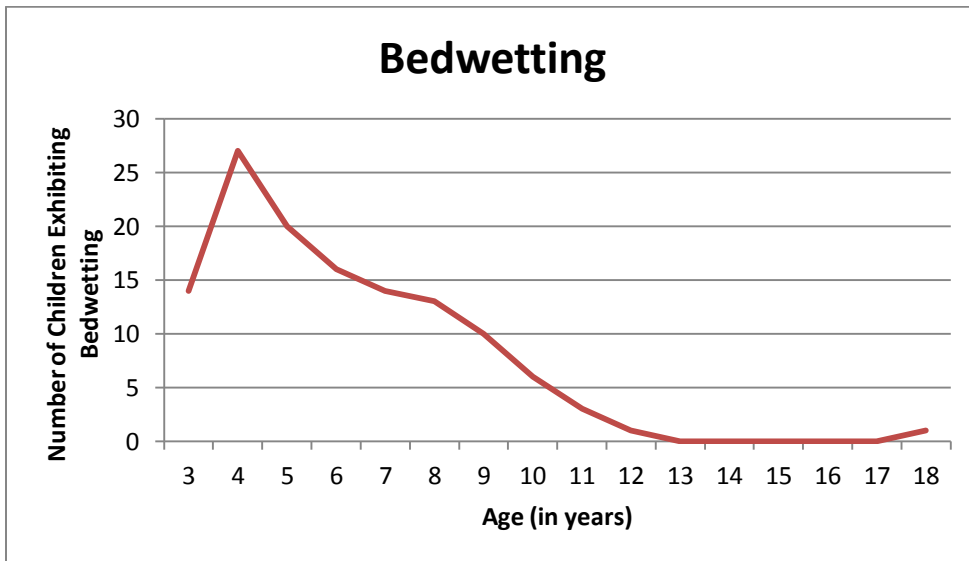


Figure 1.6. Relationship between age of children with a deployed parent and clinginess reported.

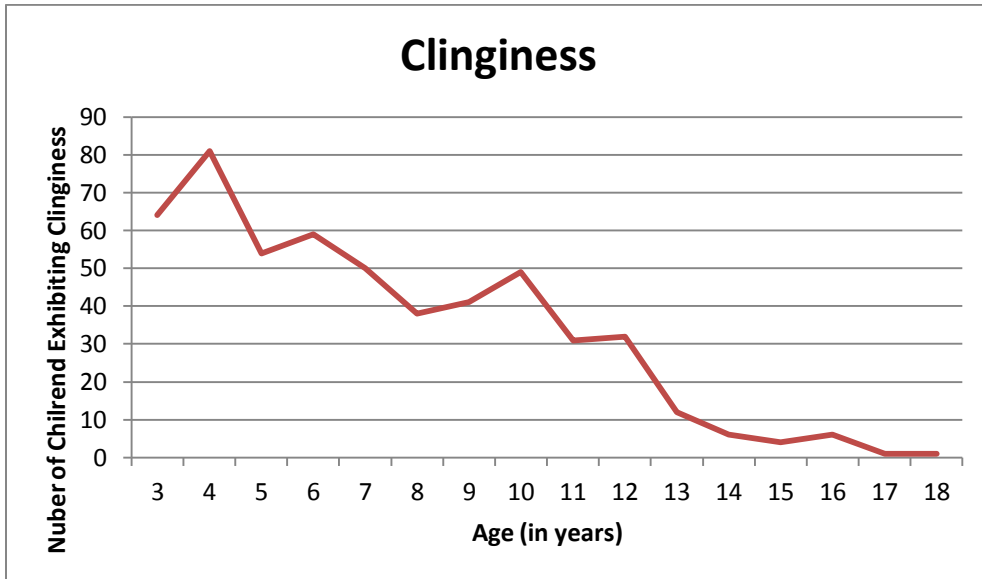


Figure 1.7. Relationship between age of children with a deployed parent and crying reported.

