Child Care and Other Support Programs

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Summary
The U.S. military has come to realize that providing reliable, high-quality child care for service members' children is a key component of combat readiness. As a result, the Department of Defense (DoD) has invested heavily in child care. The DoD now runs what is by far the nation's largest employer-sponsored child-care system, a sprawling network with nearly 23,000 workers that directly serves or subsidizes care for 200,000 children every day. Child-care options available to civilians typically pale in comparison, and the military's system, embedded in a broader web of family support services, is widely considered to be a model for the nation.

The military's child-care success rests on four pillars, write Major Latosha Floyd and Deborah A. Phillips. The first is certification by the military itself, including unannounced inspections to check on safety, sanitation, and general compliance with DoD rules. The second is accreditation by nationally recognized agencies, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The third is a hiring policy that sets educational and other requirements for child-care workers, and the fourth is a pay scale that not only sets wages high enough to discourage the rapid turnover common in civilian child care but also rewards workers for completing additional training.

Floyd and Phillips sound a few cautionary notes. For one, demand for military child care continues to outstrip the supply. In particular, as National Guard and Reserve members have been activated during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the DoD has sometimes struggled to provide child care for their children. And force reductions and budget cuts are likely to force the military to make difficult choices as it seeks to streamline its child-care services in the years ahead.

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The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) receives wide acclaim for offering accessible, affordable, high-quality child care to military service members and their families. The military sees child care as an essential element of combat readiness and effectiveness, so it places a high premium on the quality of children's experiences in military child-care facilities, and on assuring families that their children are well cared for. From former President Bill Clinton to the Carnegie Corporation to the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, high-ranking officials, prominent foundations, and leading research organizations alike have called the DoD's child-care system a model for the nation.[1]

This military child-care system stands in stark contrast to the mixed bag of child-care options and spotty subsidies for civilians. "The best chance a family has to be guaranteed affordable and high-quality care in this country is to join the military," child-care advocate Ann Crittenden said in 1997, and her statement remains true today.[2] The contrast between military and civilian child care is posing new challenges to the DoD as the proportion of service members who rely on civilian child care grows, raising questions about inequities in the child-care options available to military families.

In this article, we describe the military's approach to providing high-quality, reliable, and affordable child care to military families as a means to promote combat readiness and retain personnel. We also discuss how the DoD is coping with the challenge of providing child care to families who face multiple deployments, and to the growing share of military families who live in civilian communities. Finally, we argue that the military's experience with revamping its child-care system could be used as a template to improve child care for the nation as a whole.

History of Military Child Care

Military child care has not always had such a positive reputation. Indeed, the dramatic transformation of military child care from a system in distress to a model for the nation has been called "a Cinderella story."[3] A 1982 report found that many DoD child-care programs did not meet fire and safety codes, that the inspection system was weak and lacked sanctions, and that teachers' training and pay were woefully inadequate. The hourly wage for child-care workers was less than that for people who collected trash on military bases and stocked commissary shelves, and the low pay fueled high turnover rates.[4] There was virtually no oversight of families who cared for others' children in their homes. Long waiting lists and high costs also plagued the system, making child care inaccessible for many military families. Allegations of child abuse at the Presidio Army base in 1986 lent a note of alarm and became the catalyst for congressional hearings in 1988.

This negative attention to military child care coincided with post–Vietnam War changes in the military's demographics. With the advent of the all-volunteer force, service members increasingly became career-oriented professionals with families, and the number of women in the military service branches (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps) grew steadily. Between 1973 and 1989, the share of enlisted women on active duty rose from barely 2 percent to almost 11 percent.[5] Today, women constitute 14 percent of active-duty personnel.[6] The number of dual-service military couples—spouses who are both service members, with at least one on active

duty—has also been growing. And 5.4 percent of service members are single parents, about two-thirds of them men.[7]

These pressures led to the Military Child Care Act (MCCA) of 1989, which became the driving force for change. The MCCA focused attention on assuring high-quality services by establishing comprehensive standards, setting accreditation requirements, and aggressively enforcing licensing; it also expanded access through subsidies for families. These initiatives primarily targeted military child-development centers, which remain the centerpiece of the military child-care system. The MCCA called for the military to establish comprehensive, cross-system regulations; substantially improve training and pay for the centers' workers; provide specialists to support training and curriculum development; create an effective inspection system, including regular unannounced visits and strong sanctions for noncompliance; and implement a sliding fee schedule based on family income. To support these changes, the act directed the DoD to give each service branch more money for child care. The MCCA thus produced a broad and transparent system of high-quality, highly accountable, affordable child care that is now widely viewed as the best the nation has to offer.

