

Reducing Collateral Damage on the Home Front:

Child Abuse Homicides within Military Families and Communities in North Carolina: Facts and Recommendations

Children in Cumberland and Onslow County military families are 2 times more likely to be killed by their parents (or other caregivers) than other children in North Carolina. What might reduce this long-standing risk?

THE "TAKE HOME" POINTS:

FINDINGS

- o In the period 1985-2000 in North Carolina, there were 378 child abuse homicides of children from birth through 10 years of age. That computes to an annual rate of 2.2 deaths per 100,000 children.
- o Of North Carolina's 100 counties, 88 had fewer than 8 child abuse homicides during this period. (Of these, 26 small counties had none.)
- o In Cumberland and Onslow counties, home to three of the state's largest military installations, 58 child abuse homicides occurred during these years, of which 35 were in military families. Stated another way, Cumberland and Onslow account for 2% of NC's counties, 7% of NC's children, and 15% of NC's child abuse homicides.
- o In Cumberland County (Ft. Bragg and Pope Air Force Base), the annual *child abuse homicide* rate for children of *military* families was 5.0 per 100,000 children (0-10) over the same 16-year period. Rates were also higher (4.4) than the state average for non-military children in Cumberland County indicating community-wide problems and needs.
- o For Onslow County (Camp Lejeune/New River Air Station) children of *military* families, the *annual child abuse homicide* rate was 4.9 per 100,000 from 1985 through 2000. Rates were also higher (3.2) than the state average for non-military children, again indicating problems broader than those stemming from the military installation itself.
- o These long-term patterns are not a statistical fluke, nor a coincidence. They suggest problems in and around North Carolina military families and military communities that predictably result in a consistently high number and rate of child abuse homicides. There is no reason to believe that there is anything peculiar to military installations in NC; however, this is the only state in which such a long-term, detailed analysis has been accomplished.
- o Child abuse homicides are neither inevitable nor acceptable, and all are preventable. Effective prevention and early intervention strategies are apparently either missing, inadequate and/or undermined by other influences on military families as well as among civilian families.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Action could and should be taken at the local, state and national levels to reduce child abuse homicides within military families and the communities surrounding installations. Most importantly:

- o There should be a national study of all installations to determine whether the higher child abuse homicide rates in NC military families in Onslow and Cumberland counties are also found in military families in other states.
- o Current prevention, treatment, and support services available to military families should be expanded and employ a family violence approach to reduce both spousal and child abuse.

BACKGROUND

We recognize being in the armed services injects unique stresses and difficult situations into the family lives of the men and women who courageously serve. We are grateful for their service to our country. We also recognize the many fine on-going prevention programs, training initiatives, counseling systems, and other programs and policies provided by the armed services to lessen violence within their families. Still, our findings indicate we need to do more. Society can, and must, reduce the frequency and severity of family violence at large and within military families. Helping our men and women in the service and their children is an important way to really "support our troops."

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North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute
311 E. Edenton Street
Raleigh, NC 27601
919.834.6623 ext. 229
www.ncchild.org

Child Abuse Homicides Among All North Carolina Families: 1985-2002

Child abuse homicides are a significant cause of preventable injury deaths among young children in North Carolina. From the Child Abuse Homicide Study^(1, 2), published in 1998, we learned that 85% of all homicides of children under 12 years of age are due to child abuse, not "stranger danger." Most are committed by males, either the biological father or another male caregiver. Combining these numbers with ongoing data from the NC Child Fatality Prevention Team, we know that a total of 439 NC children have been killed by their parents or other caregivers from 1985 through 2002. That is an average of **one every two weeks** for the entire 18 year period.

Child Abuse Homicides Among North Carolina's Military Families, 1985-2000.

Data analysis found that counties with the two largest military facilities had by far the highest rates of child abuse homicides. That finding led to the further analyses below. As far as we know, North Carolina is the only state to have accurate child abuse homicide figures as far back as 1985. Therefore, we cannot compare ourselves to other states, and we do not know if these findings are typical for the country as a whole or are unique to North Carolina. Even so, the findings point out areas for improvement that would benefit all states and military installations.
(Note: Analysis of the military data stopped at year 2000.)