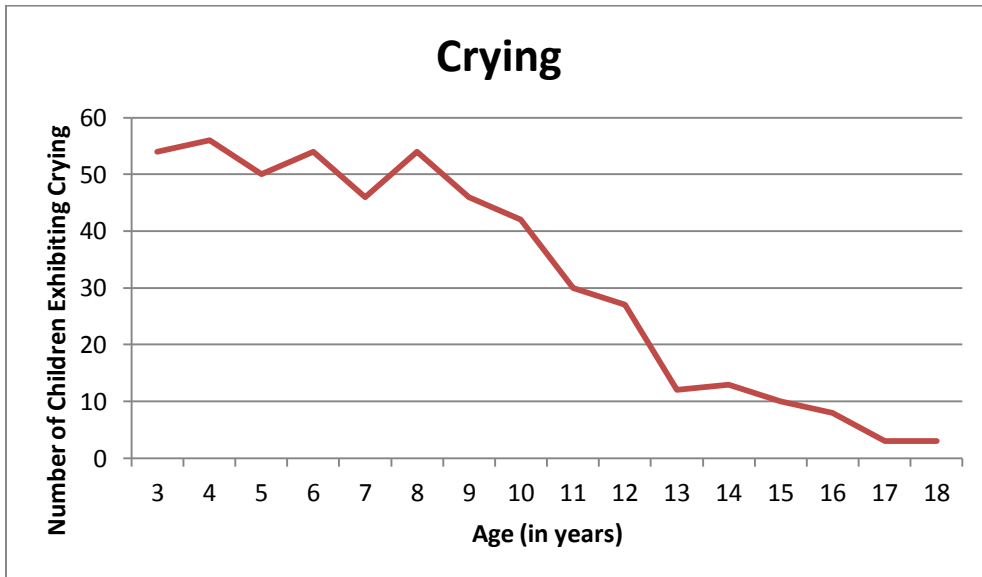
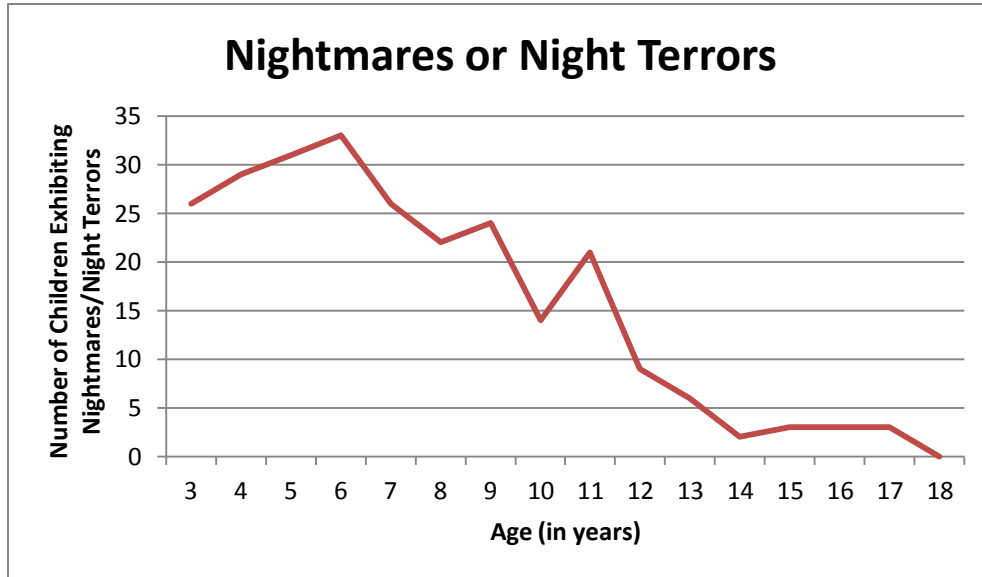


Figure 1.8. Relationship between age of children with deployed a parent and reports of nightmares or night terrors.



Qualitative Data

Of the 780 people taking the survey, 608 (78%) elected to provide a comment in response to the following:

“Due to federal budget cuts, the National Guard is reevaluating and prioritizing ALL of its family support programs based on feedback from National Guard families. Without this federal funding, Our Military Kids would be unable to provide grants to National Guard children during future deployments. Please share your thoughts and experiences about the impact of Our Military Kids in order to keep the program alive for children in 2012.”

We have included 22 comments that best represent the sentiments shared by the survey respondents.

“I think that if my oldest would not have had a positive way to get his anger out he would have possibly committed suicide. He was really struggling with his attitude and having anything in common with anyone in the household. Being able to do something outside the family that made him feel good about himself saved his life! During the deployment, I was doing everything I could to help him but he needed someone other than his Mom. Military children go through enough pain and loss without their parent but the Our Military Kids grants are an amazing and positive way to help military kids. I am also the FRG President for my husband’s unit and I am saying these things not only about the effect the grants had on my kids but also other kids that I saw on a daily basis at the FRG functions. The other parents and I agreed that the grant program is the best program offered our children. I think if there need to be cut backs it should not be at the expense of kids that are already sacrificing a ton!”

“This program was a lifesaver. It is very difficult when your spouse and father leaves for a year, just their being gone is stressful. Add on the stress of a lower paycheck and extra expenses (repairs around the house that my husband did; extra outings to increase kids’ morale, etc.) This grant eased that stress and allowed our children

to enjoy a sport and class we would not have been able to afford. My husband is giving up a year of being home. I think any little bit that eases that loss helps the entire family. I know my husband was more at ease knowing the kids could do something that otherwise would not have been able to do with him being in Afghanistan, and my children were happy they could participate in the activity. If my husband were home and working his civilian job along with guard this would not have been a concern so the grant filled that gap. Please continue this for future families, it is very much needed and appreciated."

"National Guard soldier are deployed just as any other branch. Their children need and deserve the same benefits!!!!"

"This program was the best thing that my family has experienced with this deployment. My children improved immediately upon starting lesson, they were happy again, and we all look forward to art Saturdays. We count down the weeks through art, and every week they make a new creation to show daddy when he comes home. It has bonded the whole family."

"This program provides the children of the deployed soldiers the opportunity to develop positive coping skills and realize there are active and healthy ways to cope with stress, anxiety and depression. This program allows a child to do something they enjoy and can feel good about; thus, boosting their self-esteem. When the soldier calls home, the child is excited to share progress and activity information with their father. Allows all family members to feel good and gives opportunity to bring all together. Thank you!"

"For us this program was a life saver. Before my daughter started her program she had such severe separation anxiety she would vomit, she was terrified since daddy left, everyone else would leave her too, she didn't trust, she was very sad. Now she is thriving, she loves it, and is proud of herself. Daddy will also be home for her dance recital so it has been a positive goal to work towards and look forward to."

"My husband has deployed three times since 2007, twice to Iraq and one current to Afghanistan. Last year, my son both welcomed his Dad home from war in Iraq and sent him back to war in Afghanistan. This had a tremendous negative impact on him. His grades suffered and he developed mood swings, nightmares and self esteem problems. Soldiers are processed for readiness to deploy but families do not receive the same assessment. Our Military Kids provided a grant for my son to join a Taekwondo Martial Arts school. After watching him in class, I was able to join at a discounted rate. Now, we are working toward our Black Belts together. This has contributed to our resilience and has improved our mother-son relationship. I am truly thankful for Our Military Kids. There are many programs out there to "help" families of deployed soldiers. Most have beautiful facades and rarely provide more than a referral or the obligatory call from a stranger. Our Military Kids provides tangible results and I believe that it merits more funding to reach out to more families!"