Further Steps

In 1992, the DoD developed a comprehensive plan to expand the inadequate supply of child care, although the MCCA, which prioritized quality of child care over quantity, had not directed it to do so. The 1992 plan involved building centers, expanding the supply of hourly and drop-in care, increasing the capacity (as well as the quality and oversight) of family child-care homes, and expanding the role of resource and referral agencies as central clearinghouses for military families seeking DoD-sponsored or civilian child care. By 1997, the military child-care system was serving more than 200,000 children, up from 52,000 in 1988.[8]

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Amendments to the MCCA in 1996 directed the DoD to establish accreditation standards for the child-development centers. The DoD responded aggressively; by 2000, 95 percent of its child-development centers had received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).[9] At this writing, about 98 percent of child-development centers and school-age centers are accredited, and the rest are in the process of obtaining or renewing their accreditation.[10]

In 2000, Congress for the first time authorized the DoD to subsidize civilian child-care programs, as long as they increased the supply of child care for military families and complied with DoD regulations, standards, and policies. These requirements mean, for example, that only state-licensed civilian providers who have been inspected in the past 12 months can receive DoD child-care funds. By contrast, civilian families can use federal child-care subsidies for any legal, but not necessarily licensed, child-care arrangement.[11]

New Collaborations

As of 2010, after nine years of continuous fighting overseas, more than two million service members had been deployed to combat zones, putting a tremendous strain on DoD child care. President Barack Obama, in an effort to make caring for military families a national priority, directed his cabinet to study the most pressing issues that military families face. Their report, issued in 2011, named improving the availability and quality of civilian child care for military families living off-installation as one of four goals to improve military families' lives. (The other three were to enhance overall wellbeing and psychological health, to ensure excellence in military children's education and development, and to develop career and education opportunities for military spouses.)[12] The report found that the military needed 37,000 more child-care slots.

To meet this need, the administration established the Military Family Federal Interagency Collaboration between the DoD and the Department of Health and Human Services. The collaboration aims to increase the availability and quality of civilian child care for military families. A pilot program has placed military child-care liaisons in 13 states that have large numbers of military families. The liaisons are helping to determine local needs, set goals, and coordinate the efforts of state and local governments, military officials, and community partners to increase child-care quality and use child-care resources effectively.

Over the course of this initiative, which began in February 2011, the 13 participating states have tried to improve military families' access to high-quality child care through both regulatory changes and laws, which have varied from state to state. New regulations have included requiring annual inspections of licensed programs, requiring background checks and fingerprinting of employees, adding computer and TV time limits and physical activity requirements for children, approving online training, and increasing the number of required annual training hours. New laws have strengthened background check requirements, set or increased penalties for illegal unlicensed care, specified what credentials people need to train early education providers, and required that child-care staff be trained to recognize and prevent child abuse and maltreatment. In addition, military child-care liaisons have worked to deliver the training that states request, whether face-to-face or online. The liaisons take steps, when possible, to ensure that teachers can get professional development credit and that the state land grant university's cooperative extension system can provide public domain resources.

Overview of DoD Child Care

The DoD child-care system consists of 900 child-development centers and school-age programs at more than 300 sites, along with more than 4,500 family child-care homes (called child-development homes in the Navy). Together, this network employs nearly 23,000 child-care workers, 7,300 of whom are military spouses, and it constitutes the largest employer-sponsored child-care program in the nation. The DoD's network provides and subsidizes daily care for more than 200,000 children from shortly after birth through 12 years of age, or approximately 21 percent of all active-duty military children in that age range.[13]

Parents who are eligible for DoD-sponsored child care include active-duty service members, DoD civilian employees, National

