

HOME VISITING PROGRAM READINESS TO SERVE MILITARY FAMILIES WITH VERY YOUNG CHILDREN

Deployment separation represents a critical threat to the parental role for both military and at-home parents, the quality of parenting, and parent-child attachments across sensitive developmental periods for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Even though over 70% of military families reside in civilian communities, the only widely disseminated military specific home visitation program is the New Parent Support Program, which is primarily installation-based. Little information is available on the proportion of home visiting (HV) programs serving military families, their capacity to serve military families, and their perceived needs related to doing so.

Through the Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative (HARC), the first phase of a mixed methods study was completed to assess the extent to which HV programs serve military families and home visitor perceptions of the unique needs of military families and what might be needed to better serve these families. This study was designed to fill gaps in existing research that will inform HV program efforts to build capacity to serve military families. The study examined the following questions:

1. In what capacity are HV programs currently serving military families?
2. How do HV programs perceive the needs of military families?
3. What do HV programs need to serve military families?
4. What are the barriers to serving military families?

METHODS: HARC home visiting programs located within 50 miles driving distance of active military installations were invited to participate in the study. Of 244 HARC programs, 81 (31%) met this inclusion criterion. Eligible HARC liaisons were invited to participate in a 20 minute online survey administered via Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool. Forty-five participants completed the online survey, yielding a 56% response rate. For additional information, contact Amanda Belknap at aebelknap@jhu.edu

BARRIERS TO SERVING MILITARY FAMILIES

Participants were asked whether military families resided within their service catchment areas and whether their program served military families.

- 60% of programs reported that military families do reside within their catchment areas.
- Of those: 38% serve military families, 58% do not and 4% were unsure.

Programs that do not serve military families were asked about barriers to service (Figure 1). Barriers included logistical barriers, such as needing special clearance to access an installation as well as institutional barriers (being at capacity with families served). Significantly, almost half of respondents did not identify barriers to serving military families.

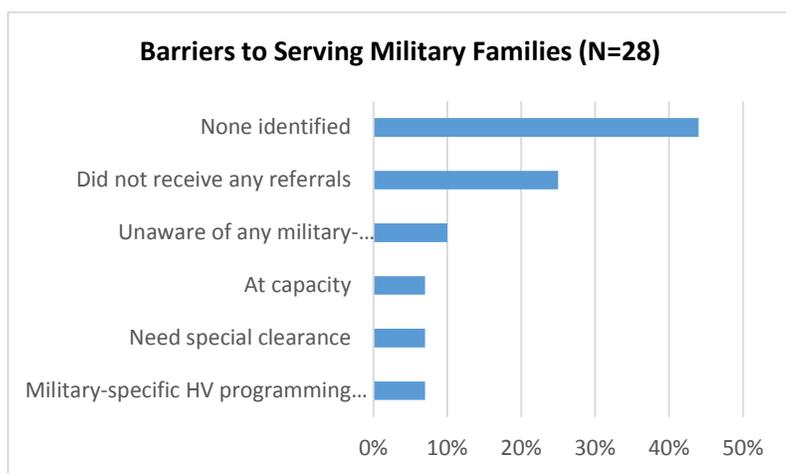


Figure 1.

PROXIMITY TO INSTALLATION

Driving distance (miles) to the closest active military installation was calculated for each participating program. Driving distance ranged from 5.5 to 48.6 miles with a mean distance of 25.2 miles and median value of 23.8 miles.

Findings indicate that the geographic proximity to active military installations is not a factor that affects whether military families reside within a program's service area or whether military families utilize home visitation services.

NEEDS OF MILITARY FAMILIES AND NEEDS OF HOME VISITORS

Respondents that served military families were asked to rate perceptions of the extent to which the needs of military families and skills needed by home visitors to work effectively with military families are different from those needed to work effectively with civilian families. See Figures 2-3.