"This program has not only provided a financial asset to help our kids participate in activities that help relieve stress of deployments, but an even bigger role is the morale boost it has given my children. For geographically separated military kids, that includes a lot of National Guard kids, they feel disconnected from the military community and its resources. Even supportive communities do not necessarily know how to acknowledge them. Their surprise and appreciation for being acknowledged by Our Military Kids was such a boost for them. It was like a big pat on the back and high five from the country for their sacrifice."

"It was the BEST part of the deployment for me as well as my children. It really has changed our lives for the best. From their grants, my kids have experienced victory after victory, by learning new songs while taking their music lessons. They are becoming fantastic musicians! Thank you Our Military Kids. Keep up the great work!"

"Most National Guard families, like mine, do not live near a military installation or base. This puts a psychological strain on spouses and children because we feel alone. In my children's school district of 2700, they were the only ones with a deployed parent. None of my friends or acquaintances have deployed spouses. Our Military Kids showed me and my children that we are not forgotten; that the military appreciates us and cares for us. It gave my children the opportunity to participate in activities that took their minds off their missing parent."

“When our soldier wears the uniform in the community many express thanks and gratitude for his service and sacrifice. NO ONE thanks the spouse or children sitting/standing next to him. This program offers invaluable and tangible thanks to the spouse and children of those serving in uniform. This was the best thing to happen to my children while my husband was deployed.”

“The National Guard is no longer a reserve organization. The expectations for guard members and families have grown during our nation’s war on terrorism. If we expect guard members to do the same job as regular army units we need to provide for their families the same way we provide for regular army. National Guard families face unique challenges due to their often long distances from their unit’s home base and lack of access to services. In addition, National Guard families are frequently self-employed and the burden of keeping the business running while the guard member is gone is often times HUGE. Any resources that allow families to manage these challenges and help keep our children healthy and happy must be continued if we hope to maintain force strength and loyalty.”

“Do not cut this program! There is so little that helps a child through a deployment already. Having the funding to provide them with an extracurricular activity is invaluable. Kids learn by doing. Kids reduce stress by being active. Kids do better in academics when they have something they enjoy. Don’t threaten the success of our nation’s youngest soldiers by taking away the one thing they still have.”

“The impact that this program has had on our family is tremendous! My daughter received the grant in order to participate in dance class. Dance allows her to express herself and gives her a sense of belonging. The grant package really made her feel connected to her Dad and that she mattered to the people that “made her Dad be away for so long.” She wears her dog tag from Our Military Kids with pride, and beams when she talks about how her dance lessons and costumes were paid for by the military. She feels like she has a connection to her Dad.”

“My children went into withdrawal upon their father leaving. Depression, nightmares, anger outbursts, uncontrollable crying and more was our life until they started their activities. Yes these things still exist but they are far and few between. Although it is a bit hectic for me to transport them to their activities, I am getting out of the house. We go to the park in between activities, have picnics, play ball and just talk. I know in my heart that I would not have been able to handle this deployment without Our Military Kids.”

“Involvement in activities outside the home enabled a focus other than deployment and kept children busy. Wide-range of available activities also led to topics for discussion when talking to separated family member. The service member is able to actively participate in discussions related to involvement in the extracurricular programs. An opportunity for both the children and service member to reconnect with each other with the positive distraction of the available activity exists upon reintegration. The children have an opportunity to showcase what they have learned and focused their attention on during the deployment period. Both our children were involved in activities – one in dance, the other in karate. Although young, they have a sense of pride knowing that they have accomplished new things, are eager to share progress during conversations/emails/letters, and will be able to share more with their daddy when he returns!”

“Personally my son had no mentor while my husband was away. He was able to connect on a personal level with his weight trainer who was trying to help him prepare for the football season. The trainer ended up being a great role model for him. I don’t know what I would have done without him. Your program was a true blessing for my son. I cannot thank you enough.”

“This program is extremely helpful and takes the family members’ minds off the stress of deployments and focus on the children. It is also an incentive to join the Army National Guard.”

“Please keep this program. It not only did wonders for my children that received it but me and my husband (service member) too. Other children and families deserve this program.”

“These are the children who are affiliated with the military but are looked at so differently since their parent is in the “Guard”. While many of the military kids we know are affiliated with other branches, the Guard puts a different stress on the family. Mainly because we are out there in the community, but people might not realize we are going through a deployment and don’t have the same network of support the regular military has. Children in these cases, like mine, have felt even more isolated. This has caused stress, resentment to other military families for not recognizing what my son has gone through, and general anxiety about our situation. It’s like these kids are out there flying without a net and it’s nice to have an organization that thanks them for their sacrifice. Because, let’s face it, even though it’s not PC to say, the Guard is looked at very different than other branches and this bleeds over to the kids. I’ve had other kids ask my son if his dad was not good enough for the regular Army... This not only makes him feel awful, but makes him confused about what his father is doing over there. Our Military Kids is a great organization and these kids need to be told that they matter and are appreciated. Please keep this going for our National Guard children so they feel special. Thanks.”

“This grant was huge for my children. Often they are forgotten in the deployment and don’t understand things like adults do. This was something tangible for the children that allowed them to do something in which they could temporarily forget about missing their dad and participate in an activity that makes them happy. It was also very helpful as a parent and meant the world to me to be able to see my children laughing and having fun during this difficult time. It was truly beneficial to our entire family.”

“This program has helped my son deal with the deployment of his father. He was extremely withdrawn and feeling lonely when he left. These grants and programs allowed me to get him into some activities he would enjoy and for the interaction he need with other children both military and civilian. This is a very important program for our children and deployed soldiers. Please don’t lose it.”

“This is the most valuable resource out there for military families. No one has done as much for my children as this program. They really seem to understand what kids need to help them during deployment of their father. This really and truly helps. It is not a promise or a piece of paper, but a real valuable asset to my family in coping during deployment. THANK YOU.”