Table 1. Primary DOD-Subsidized Child-Care Programs

Program	Setting	Purpose
Child-Development Center	On-installation child-care centers certified, inspected, and operated by the DOD and the services.	Provides high-quality full-time or part-time child care.
Family Child Care	On- and off-installation care in military housing. Providers—usually military spouses—are trained and certified by the services, and the homes are inspected according to DOD and service requirements.	Provides an alternative to CDC care if CDCs are full or if families' needs are not met by CDCs. Some Family Child Care may offer overnight, emergency, or infant care, for example.
School-Age Care	On-base or off-base providers, including CDCs, Family Child Care, youth centers, community-based nonprofits, or schools. Providers must be certified or licensed, and inspected, by the DOD or the state.	Provides before-school, after-school, and summer/holiday care.
Operation Military Child Care and Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood	Off-installation child-care providers licensed and inspected by the state, including child-care centers and family child-care homes. Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood providers must be accredited to ensure quality comparable to a CDC. In practice, service branches may waive this requirement if no accredited provider is available.	Subsidizes the cost of off-installation care if on-installation facilities are full or there is no installation nearby. Operation Military Child Care is intended for short-term care, primarily during deployment.

Source: U.S. General Accounting Office

Guard and Reserve members who are on active duty or attending personnel training, and DoD contractors. Base commanders can establish a priority system when demand for child care exceeds the supply, but they must abide by DoD guidelines that give top priority to active-duty service members and to DoD civilian employees who are single parents or whose spouse works full time outside the home.

Table 1 describes the four main components of the military child-care system: child-development centers, family child-care homes, school-age child-care programs, and subsidized civilian child care. Child-development centers serve approximately 44 percent of the children in DoD-funded child care, family child-care homes serve 14 percent, school-aged child-care programs serve 21 percent, and subsidized civilian child care serves 21 percent.[14] Just over half the children in child-development centers are infants and toddlers. DoD-subsidized civilian child-care providers are in limited supply, primarily because of the DoD's stringent licensing and accreditation requirements.[15]

The child-development centers, which encompass school-age programs, care for children up to 12 years old. Child-development centers offer a range of options: full day, partial day,

Table 2. DoD Weekly Child-Care Fees (2011–12)

Family Income	Fees
Below $29,400	$46–$59
$29,401–$35,700	$62–$74
$35,701–$46,200	$77–$90
$46,201–$57,750	$93–$105
$57,751–$73,500	$108–$121
$73,501–$85,000	$124–$130
$85,001–$100,000	$133
$100,001–$125,000	$136
More than $125,000	$139

Source: U.S. Department of Defense

and drop-in care; partial-day preschool programs; before- and after-school programs; and extended care, including nights and weekends. Because so many military children are under the age of five, child-development centers at each military installation offer pretoddler (12 to 24 months) and preschool programs. Both pretoddler and preschool programs focus on young children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. In addition, preschool programs work to prepare children for school through enrichment activities that build the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes they'll need. Children from six weeks to five years old can receive full-day care. For parents who need child care intermittently, the centers also offer hourly programs. Some installations place a cap on how much hourly care a family may use per month; other installations charge a small fee for hourly care ($3–$4 per hour, in some cases).

School-age care programs, for six- to 12-year-olds, take place in child-development centers, youth centers, and other suitable facilities. They offer care before and after school, during holidays, and during summer vacations. Many military school-age care programs transport children to and from their schools.

The family child-care home program cares for children as young as four weeks and up to age 12. The homes are operated predominantly by military spouses who live on military installations. People who live in civilian housing near a base may also provide DoD-subsidized care. Unlike most child-development centers, many family child-care homes are equipped to care for mildly ill children. Though family child-care homes must be licensed and inspected annually, they are rarely accredited.[16]

The service branches run several more child-care programs. The Air Force's Extended Duty Care and the Navy's Child Development Group Homes offer child care during nontraditional hours. The Marine Corps' Enhanced Extended Child Care program offers child care to family members who can't use regularly scheduled child care because of extended duty, family illness, family emergency, etc. Each branch of service, and each installation, can determine the types and levels of child care that best meet the needs of its military families.

Parents on military installations seek child care through Resource and Referral offices,

which work closely with civilian agencies. If on-base child care is not available, the Resource and Referral offices help families find child care in the surrounding community. The military is working to increase the capacity of this network of child-care support.

