Considering Child Care and Parenting Needs in Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services


36 Veterans (with children under the age of 18) attending mental health appointments at a Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital completed surveys to evaluate interest in on-site child care centers at VA facilities as well as potential related barriers to care. The majority of Veterans surveyed agreed that provision of on-site child care services would be useful, and that they would use child care services at the VA if they were available.

Key Findings:

- Both male and female Veterans expressed interest in on-site child care services at the VA.
- Veterans agreed that lack of child care was a barrier for Veterans in accessing VA services.
- The three items most highly rated by female Veterans included: wanting child care services at the VA, on-site childcare services increasing access to VA services, and the positive effects of motherhood on overall health.
- Many Veterans reported that they would be somewhat comfortable leaving their child with a VA volunteer during an appointment.
- Veterans expressed more interest in child care than in parenting education classes at the VA.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could consider partnering with child-care facilities or staff in order to provide child care for Service members and Veterans during healthcare appointments.
- Programs could provide a list of community resources for child care for Service members and Veterans.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate resources to offer child care programs in healthcare facilities to enable Service members and Veterans to attend medical appointments.
- Policies could recommend the development of collaborative relationships between military healthcare organizations and community agencies, perhaps funding vouchers to parents so their children can enjoy safe childcare during appointments.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Additional research investigating the feasibility, logistical challenges, and impact of offering on-site child care services could be beneficial.
- Examination of the challenges in effective parenting for Veterans living with mental health problems may be helpful.
- Additional research using a more representative sample may be beneficial.
Veterans (who had children under age 18) seeking outpatient mental health treatment at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System were invited to complete a survey of their child care and parenting needs. Veterans completed items constructed by the researchers on their attitudes and experiences regarding child care and parenting support at the VA, access to child care, children and health, and parenting. Means of items were calculated.

Participants:
- 36 Veterans participated (69% male).
- 52% White, 31% African American,
- Mean age=42.90 (SD=14.20) years, 40% had one child, 37% had two children, Mean child's age = 9.29 (SD=5.70) years.
- No information on other military variables was presented.

Limitations:
- As a treatment seeking sample of Veterans was used, those for whom lack of child care was a barrier to seeking treatment were not included; therefore, figures herein may be underestimates of the actual need.
- The data were collected by non-standardized measures.
- The sample size was small and restricted to one area of the country; thus, it is not generalizable to all Veterans.

Assessing Research that Works

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<th>Research Design and Sample</th>
<th>Quality Rating:</th>
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<td>Excellent (★★★)</td>
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<td>The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...</td>
<td>Excellent (★★★)</td>
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Overall Quality Rating: ★★★★☆