“This program is very beneficial to all: children need some sort of stability and support in all aspects of their lives-emotional, physical, mental and spiritual-we are talking about the whole child, as the saying goes, “it takes a village to raise a child”, any support they can receive is always a good thing. As for the deployed parent, having the peace of mind that their children are getting the support they need, is always a positive thing, it allows the soldier to do their job and stay focus, without having to worry what is going on back home. If I knew about this program earlier in my husband’s deployment, I would have taken full advantage of this program, it wasn’t until later I learned of this program.”

DISCUSSION

This survey provided valuable insight into the effects of active duty deployment on Army National Guard families, particularly the children. Deployment for National Guard families creates noteworthy changes from their typical civilian lives.

More than half of the participating families reported living at least 25 miles from an active military installation, which significantly decreases their access to resources for military families. In addition, the majority of families reported deployments lasting six or more months, and more than half of the families reported the Service Member had been deployed multiple times over his/her military career. Longer and multiple deployments place further stress on military families and can lead to an exacerbation of

psychological symptoms in children. Giving children the opportunity to be enrolled in an extracurricular activity allows them to focus less on their parent being gone and more on just being kids.

A significant 62.2% of families participating reported that if they had enrolled their children in extracurricular activities without the support of Our Military Kids, they would have endured financial strain by doing so. Sadly, extracurricular activities are looked at as nonessential costs when a family prioritizes their finances; the results of this survey strongly suggest that extracurricular activities are essential to the mental health and well-being of military children. The Our Military Kids grants give children the opportunity to maintain a normal routine, continue their activities or try new ones, receive academic tutoring, and most importantly, focus their energy somewhere other than on the fact that a vital person in their lives is not present.

Noticeable stress and anxiety in children was observed by 80% of families surveyed during the Service Member's deployment, and a majority noted the presence of psychological symptoms once a parent deployed. Emotional reactivity (mood swings), clinginess, crying, and anxiousness/depression were the most commonly reported symptoms across all age groups and genders. The average number of symptoms per child was 3.38 out of fifteen, indicating there are many psychological effects experienced by children during deployment. Some symptoms decreased or increased with age. Aggression, attention difficulties, fearfulness, changes in appetite, bedwetting, clinginess, crying, and nightmares or night terrors were more commonly reported in younger children and seemed to diminish as age increased. Likewise, some symptoms were more commonly reported in older children, such as a drop in academic performance and headaches. Almost all families reported that participation in an extracurricular activity benefitted their children and that the activity helped the children develop positive attributes and social skills, increased self esteem, gave them something besides deployment to think about, and helped minimize the negative psychological impact of the deployment.

As with any study, there are limitations to this survey. Some families chose not to complete every question on the survey, leading to incomplete data in some areas. When reporting symptoms, some families did not respond and some entered demographic information for a child but no symptoms or vice versa. These results can be interpreted either as the child not having any symptoms, or as the family choosing not to disclose symptoms. Another limitation of the survey is that respondents were reporting the psychological symptoms rather than the child, which makes the reporting subjective. Also, there was no operational definition for the symptoms listed, leaving the reporting to the interpretation of the respondent. The results may have been different had the children themselves had reported symptoms. In addition, this survey examined the symptoms and experiences of Army National Guard families only and thus limit the generalization of the results for active duty families.

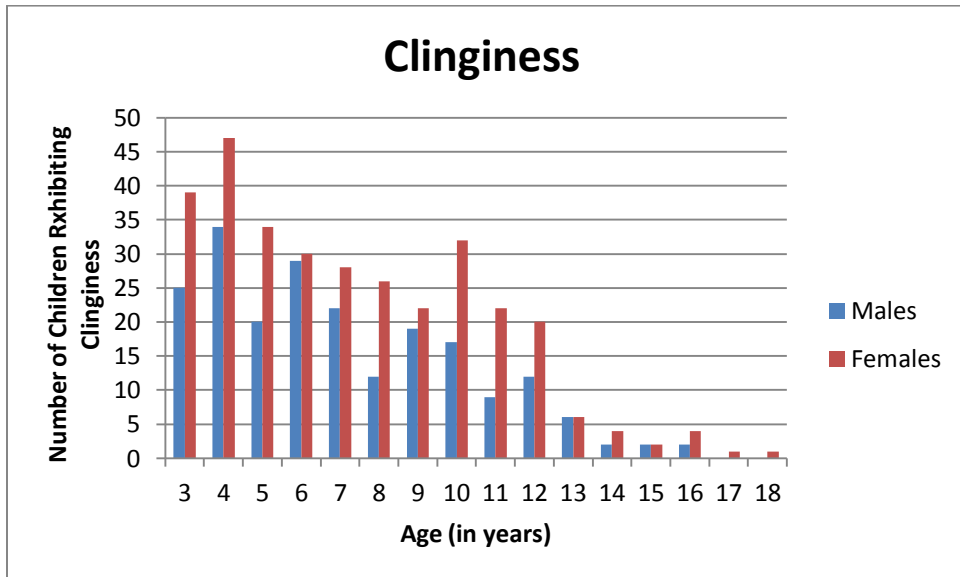
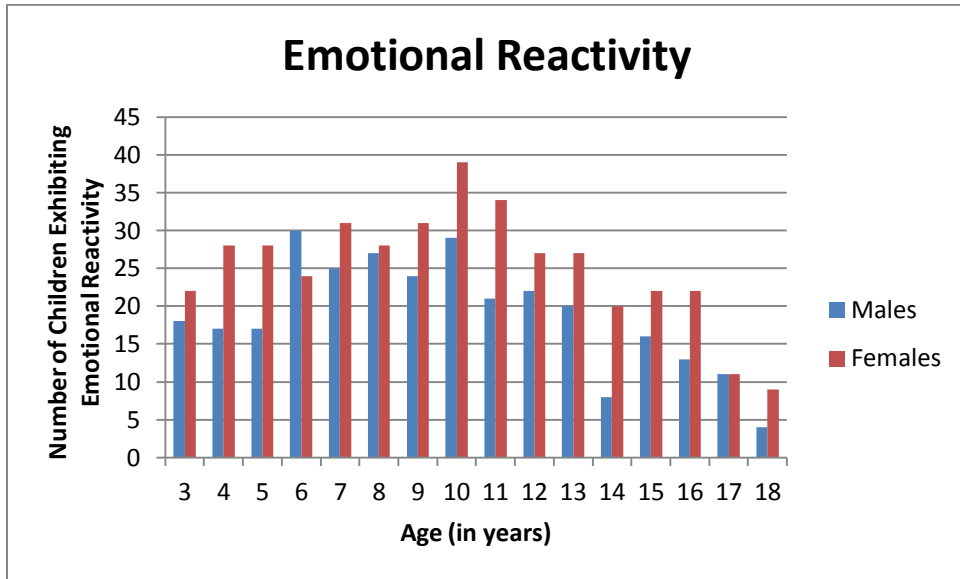
Overall, families found the Our Military Kids grant program to be a positive experience for their children during a parent's deployment. Nearly all families found the grant application process to be easy and many considered the availability of the program to be a valued benefit when considering re-enlistment. Almost all families reported that receiving the grant contributed significantly to the overall well being of their family. A majority of the families felt that extending the Our Military Kids grant program to cover activities during the reintegration period would be extremely beneficial and that it would help the