Parents who find themselves on a waiting list for DoD child care, as well as parents who live far from a military base, may seek DoD-subsidized care through Child Care Aware, a nonprofit agency that helps parents find high-quality child care in their communities. Subsidies are available through two programs: Operation Military Child Care and Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood.

Operation Military Child Care subsidizes care for children of deployed service members, or children of service members who are mobilized away from home, for example, by the Guard or Reserve. Providers must be licensed by the state and inspected annually, but they need not be accredited by a nationally recognized body. Because the program doesn't require national accreditation, it allows Guard and Reserve families, who often live in areas where accredited providers are few or nonexistent, to benefit from a child-care subsidy.

The Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program provides subsidies for families of active-duty service members and DoD civilians who are unable to access on-base child care, usually because they've been placed on a waiting list. Providers enrolled in this program must be nationally accredited.

Administration and Fees

The defense secretary's Office of Children and Youth is in charge of military child care. It establishes who is eligible for subsidized child care and provides oversight and guidance to the service branches, each of which administers its own child-care program. Each branch of service issues child-care regulations and sets fees based on the defense secretary's policies.

Funding for military child care comes from two sources: appropriated funds, which Congress authorizes each year, and fees that parents pay for child care. The National Defense Authorization Act of 1996 directed that, in a given fiscal year, the amount of funds Congress appropriates for military child-development centers must equal or exceed the amount that parents pay in fees.[17] As table 2 illustrates, parents pay for care on a sliding scale, based on nine income categories; the cost is the same regardless of a child's age. On average, subsidies cover about 64 percent of the cost of on-base care, but all parents pay something. Fees can range from $46 per week for the lowest-income families to $139 per week for the highest-income families.[18] The weekly fee covers 50 hours of care, with two meals and two snacks each day.

When families use civilian child care, the military generally sets a cap on the subsidy; families are responsible for costs that exceed the cap. Across all service branches, on average, military families pay about $108 per week for DoD-subsidized civilian child care, which constitutes 8.7 percent of the average military family's income.[19] By contrast, civilian families spend, on average, 25 percent of their income for care of children under five years old and 9.9 percent of their income for care of school-age children.[20] Yet military child care costs more to operate. A recent Government Accountability Office study reported that, on average, it costs 7 percent more per child to run military child-care centers than it does to run private child-care

facilities that receive DoD subsidies.[21] The higher costs come from the higher wages that staff in military centers receive; the expense associated with accreditation; and the significantly higher proportion of infants and toddlers, whose care is more expensive than that of older children (53 percent in military centers vs. 26 percent in civilian centers).[22]

Ensuring High-Quality Child Care

Four facets of the DoD child-care system, embedded in the Military Child Care Act, work together to promote high-quality child care: certification and inspection, accreditation, hiring, and training and pay.

Certification and Inspection

The DoD's certification standards ensure that programs and providers who receive DoD funds meet basic requirements for health, safety, and program administration. Moreover, the DoD requires yearly unannounced inspections, which include:

- a comprehensive health and sanitation inspection;
- a fire and safety inspection, and;
- a DoD compliance inspection conducted by a multidisciplinary team.

Each inspection team includes a parent representative; each service branch's headquarters also conducts an annual inspection. Inspection teams must be qualified in early childhood development and meet the NAEYC accreditation system's other qualifications.

The military gives child-care programs substantial guidance to prepare for and comply with its standards. As a result, the compliance rate is 100 percent. In stark contrast to the military system, only 81 percent of federal child-care subsidies now go to licensed or registered child-care providers (rates in each state vary from 29 to 100 percent), and the vast majority of states do not require annual, let alone unannounced, inspections.[23]

Accreditation

The military requires that all centers be accredited by a nationally recognized body. This sets a higher bar than the certification standards alone, ensuring that military children receive care that meets nationally recognized criteria for quality, including staff-child interactions, learning environments, and curriculum content. By 2002, all child-care centers on military installations were either accredited by the NAEYC or in the process of obtaining or renewing their accreditation. The DoD also offers strong incentives for family child-care homes to become accredited by paying the costs of accreditation and giving parents higher stipends for accredited homes. Unfortunately, no research has examined how accreditation affects DoD child care specifically. But a 1994 report from the RAND Corporation found that accreditation increases the overall quality and functioning of military child-care centers.[24]