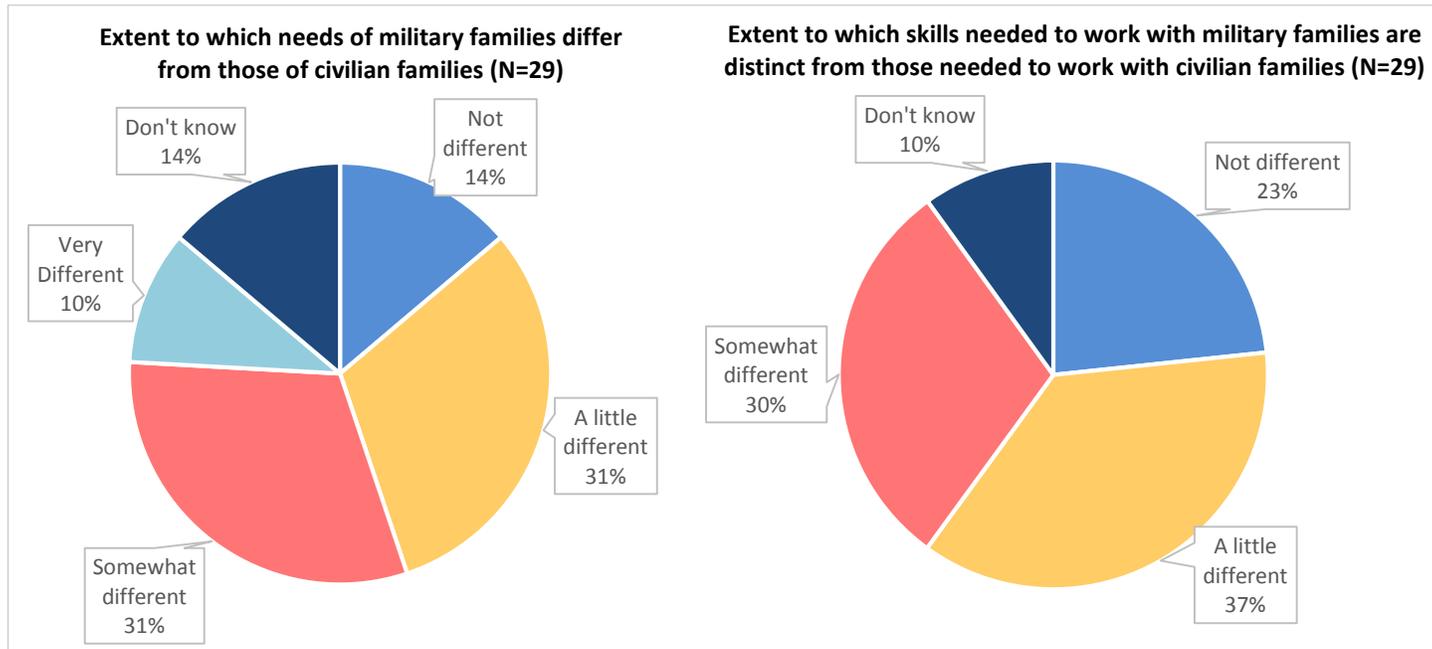


Figure 2.

Figure 3.

SUMMARY

- Most home visiting programs surveyed do not serve military families, even though all were located within 50 miles of a military installation.
- Most home visiting programs reported that military families do reside within their specific service provision areas and may be eligible to receive home visiting services.
- Agencies closer to the military base were not more likely to have military families in their service area or actually serve military families, suggesting geographic proximity is not a factor.
- The most common barriers to serving military families that were reported by respondents were 1) lack of specific referrals for military families and 2) lack of awareness of military families residing within their service provision area
- Findings cannot be generalized to home visiting programs located outside of a 50 mile radius of active duty installations.

IMPLICATIONS

These findings suggest that home visitation agencies, even when in close proximity to an active military installation, are underutilized by military families. Findings also suggest that military families might benefit from increased communication and/or coordination between home visiting programs and nearby military installations. Development of such partnerships may be a particularly useful outreach strategy for agencies to consider when recruiting and enrolling families in home visiting services.

NEXT STEPS FOR THIS RESEARCH

The follow-up phase of this study will include qualitative interviews with selected home visiting program liaisons whose agencies are engaged in targeted outreach and programming tailored for military families. These interviews will explore how the needs of military families may differ from those of civilians, and the knowledge and skillsets that home visitors who work with military families must have in order to effectively serve military families.

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HARC Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative (www.hvresearch.org)

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