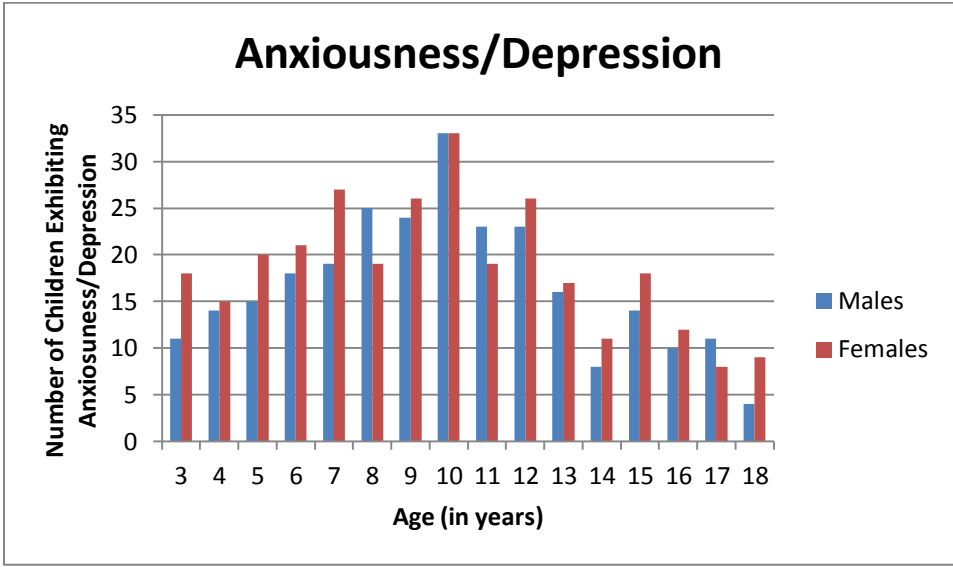
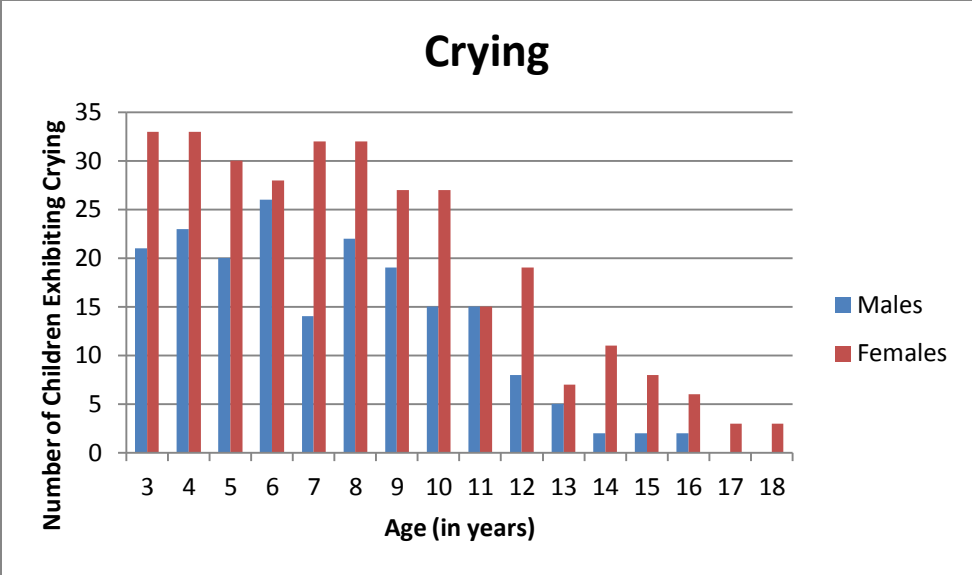
service member reconnect with their child after returning from deployment. Nearly all families expressed that the availability of a second grant during deployment would have been beneficial to their children. A striking 100% of families felt that Our Military Kids grant program should be continued and made available to the families of the National Guard and Reserves.