When it comes to civilian child-care providers, Operation Military Child Care requires that, at a minimum, they be licensed and annually inspected by their states. The Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program requires that civilian providers be nationally accredited. But only about 10 percent of civilian child-care centers and 1 percent of civilian family child-care homes in the U.S. are accredited.[25] Faced with such low rates of accreditation among civilian providers, the DoD is increasingly trying to coordinate with providers and state licensing

officials to improve child-care standards across the United States. In the interim, the military service branches may waive the accreditation requirement if they determine that no accredited provider is available to meet parents' needs. Child Care Aware has also agreed, on a case-by-case basis, to inspect some licensed providers annually so that military parents who use them can receive DoD subsidies.

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Hiring

At child-development centers, staff members must have at least a high school diploma or GED, and must be able to speak, read, and write English. These education requirements help to ensure that employees can handle the required training. Outside the military, by contrast, only 16 states require lead teachers at child-care centers to have a high school diploma or GED.[26] Additionally, all military child-care workers must pass comprehensive background checks; only 10 states require such background checks for civilian child-care center workers.[27]

Training and Pay

Compensation for child-care workers reflects the value that the military places on its child-care system. The compensation system rewards training, decreases turnover, and helps to ensure that the people who care for military children are qualified and motivated. And it breaks the connection between child-care workers' pay and parent fees through a DoD-subsidized pay schedule that is linked to training, as are all military salaries.

Child-care staff salaries are a well-documented correlate of child-care quality.[28] DoD salaries for child-development center workers who have achieved the required level of education and experience average $15 an hour, compared with $9.73 an hour in the civilian sector.[29] (In places where the cost of living is high or living conditions are difficult, the military service branches may receive waivers to charge higher child-care fees so that child-care workers can be paid more.[30]) Under the DoD's structured compensation system, child-care workers' pay is equivalent to that of other DoD employees with similar experience, training, and seniority.[31] Under normal budgetary conditions, their salaries are adjusted annually for inflation, just like those of all federal employees. Military child-care workers also receive a benefit package that includes medical, dental, life, and long-term care insurance; a flexible spending account; retirement benefits; sick leave; and military installation privileges (including fitness centers, recreation programs, child care, etc.).

Like other DoD employees, child-care staff receive extensive training, which is linked to promotion and pay raises. Newly hired child-care workers must complete six to eight hours of orientation training before

they start, and an additional 36 hours of training within six months. This training includes courses on child development, age-appropriate activities and discipline, CPR and other emergency medical procedures, nutrition, and preventing and reporting child abuse. Continued training is a condition of employment. Each military child-development center must have at least one training and curriculum specialist to oversee both programming for children and training for workers.

An estimated 75 percent of military child-care workers are married to service members, and they usually have to move when their spouse is transferred.[32] When these workers transfer to a new military installation, their training, pay grade, and salary go with them, saving on hiring and training costs and protecting the military's investment in its child-care staff.

Child Care in the Broader Family Support System

Military families are facing unprecedented challenges. As overseas conflicts continue, most service members experience multiple deployments, and frequent and stressful separations have become the norm for many families. As this issue of *The Future of Children* makes clear, these conditions affect military children profoundly.

Studies show that the stress of multiple deployments can compromise the mental health of service members' spouses. A recent study found that almost 40 percent of nondeployed spouses showed levels of anxiety and depression that were comparable to or higher than the levels of returning service members.[33] Parents with mental health disorders may have trouble supporting their children's wellbeing, whether by spending quality time with them—so necessary for buffering deployment's negative effects on children—or by taking advantage of beneficial resources, programs, and activities for themselves and their children.[34]

A nondeployed parent's physical and mental health have a tremendous effect on the amount of stress that children experience at all stages of deployment.[35] And when a parent returns from war with mental health problems, children may also suffer.[36] The DoD recognizes that frequent deployments have placed a huge strain on families, and that this strain can affect readiness. As a result, it has expanded the Family Readiness System (FRS) so that it can better respond to military families' needs. The FRS comprises the network of programs, services, people, and agencies (including collaborations among them) that promotes readiness and quality of life among service members and their families.