North Carolina's Military Installations

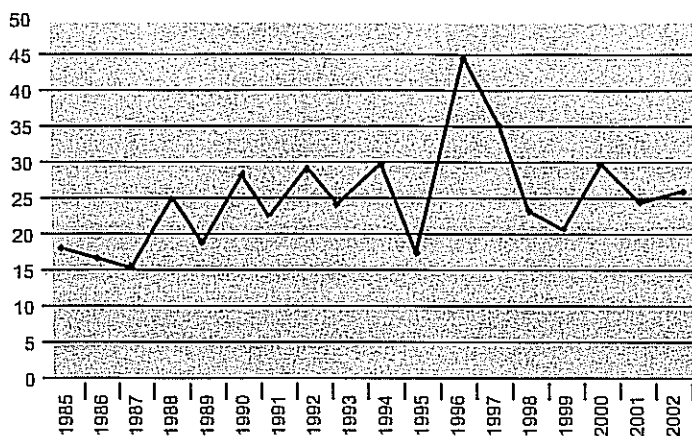
North Carolina has six military installations. Only four, Pope Air Force Base/Ft Bragg (Cumberland County), and Camp Lejeune/New River Air Station (Onslow County), had numbers large enough to provide statistically sound results. Comparing counties with small numbers is unreliable, since the results could be due to chance fluctuations. Therefore, we only studied these installations and the two counties in which they reside.

How We Did This Study

We looked at all cases of child abuse homicides of children 0 through 10 years of age from Medical Examiner records. We stopped at the year 2000 since it was the most recent with complete data at the time we conducted this study. A military case was one where one or both of the parents or other caregivers who killed the child were on active duty at the time of the homicide.

NC Child Abuse Homicides, 1985-2002

Source: NC Medical Examiners Office Reports and Not Invisible Not In Vain



The Findings

In this 16-year study time period:

1. 378 NC resident children 0-10 years of age were killed by caregivers. (The 18 adolescent abuse victims were not included in the analysis in order to have a consistent age range between the two studies from which data were drawn for the military analysis.)
2. The overall state child abuse homicide rate per year was 2.2 per 100,000 children ages 0-10.
3. 26 small counties had no child abuse homicides during the 16-year study period.
4. The rates for the large population counties (Wake, Mecklenburg, Guilford) ranged from 2.1 to 2.4 per 100,000 children ages 0-10.
5. Cumberland and Onslow counties had rates twice as high as the state average: 4.6 and 4.3 per 100,000 respectively.
6. In Cumberland County, the child abuse homicide rate for children of military families was 5.0 per 100,000 children 0-10. For Onslow children of military families, the rate was 4.9 per 100,000.
7. Child abuse homicide numbers have been publicized for many years in North Carolina. Until this study, the numbers within NC military families in Cumberland and Onslow counties have not been known. Official data on domestic violence deaths, military or civilian, are not available.

What We Don't Know-- Yet

Many questions and issues arise related to understanding the higher rates of child abuse homicides among NC active duty military families. Knowing the answers to the questions below would help. Because much of this information is available only to military organizations, we encourage the Department of Defense to conduct or support the pertinent research.

- o How many of these families also had co-occurring domestic violence.
- o How many child abuse homicides occurred in active duty military families living in counties surrounding Cumberland and Onslow.
- o Why are civilian child abuse homicide rates higher in Cumberland and Onslow counties than other counties in NC.
- o Are the rates also higher in civilian families with similar characteristics (for example, young, low income, separated from their extended families, etc.) than in the public at-large.
- o How do these rates compare to counties in other states with military installations (to our knowledge other states have not reviewed all their child abuse homicides in this manner).
- o Was the perpetrator of the homicide the active duty family member.
- o Was the timing of the homicide related to any potentially stressful events such as deployments or returns.

The study's definition of a child abuse homicide: the killing of a child by a caregiver responsible for the child's health and welfare. The caregiver is usually over 12 years of age. (This is the definition adopted by the State Child Fatality Prevention Team.)