The results of this survey clearly demonstrate the grant application process is easy and that the impact the grants have on the children of these families is significant and invaluable. National Guard families are grateful to be supported during deployment, which consistently proves to be a challenging time in their lives. The sacrifices that military spouses and children make during deployments are numerous. The Our Military Kids program allows children the opportunity to be kids and explore their talents and interests. Our Military Kids grants help reduce the negative psychological impact of deployment and make a positive difference in the lives of Army National Guard families.

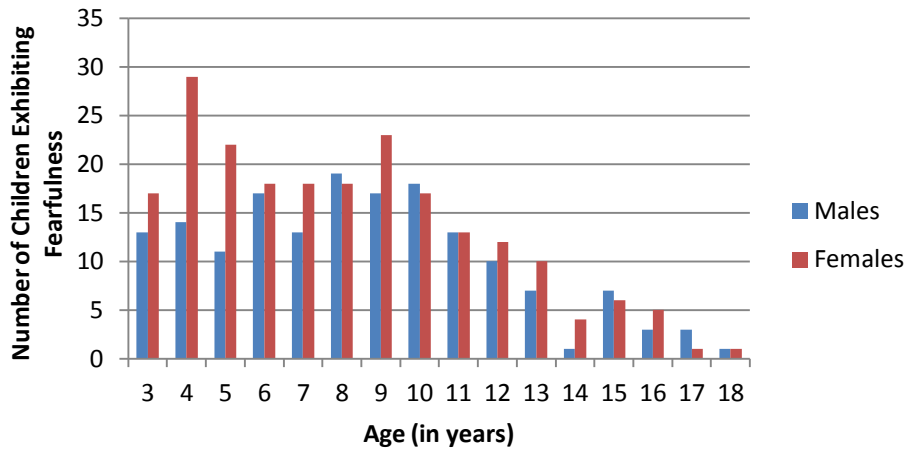
Our Military Kids grants provide another tool for spouses and children to better manage the many stresses they encounter during deployment. Additionally, 98.1% of families reported the Our Military Kids grants contributed to improved morale of the deployed Service Member; the importance of family well-being to Service Members while they are deployed cannot be underestimated. Managing family well-being and mental health on the home front is critical to military readiness. The grants made available by Our Military Kids are shown to be effective in building resiliency and alleviating the negative psychological impact of National Guard deployments on their children.

Appendix A: Symptom Totals by Age and Gender in Order of Most Commonly Reported Symptoms