Wherever they live, families can seek help in many ways. Each branch of service maintains a family readiness resource for both active-duty and reserve forces. The service branches' resources are augmented by programs available to all service members, such as the Joint Family Support Assistance Programs (JFSAP) and Military OneSource, as well as by community organizations. Table 3 illustrates the range of FRS programs. Families can access these programs online, by phone, and through social media; they provide a wide range of services, including:

- Child abuse prevention and response services
- Child-development programs

Table 3. Components of the Military Family Readiness System

All Services			
Military OneSource/Joint Family Support Assistance Programs Community Organizations			
Army and Air Force			
National Guard Family Program			
Army	**Air Force**	**Navy**	**Marines**
Army Community Service	Airman and Family Readiness Center	Navy Fleet and Family Support Center	Marine Corps Community Services
Army Reserve Family Program	Air Force Reserve Family Program	Navy Reserve Family Readiness	Marine Forces Reserve Family Program

- Domestic violence prevention and response services
- Deployment assistance
- Support for family members with special needs
- Emergency family assistance
- Information and referral
- Morale, welfare, and recreation services
- Nonmedical individual and family counseling
- Personal and family life education
- Personal financial management services
- Moving assistance
- Transition assistance
- Youth programs

The FRS encompasses more than 200 initiatives to support military family members, many of them explicitly designed to interface with the DoD child-care network.[37] Here are some of the most important ones:

Child and Youth Behavioral Health Military Family Life Counselors

These licensed clinicians work with child-care providers, teachers in DoD schools, parents, and children, with a focus on children who have recently moved or who have a deployed parent. They observe and assess children, intervene with children who need assistance, and serve as liaisons among child-care staff, teachers, and parents. The military is broadening the reach of family life counselors across the military. The counselors currently rotate through assignments for up to six months at a time, but a pilot program at Fort Bragg in North Carolina both extends access to counselors across the full school year and ensures that, rather than rotating each semester, the same counselors are assigned for the entire year. The DoD also recently started sending child and youth family life counselors to work in community schools that serve large populations of military children. The counselors offer help with bullying, conflicts, self-esteem, coping with deployment and reunion, and relationships and separations.[38]

Family Advocacy Program (FAP)

The FAP aims to prevent child and domestic abuse in military families through public

awareness, education, and family support. It provides programs and activities for military families who have been identified as being at risk for committing child or domestic abuse. The FAP promotes coordinated, comprehensive intervention, assessment, and support for military family members who are victims of child or domestic abuse. It also assesses, rehabilitates, and treats military family members who are alleged to have committed child or domestic abuse, and it works with civilian authorities and organizations.

New Parent Support Program (NPSP)
Military families access this program through their installation's Family Advocacy Program or Family Support Center. The program is staffed by nurses, social workers, or home visitation specialists, who are supervised by the Family Advocacy Program manager. The NPSP promotes resilient families, healthy parenting attitudes, and skills to prevent child abuse, neglect, and domestic abuse. NPSP personnel identify expectant parents and parents of children up to three years of age (five for Marine Corps families) whose life circumstances place them at risk for child abuse or neglect. Through intensive home visits, offered on a voluntary basis, NPSP personnel help parents cope with the hardships of raising children. The NPSP also makes hospital visits, refers parents to other resources, and offers prenatal classes, parenting classes, and play groups.

Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)
This service supports children with special medical and educational needs. Service members or their spouses who identify a child's special need are required to document it by enrolling in the EFMP. Documentation, which can occur at any military treatment facility, allows medical and educational personnel to review the resources required to meet the child's special need.

The EFMP determines whether families enrolled in the program can be sent on certain assignments, because critical medical and educational services may be in short supply or unavailable at some posts. And when the family is assigned to a new post, the EFMP helps them find and access the services that their child requires. The EFMP also refers parents to other military and community services; teaches parents about their children's condition; provides information about local school and early intervention services; and offers nonclinical case management, including individualized service plans. EFMP managers are available at family support centers across the military.

Children with special needs are considered for the same child-care options as are other children, and all Children and Youth Services activities are open to them. However, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps have developed special processes to determine where to place special-needs children. The Army Special Needs Accommodation Process and the Marine Corps Special Needs Evaluation Review Team both convene multidisciplinary teams to determine the safest, least restrictive, and most appropriate placement. The Navy Special Needs Review Board (SNRB) determines whether the Navy's Child and Youth Program can reasonably accommodate children with special needs, then reports its findings to the installation commander, who decides what action to take.