NC Counties with 8 or More Child Abuse Homicides, 1985-2000,
Numbers and Rates, Ages Birth Through 10 Years

	Child Maltreatment Homicides, Birth through 10 years (A)	Rates per 100,000 per year, children age 0 through 10 (B)	Population Ages 0 through 10 (June 30, 1992) (C)	% Total Population Active Military, 2000 (D)
North Carolina	378	2.2	1,055,342	
Cumberland* (total)	40	4.6	52,987	15.8%
(military)	(22)	(5.0) #	(27,560)**	
(civilian)	(18)	(4.4) #	(25,427)	
Mecklenburg	32	2.3	87,785	--
Wake	24	2.1	71,625	--
Guilford	20	2.4	52,142	--
Onslow *† (total)	18	4.3	26,115	23.5%
(military)	(13)	(4.9) # †	(16,543)***	
(civilian)	(5)	(3.2) # †	(9,572)	
Forsyth †	15	2.3	40,450	--
Craven *†	13	5.6	14,550	8.6%
Gaston †	10	2.0	28,051	--
Durham †	10	2.2	28,784	--
Wayne *†	9	3.2	17,817	3.4%
Alamance †	8	3.1	15,898	--
Buncombe †	8	2.0	25,117	--

Counties shown in the table had 8 or more child abuse homicides from 1985-2000 and are in descending order. 62 counties had from 1 through 7 homicides and 26 counties had no homicides in this 16 year study period. Child abuse homicides occur most frequently to children under 5 years of age. In NC, according to 2000 census data, children under 5 comprised 6.7% of the population. Onslow and Cumberland are slightly higher than the state average with 8.8% and 8.2% respectively.

* Site of military installation. 2003 population numbers for active duty personnel: Ft Bragg, 46,826/Pope AFB, 5,800 (Cumberland); Camp Lejeune/New River Air Station, 38,039 (Onslow); Seymour Johnson, 4,399 (Wayne); Cherry Point, 8,987 (Craven).

** Population data for Cumberland County military dependents, 0-10 years of age, 1995, closest year available (1992 unavailable).

*** Population data for Onslow County military dependents, 0-10 years of age, 2000, closest year available (1992 unavailable).

Rates are approximate due to lack of comparable 1992 population data.

† Rates based on fewer than 20 events are not as reliable as those for more than 20 because of the way variation in small numbers can effect the calculations.

Sources:

(A) Medical Examiner, NC Department of Health and Human Services

(B) Calculated by NC Child Advocacy Institute

(C) State Data Center, NC Department of Administration

(D) Accessed in 2002 at

www.bragg.army.mil/pao/FY%2001_stats.htm

www.pope.af.mil/43AW/43aw_pa/demographics.htm

<http://www.military.com/InstallationGuides/RegionSpecificInstallations/1,11401,Eastern%5FSeaboard,00.html>

www.cherrypoint.usmc.mil/mission.asp

RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the root causes of parental violence against children and how to prevent it is understandably a complex issue. While a lot is known, there is still much more to learn. National, state, and local responses are required in synchrony in order to begin to address this tragic problem. We do not presume to understand the complexities of our armed services and their policies and programs. We know a great deal is being done to address the child maltreatment that occurs in our armed services families.

These recommendations follow discussions and presentations to key military and civilian officials over an almost two year period. They flow from suggestions of colleagues and from our findings. Further, these recommendations are not meant to be comprehensive, but are based on our limited findings and are practical and doable.

Finally, in some cases the recommendations support initiatives already underway that have been developed in response to the recognition of the disproportionate fatal violence that children in some NC active duty military families and their surrounding communities have suffered.

We recognize and commend the many ongoing programs ranging from prevention to recognition and treatment on military installations as directed by the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) within the Department of Defense.

National Recommendations

- § Prevention efforts for the US as a whole and within the armed services must be enhanced and need to address the entire spectrum of family violence with coordinated and comprehensive strategies.
- § Research should be conducted nationally to determine whether military installations outside of North Carolina also have higher child abuse homicide rates in active duty military families than civilian communities.
- § Records for past active duty military child abuse homicides victims should be reviewed to ascertain any co-existence of domestic violence and other epidemiological information in order to better understand the complete picture of family violence. (Onslow County DSS has looked at this and noted several red flags for child abuse: income, age, education and isolation.)
- § The Department of Defense (DoD) should ensure that copies of all policies, directives, and memos affecting domestic violence and child maltreatment procedures are being sent to the civilian agency in each state in charge of child protection services.
- § All installations should strive for improved investigations of child fatalities that include:
 - o conducting ongoing education of military police and criminal investigators, first responders, and others involved with fatalities about the dynamics of abuse and proper procedures, including when deaths appear to be of natural causes. (This will be part of the new DoD fatality review process.)
 - o having standardized death scene investigation and autopsy procedures.⁽⁴⁾
 - o always immediately sharing information with the appropriate military and civilian agencies.
 - o providing universal ongoing mandatory training in family violence dynamics and investigation procedures for military law enforcement agencies.
- § All installations should provide an array of prevention services that should decrease child abuse homicides:
 - o Primary component—a universal prevention process through the military medical treatment facilities and other appropriate units.
 - o Secondary component—have outside agencies such as Departments of Social Services, Medical Examiners Offices, and child abuse prevention organizations involved in the development of prevention strategies.
 - o Tertiary component—remove children from dangerous situations and assure their ongoing safety when they are returned to families.