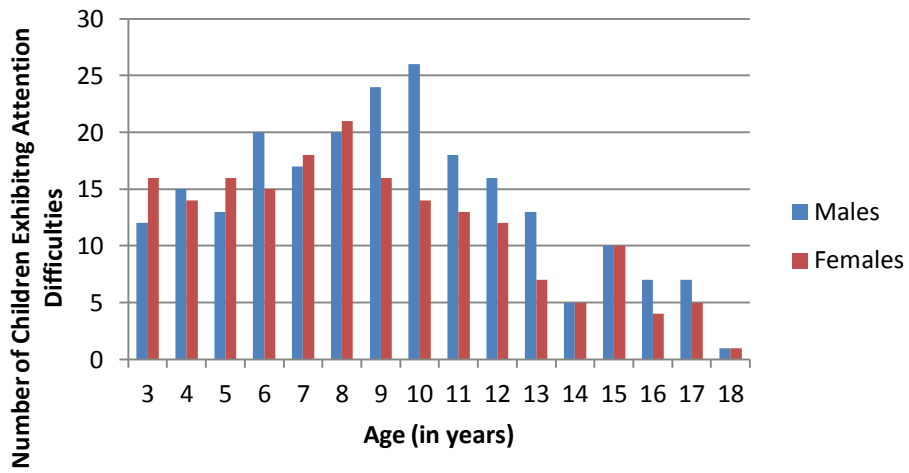




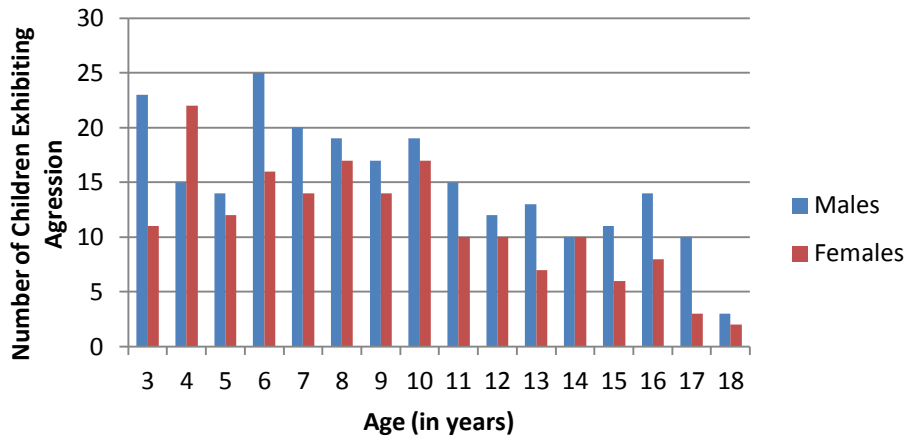
Fearfulness



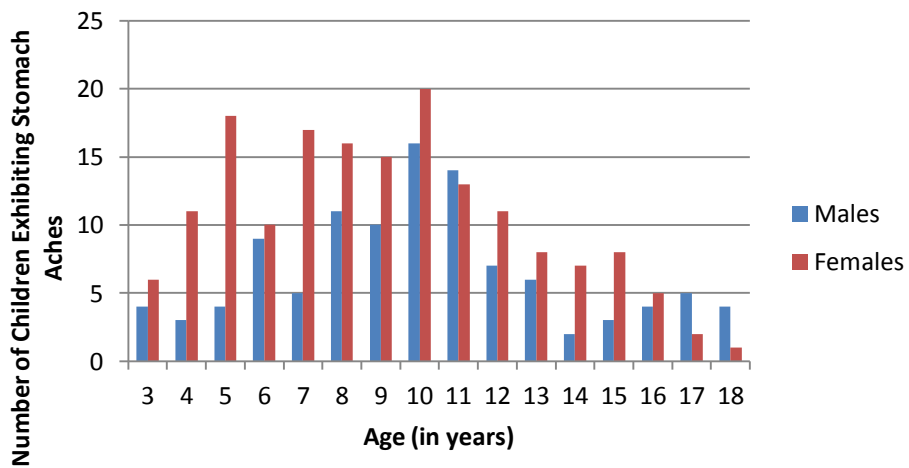
Attention Difficulties



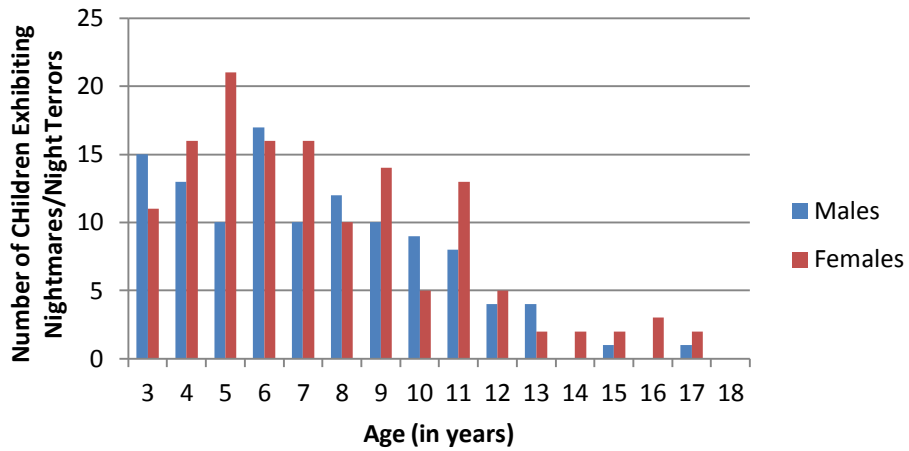
Aggression



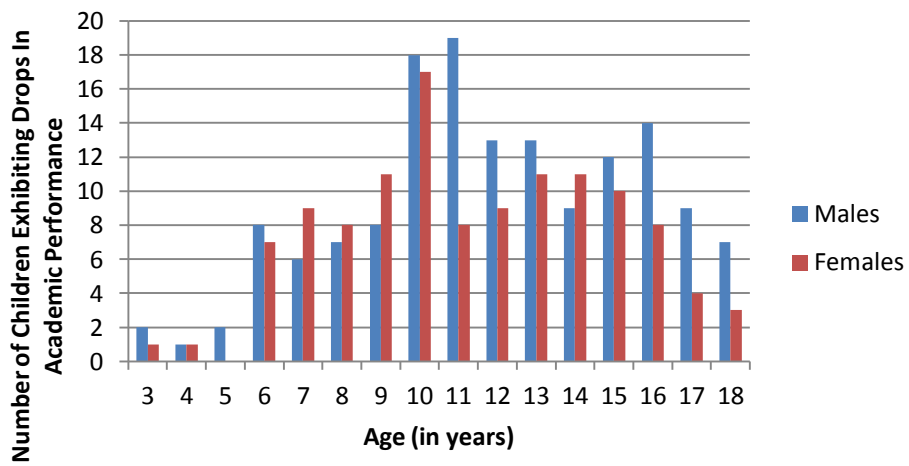
Stomach Aches

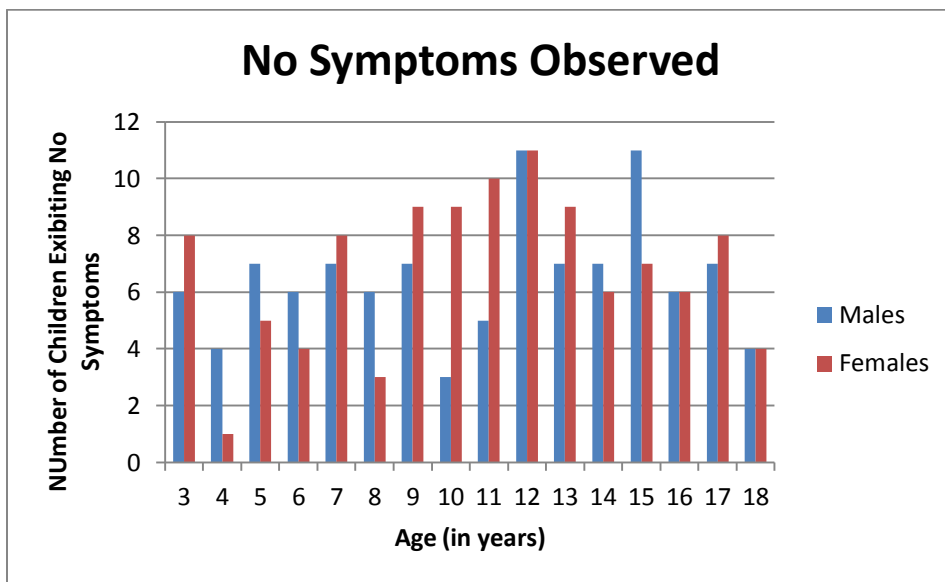
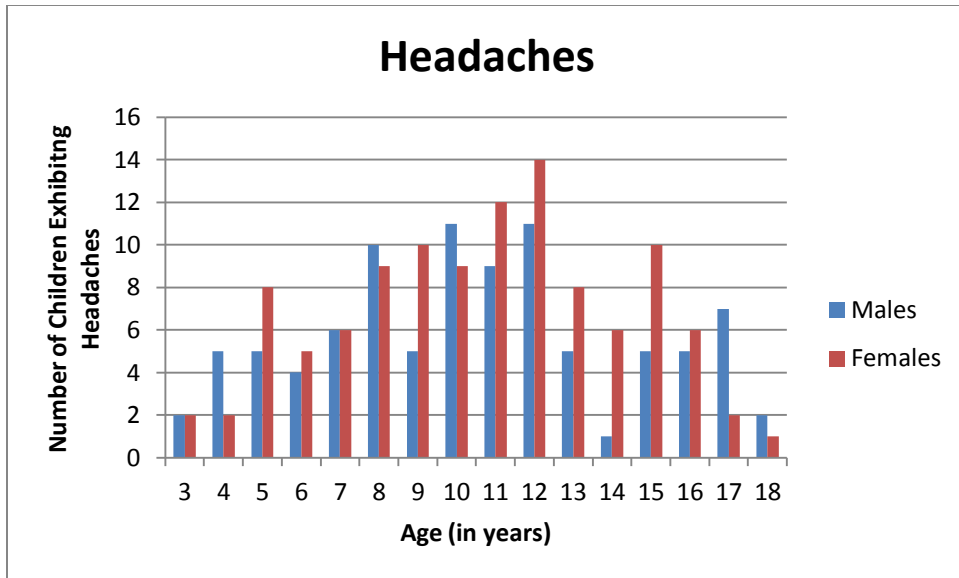