Respite Care
Respite care supplements the military child-care system for parents whose spouse

is deployed overseas or families who have children with special needs. This free service provides a temporary rest from the stress of caregiving. Across the branches of service, eligible families enrolled in the EFMP may receive eight to 40 hours of respite care each month, based on the severity of the child's and the family's needs. Active-duty Guard and Reserve families with a deployed spouse may receive up to 16 hours per month.

Military OneSource

This free DoD service offers resources and support to service members and their families primarily through its website and a 24-hour call center staffed with master's level consultants who are familiar with military life. Consultants can provide comprehensive information about any aspect of military life, including deployment, reunions, relationships, grief, employment and education for spouses, parenting and child care, etc. Through Military OneSource, families can get personal, nonmedical counseling services, as well as help with managing their finances, doing their taxes, finding a job, maintaining their health, and a range of other topics.[39] The program also links families to the resources that their service branch and installation provide.

Joint Family Support Assistance Program (JFSAP)

The JFSAP augments military family support programs by providing resources and services, including child-care referrals, to military family members who are isolated from military installations, where most family support programs are based. JFSAP teams consist of a military family life counselor, a child and youth family life counselor, a Military OneSource consultant, and another person whose duties are determined by the state in which the team works, based on local needs. JFSAP teams work in all 50 states and four U.S. territories, and they support more than 800,000 service members and their families.[40] They offer information about and referrals to community agencies, nonmedical counseling for children and family members, and help finding child care.[41] JFSAP delivers its services in the communities where service members and their families live, through collaboration with federal, state, local, and nonprofit entities. In this way, it enhances each community's capacity to serve its military families.

Challenges for DoD Child Care

About a million military service members are balancing the demands of serving our country and raising a family, and many depend on reliable, affordable child care. More than half of the active-duty force is married, and 63 percent of enlisted military spouses are employed. Approximately 6 percent of service members are single parents, and 3 percent are in dual-service marriages with children. These families move frequently (typically, every two to three years), and service members must be ready to deploy anywhere in the world on a moment's notice. The high rates of deployment since 9/11 have increased the demands for both military and civilian child care. Waiting lists for military child care are common, particularly for infant care, and families usually need child care immediately.

Families of Guard and Reserve members face their own challenges. Guard and Reserve families are dispersed across the United States, and they generally don't live in military communities. When Guard and Reserve members are called to active duty, their families often cannot access on-base child care. Programs like Operation Military Child Care and Military Child Care in Your

Neighborhood have grown increasingly important for these families. However, the demand for civilian child care exceeds the supply, a problem that is likely to grow worse in the years ahead.

Similarly, though DoD child care serves a large number of children in relatively high-quality facilities, the demand for care continues to exceed the supply in these facilities as well. The DoD hopes to meet 80 percent of the military's need for child care, and construction projects approved in 2008 and 2010 are expected to add more than 21,000 spaces in child-development centers.[42] At the same time, however, the number of family child-care homes on military installations is falling, for several reasons. Some of the decline can be traced to frequent deployments that place added time pressure on military spouses, who have traditionally been the major providers of on-base family child-care homes. At the same time, because of the added combat pay that deployed service members receive, husbands or wives who remain at home may have fewer financial worries, thus reducing the incentive to run a child-care home. Moreover, increasing privatization of military housing means that there are relatively fewer potential family child-care homes on military installations. Simply expanding the supply of on-base child-care centers, then, is unlikely to be sufficient to meet military families' needs.

The DoD is also working to close the gap between supply and demand for child care through interagency and public-private collaborations. The Military Family Federal Interagency Collaboration, primarily through its military child-care liaisons, works to give military families better access to quality civilian child-care programs. The liaisons also work to make child-care providers more aware of quality indicators that help to create and maintain safe and healthy environments for children.[43] The liaisons' influence extends beyond the military: their work increases the quality and quantity of civilian child-care options not only for military families, but for civilian families as well.

As Guard and Reserve families who live in civilian communities seek child care in increasing numbers, the military needs help from federal, state, and local agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations.