§ Returning service members may have problems with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anger and abuse. Consequently, additional resources should focus on:

- o mental health services.
- o local hotline accessibility for vulnerable families. (Camp Lejeune has a hotline, 1-800-451-MCCS, in place since the war with Iraq.)

§ Ongoing Department of Defense policies and initiatives should be supported and improved:

- a. Support the recent DoD procedures for fatality reviews and augment where necessary to ensure that all domestic violence homicides, child homicides and sudden unexpected deaths that are suspicious for abuse or neglect of military dependent children whether on or off installations receive a thorough fatality review. The purpose is to obtain, collect, and publish epidemiological data including the occurrence of homicides with patterns of deployment and return, and to ascertain gaps in identification of family violence problems, communication among agencies, family communication, and services that could prevent future similar deaths.
- b. Augment the DoD FAP data system set up to record child maltreatment and domestic violence to include *all* child abuse homicides, near fatalities, and domestic violence homicides among active duty military families, whether or not the installation's FAP was involved, and whether or not the victim involved was an open case. The system should include relationship of the caregivers, marital status, child protective services history, military status, whether or not the perpetrator was the active duty caregiver, and other demographic data on both the victim and the caregivers. Without complete data the full spectrum of fatalities remains largely invisible and prevention efforts are hampered.
- c. Improve access to counseling where needed for active duty military families who live off the installation during high stress transition periods such as deployments, returns, and with ongoing stress involving domestic violence, known child maltreatment, substance abuse, or other risk factors.
- d. Further recognize and identify the disincentives for seeking help. For example, in situations of intimate partner violence, the service member could be demoted in rank, causing serious financial impact on the family as a whole.

e. Formal working relationships should be established with Memorandums of understanding between all DoD constituencies and recognized prevention agencies in the US, such as Prevent Child Abuse and the National Children's Alliance down to the level of local prevention agencies in counties with military installations.

North Carolina Recommendations

§ A process should be developed to study whether informing installation personnel about the screened-out and unsubstantiated child maltreatment cases in military families living off the installation or base would be beneficial to the families and increase the safety of the children. Currently, social workers at Ft. Bragg, Pope Air Force Base, and Camp Lejeune/New River Air Station only receive information regarding reports substantiated by child protective services in their counties. The unsubstantiated and screened-out cases may indicate a family at-risk that could use additional on-installation services. Federal law allows for screened-out or unsubstantiated reports to be sent to military installations. Memorandums of understanding in counties with military facilities could be instituted per the US Code below to provide the necessary procedures and protections for reporting.

10 U.S. Code Sec. 1787. Reporting of child abuse

(a) In General. —The Secretary of Defense shall request each State to provide for the reporting to the Secretary of any report the State receives of known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect in which the person having care of the child is a member of the armed forces (or the spouse of the member).

(b) Definition. — In this section, the term "child abuse and neglect" has the meaning provided in section 3(1) of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (42 U.S.C. 5102).

(In Cumberland County, if the report originates from the military hospital social workers, services will be provided regardless of substantiation. This would constitute an "exception to policy" for military cases.)

§ Procedures should be developed to ensure that Child Protective Services (CPS) reports are made by the person actually identifying the case directly to the county CPS agency wherever possible. When cases are referred to uninvolved personnel for reporting, there is sometimes a 'watering down' effect and information needed to prevent inappropriate screening may be lost. In addition, such a policy would avoid any fear of career reprisals that might be a factor if the report is made to installation personnel.