



Center for Military Health Policy Research

A JOINT ENDEAVOR OF RAND HEALTH AND THE
RAND NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH DIVISION

***Children on the Homefront:
The Experience of Children
from Military Families***

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How Does Deployment Affect Children and Military Families?

- Multiple, prolonged deployments are straining military families
- Many programs have been rolled out to support these families
- Yet knowledge gaps remain about deployment effects on children



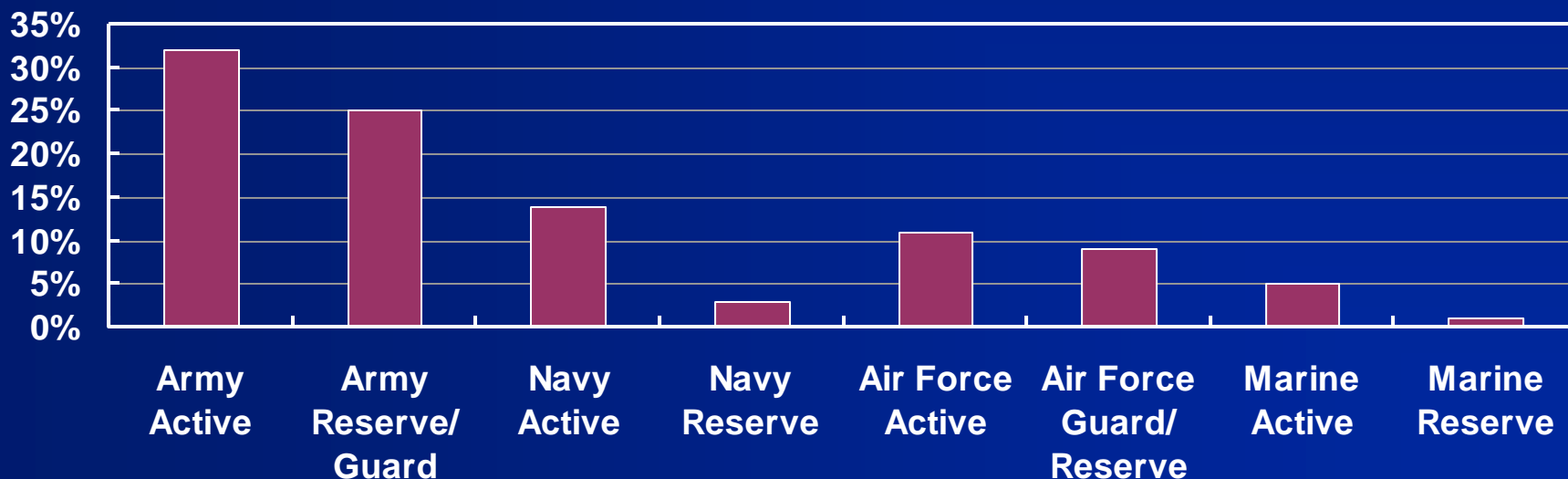
RAND Conducted the Largest Study to Date of Military Children's Emotional Well-Being

- **Commissioned by National Military Family Association**
- **Addressed two key questions:**
 - **How are school-age military children faring?**
 - **What types of issues do military children face related to deployment?**