The DoD's partnership with Child Care Aware also helps meet the demand, providing high-quality DoD-subsidized child care for at least 23,000 military children.[44] Through Child Care Aware, military families get a list of civilian child-care providers, learn the criteria for eligibility, and receive a DoD subsidy application. Civilian providers who meet the eligibility requirements must apply to receive DoD subsidies for serving military families.

As Guard and Reserve families who live in civilian communities seek child care in increasing numbers, the military needs help from federal, state, and local agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations. Military child-care liaisons must work diligently to provide training, awareness, and incentives to civilian child-care providers, and to press for legislation to ensure that civilian agencies increase the quality of child-care services under their

jurisdiction so that military families can receive DoD subsidies to support their child-care expenses.

Getting the Word Out

Some military parents may not be aware of their options for DoD-subsidized child care, particularly for subsidized civilian care.[45] About 73 percent of active-duty military families live off-base but within 20 miles of a military installation.[46] These families are less likely to use DoD child care than are families who live on-base.[47] They are also less likely to apply for military child-care subsidies. As a result, they are more likely either to pay the full price of civilian child care or rely on their extended families or some other informal child-care arrangement.

The DoD uses many methods to tell military families about their child-care options, including predeployment briefings, family readiness centers, brochures and ads, and e-mail and websites. But military families receive large amounts of information through these channels, making it difficult for them to focus on and remember specific programs, especially programs that they may not need immediately.[48] Conversely, families who live far from an installation are likely to receive less information; in general, they tend to believe, inaccurately, that military subsidies for civilian child care are needs-based.[49] The DoD is trying to improve communication about child care. Family readiness professionals, whose responsibilities include helping families find child care, are being assigned to military units. The military is also moving toward a central, web-based system that families can use to request either military or civilian child care as they move from one assignment to another.

Hard Choices

The DoD is striving to meet 80 percent of service members' demand for quality child care.[50] Looming budget cuts threaten the military's ability to achieve this goal. As we were writing this article, the defense secretary's office of Military Family and Community Policy was conducting a DoD-wide review of all family and military community programs, including child-care programs, to determine their effectiveness and to identify gaps in coverage and possible cost savings.[51] The DoD will have to make difficult decisions about whether resources can be diverted from military child care to other programs in the Family Readiness System. Cuts could reduce subsidies that installations receive to run their child-care programs, subsidies for civilian child-care providers, or the subsidies that military families receive to pay for child care. The DoD and the service branches are considering ways to mitigate the effects of budget cuts on their child-care operations, including uniformly imposed caps on subsidies.

Fertile Areas for Research

Although the military's child-care programs are widely recognized as the best in the country, researchers have not assessed their developmental effects. We need to know whether the DoD's investment in accessible, high-quality child care has paid off in terms of key developmental measures, such as readiness for school, social skills, and health. Ideally, such studies would use the same measures as other major child-care studies—for example, the NICHD Study of Child Care and Youth Development—so that we could compare the effects of civilian and DoD child care.[52] Given the context in which military families use child care, it is equally important to study dimensions of care, such as the stability of core staff and links to family support

services, that may be particularly important for children who face high stress, family loss and frequent moves. In particular, we need to know, through neuropsychological measurement, whether and how child care can buffer stress and restore security for young children. Such research would advance our understanding of child care generally.

Conclusions: Beyond Military Child Care

The U.S. military offers a remarkable example of what it takes to institute a dramatic turnaround of a child-care system that once served families poorly. Today, the DoD system exemplifies a sustained commitment to accessible, high-quality care, and it continuously strives to better meet this commitment as the characteristics and needs of U.S. military families change. If we acknowledge the issue's seriousness and find the political will, there is no reason that the civilian child-care system could not follow the military's example. The idea that undergirds DoD child care—the need to support and invest in workers' families—applies equally to the civilian labor force. Any argument that the military's is a "closed system" and cannot offer a model for civilian child care is undermined by the DoD's progress in mitigating inequities in access to quality child care for military families who rely on civilian providers. Like the military, the civilian sector is struggling to ensure that all families can find and afford high-quality child care. As the DoD builds bridges to state and local child-care agencies and services, we can embrace the military's belief that workforce readiness begins with high-quality child care.

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