Nightmares or Night Terrors

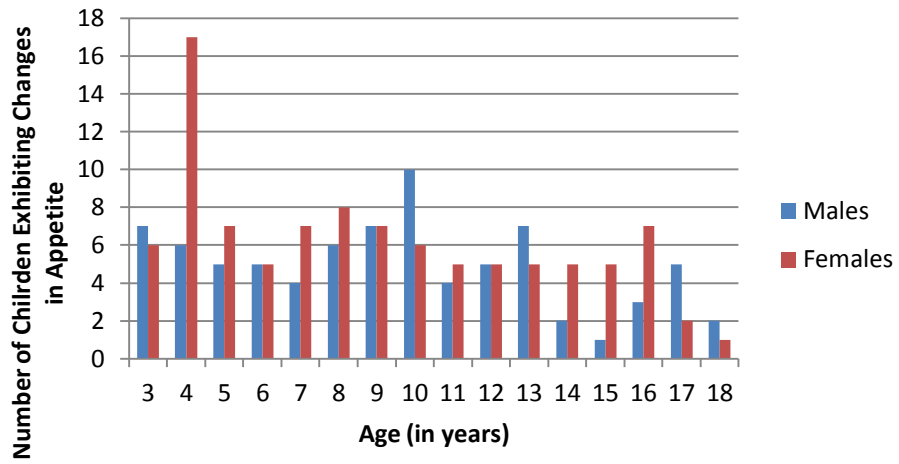


Drop in Academic Performance

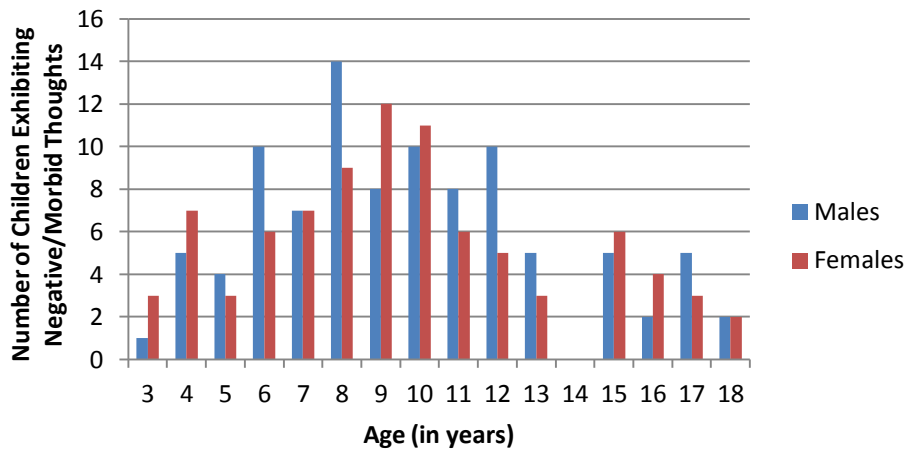




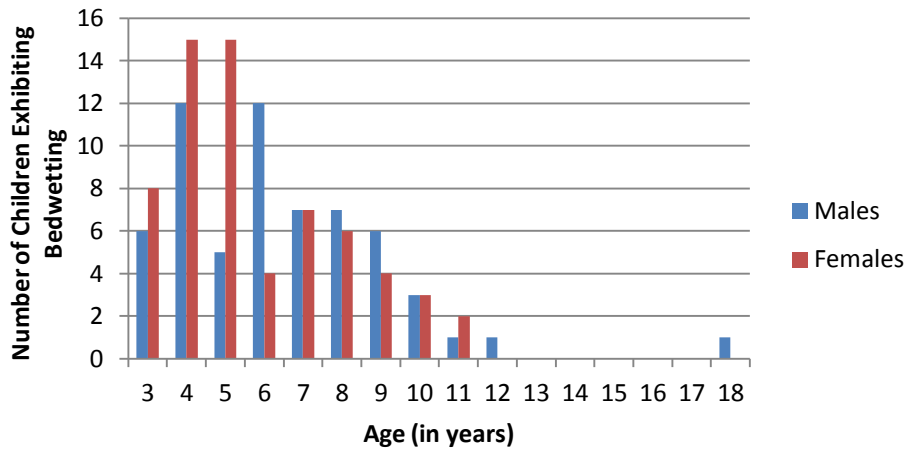
Changes in Appetite



Negative or Morbid Thoughts



Bedwetting



Social Withdrawal