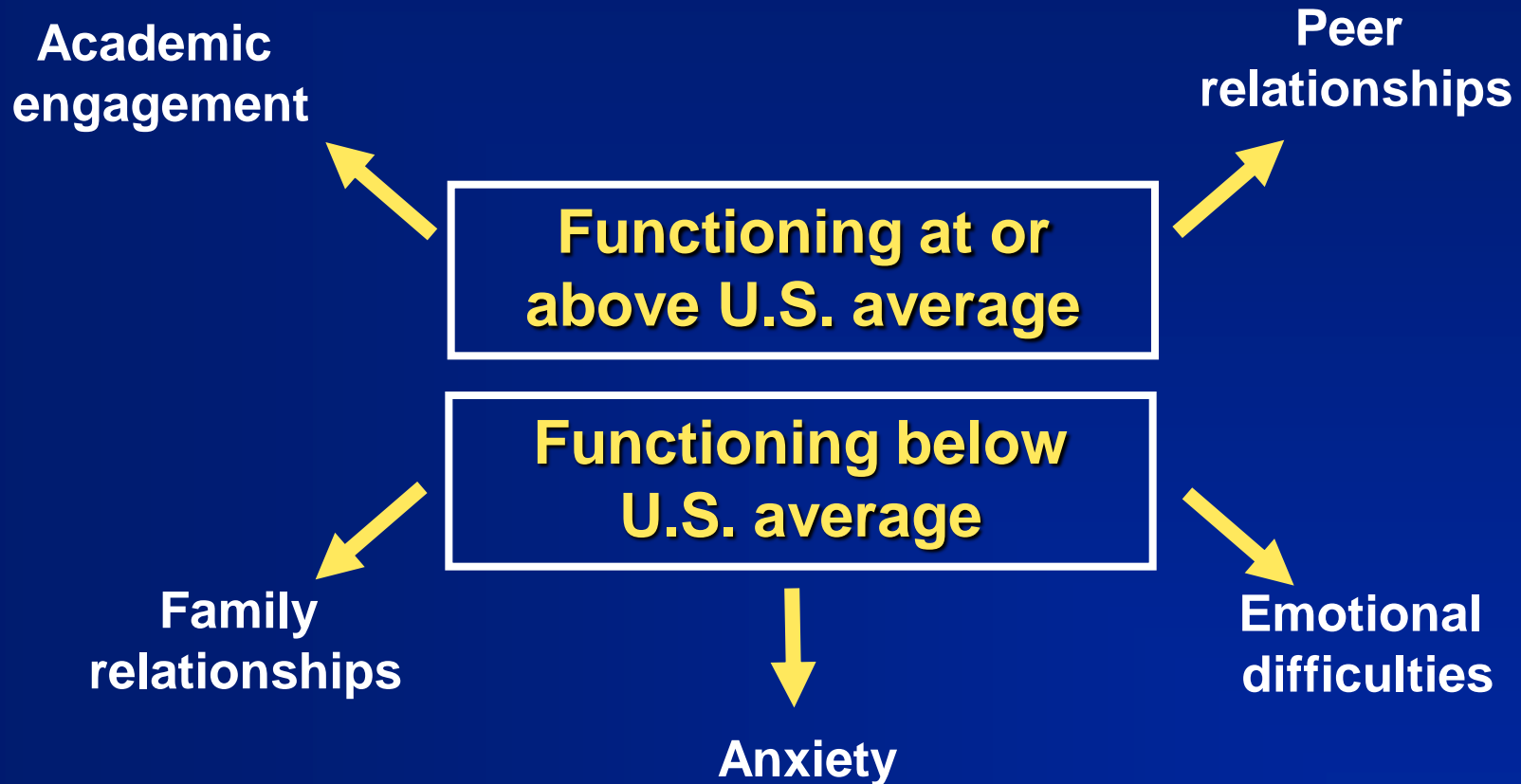


Study Sample and Approach

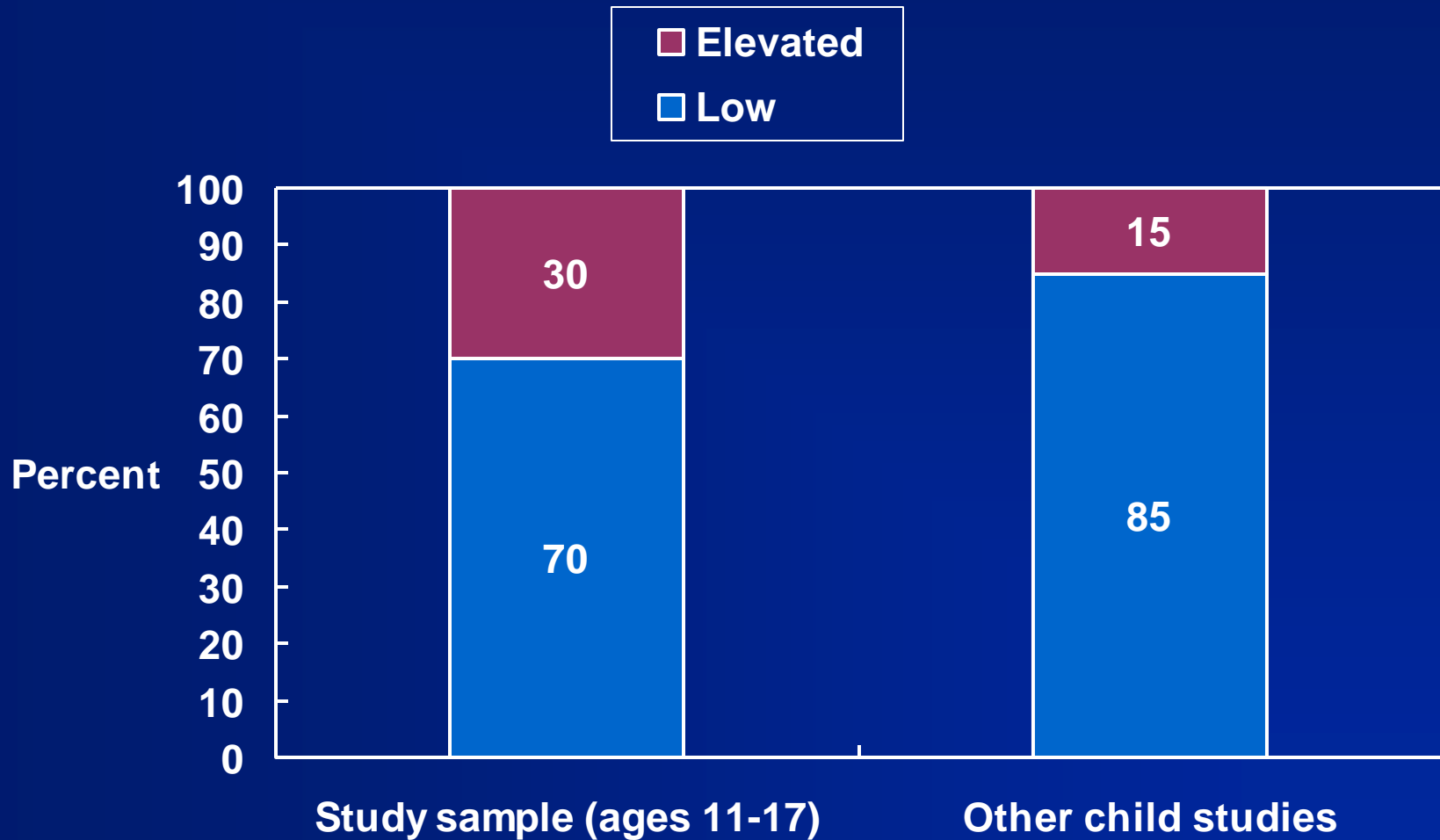
- **Sample: 1500 families (applicants to Operation Purple® camps)**
- **Designed to represent deploying personnel by service, and component**
- **Children ages 11-17**
