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For Immediate Release:

Study finds children of deployed service members accessing mental health services

Bethesda, Md. — A study of more than 643,000 children from 2006 through 2007 suggests that while nine years of war is taking a toll on U.S. children, these same children are getting necessary access to appropriate medical care for mental health services.

Led by Navy Commander Gregory Gorman, an assistant professor of Pediatrics at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, or USU, and a practicing pediatrician, the study found children of active-duty military personnel make 18 percent more trips to the doctor for behavioral problems and 19 percent more visits for stress disorders when a military parent is deployed compared with when the parent is home. The study of children ages 3 to 8 was published in the December issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.

Those increases are even more striking given that the overall number of doctors' visits declined 11 percent during deployment, perhaps because the lone parent at home was so busy, said Gorman. "There were variations when we looked at single-parent households, when the children were living with extended family rather than a birth parent, and if the female parent was deployed. In those cases the rate of visits may not have been as high, but we don't have a definitive explanation for why that is the case. It could be that the demands of a functionally single parent, or an extended family member less familiar with the needs of the child, impacted on the decision to seek help for some issues."

Data for the study were obtained from the Tri-care Management Activity, which oversees all health care for the US military and their family members in both military and civilian sectors. "Military doctors usually are aware of the burdens the children of service members face," said Gorman, "but in many cases these kids are being seen by civilian doctors in non-military base settings. The physicians or other caregivers may not think to ask whether a parent is deployed or how families are coping. That's one of our big challenges – to help educate these community-based physicians to better understand the needs and stressors on military families."

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The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is the nation's federal health sciences university. USU students are primarily active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, emerging infectious diseases and other public health emergencies. Of the university's more than 4,500 physician alumni, the vast majority are supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, offering their leadership and expertise. For more information, visit www.usuhs.mil.