- **Racial/ethnic and gender mix (28% minorities, 47% girls)**
- **Multiple waves of data collection**
 - **Phone survey with child and non-deployed parent**
 - **June-August, 2008**



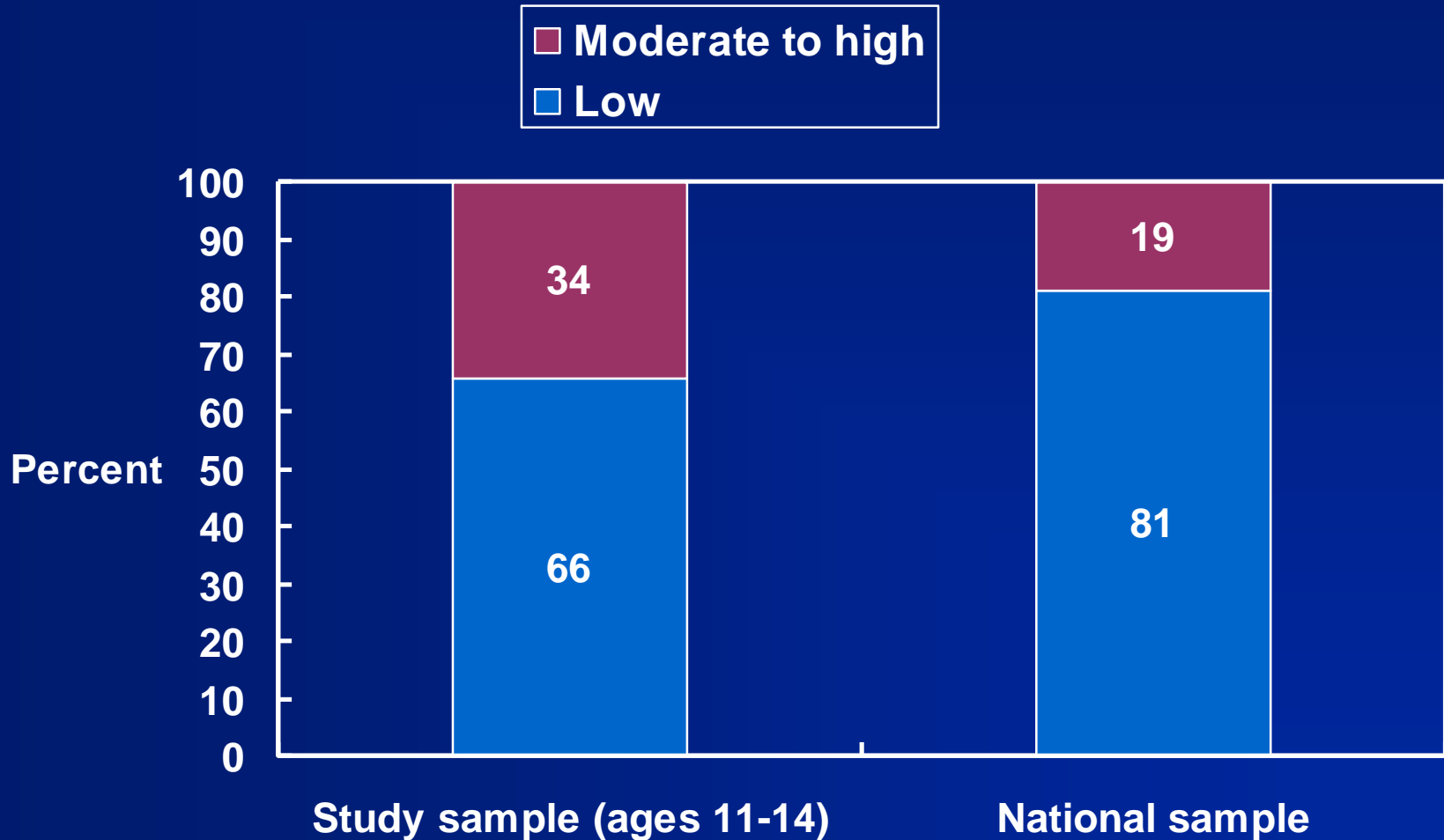
How Are Military Children Faring Compared to Other U.S. Children?



Higher Percentage of Military Children Reported Elevated Anxiety Symptoms



Higher Percentage of Military Children Reported Moderate to High Number of Emotional Difficulties



Age and Gender Differences Comparable to Civilian Studies

- **More difficulties with academic engagement and risk behaviors among older youth**
- **Anxiety problems decrease among older youth**
- **Girls report more anxiety symptoms**

Impact of Deployment: Four Risk Factors Were Most Important

<i>Significant factor</i>	<i>Most at risk</i>
Age	Older teens
Gender	Girls
Months of deployment	Children whose parents had longer cumulative deployment
Parent mental health	Children whose non-deployed parent had poorer mental health

Older Teens Experienced More Difficulties

- Older teens had more problems during deployment
 - Taking on household responsibilities
 - Taking care of siblings
 - Missing school activities
- ...And during reintegration
 - Getting to know returning parent again
 - Adjusting to returning parent fitting back into home routine
 - Dealing with returning parent's mood changes



Girls Reported More Difficulties During Reintegration

- **Most common difficulties:**
 - **Worry about parent's next deployment**
 - **Dealing with returning parent's mood changes**
 - **Worry about how parents are getting along**



Longer Periods of Parental Deployment Were Associated with More Problems for Children

- As months of parental deployment increased, so did challenges
- Total months away mattered more than number of deployments
- Did not observe differences by service, component, or current deployment



Non-Deployed Parent's Mental Health Mattered

- **Children whose non-deployed parent reported better mental health experienced fewer:**
 - **Challenges during and after deployment**
 - **Emotional difficulties**
 - **Peer and family functioning issues**
 - **Challenges with academic engagement**



Implications for Helping Military Families

- Families facing longer deployments may need targeted support
 - Older teens
 - Girls
- Supports need to be in place across entire deployment cycle, including reintegration
- Some non-deployed parents may need targeted mental health support



Findings Always Should be Interpreted With Some Caution

- **Comparison to national data on emotional difficulties measure only is the most recent population-based data available--2001**
- **This analysis is cross-sectional**

Next Steps

- **Following same children and parents over period of one year**
 - **How effects change over time**
 - **Whether deployment-related challenges increase or decrease**
- **Examining mental health and experience of non-deployed parents**

This Work Provides Foundation for Other Studies

- **The Deployment Life Study**
- **Co-sponsored by:** U.S. Army Surgeon General and the DCoE on Psychological Health and TBI
- **Goal:** To identify the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of family readiness across the deployment cycle
- **Sample:**
 - **At least 5000 families across all services and component**
 - **Up to three informants (service member, spouse, and child if 11-17 years)**
- **Nine assessments, over 36 month period**
 - **Baseline (6-12 months prior to deployment); Follow up waves every 4 months**



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