

What Does Research Tell Us About Military Families and Deployments?

RTI Policy Forum: Heroes at Home

May 17, 2011
Washington, DC



Speakers

- **Deborah Gibbs**, Deputy Director, Women, Children, and Families Program, RTI International
- **Dr. Stephen Cozza**, Professor of Psychiatry, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
- **David L. McGinnis**, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs
- **Dr. Susan McCutcheon**, Director, Family Services, Women's Mental Health, and Military Sexual Trauma, Office of Mental Health Services, Dept. of Veterans Affairs

Issues

- How does deployment affect military families?
- How is this war unique in its effects on families of deployed military?
 - Length of the war
 - Multiple tours
 - Volunteer (older) service members
 - Quicker, better medical care: surviving more severe injuries
 - Extensive use of reserves and National Guard
- How are the treatment programs that the military and DVA provide changing to include families?
- Is there a role for prevention in the programs?

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Presentation Overview

- Families as part of the military population
- Factors affecting family reactions
- Spouse and child well-being during deployment
- Family well-being after deployment

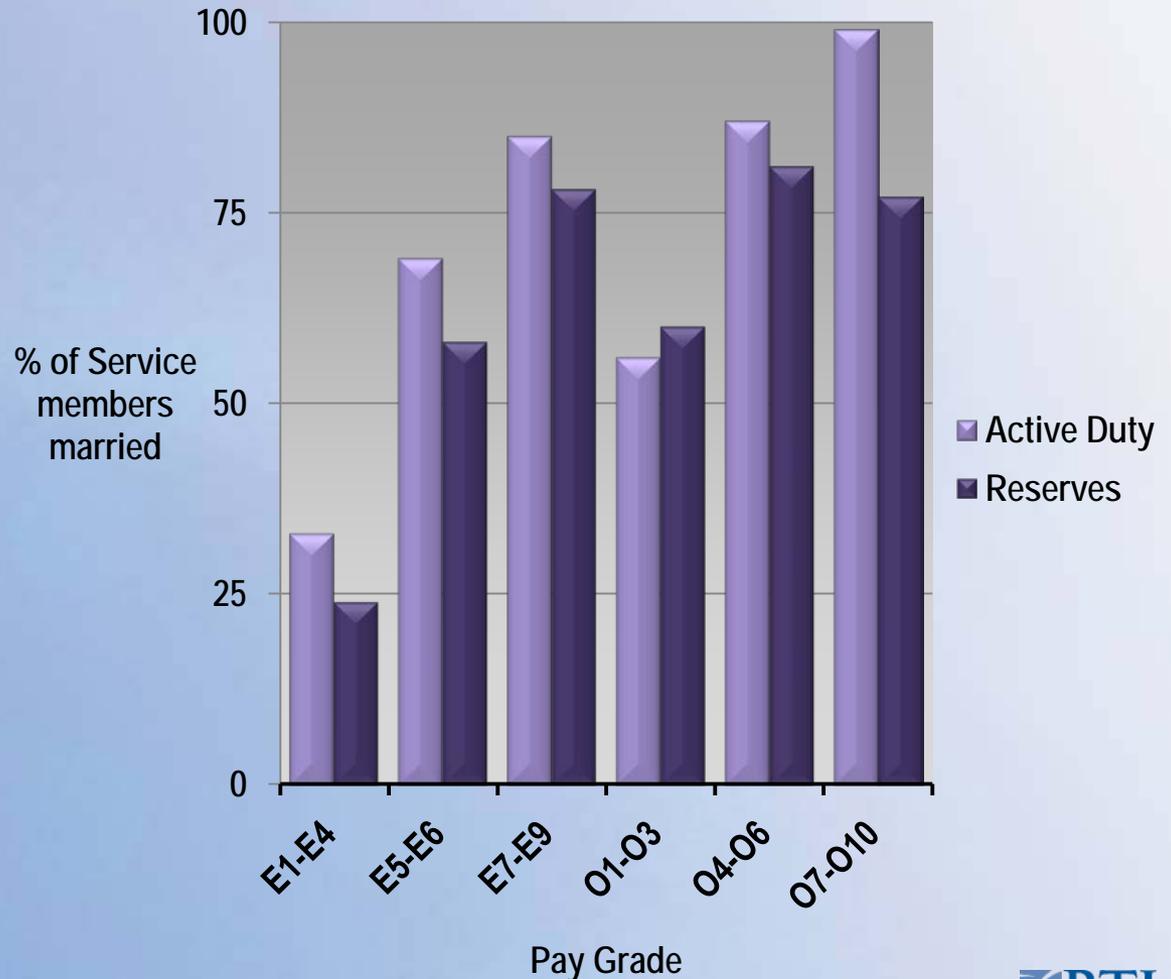




Most service members are married

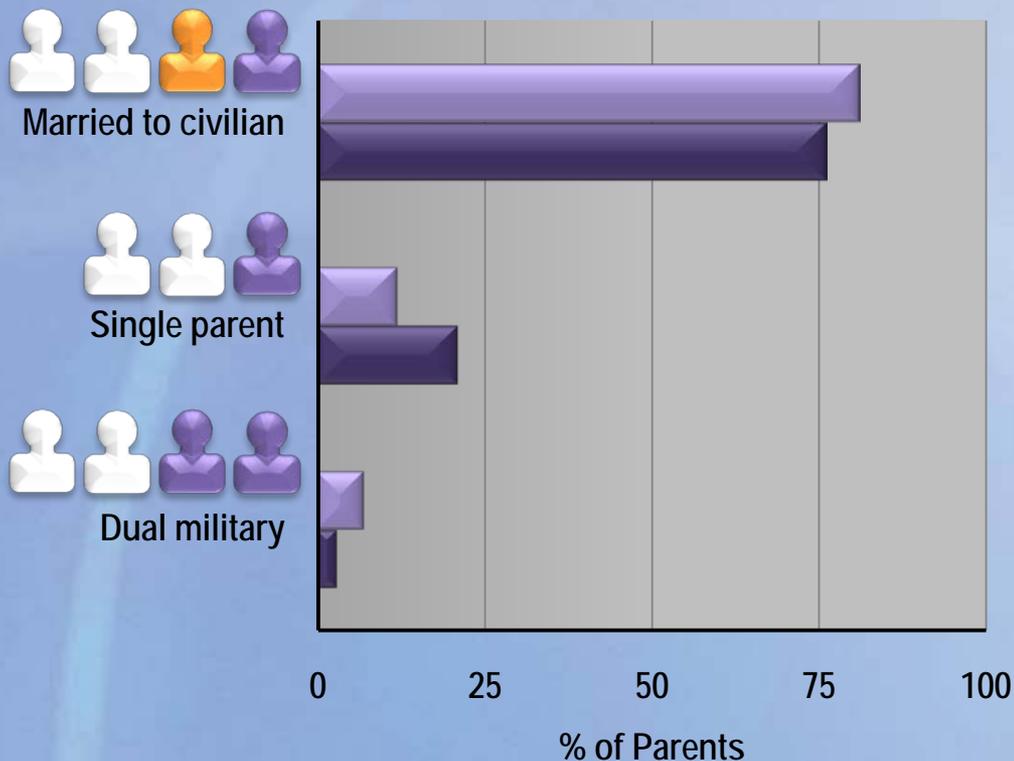
- Married service members comprise
 - 55% of Active Duty personnel
 - 48% of Reserve personnel

- Marital status varies by service branch





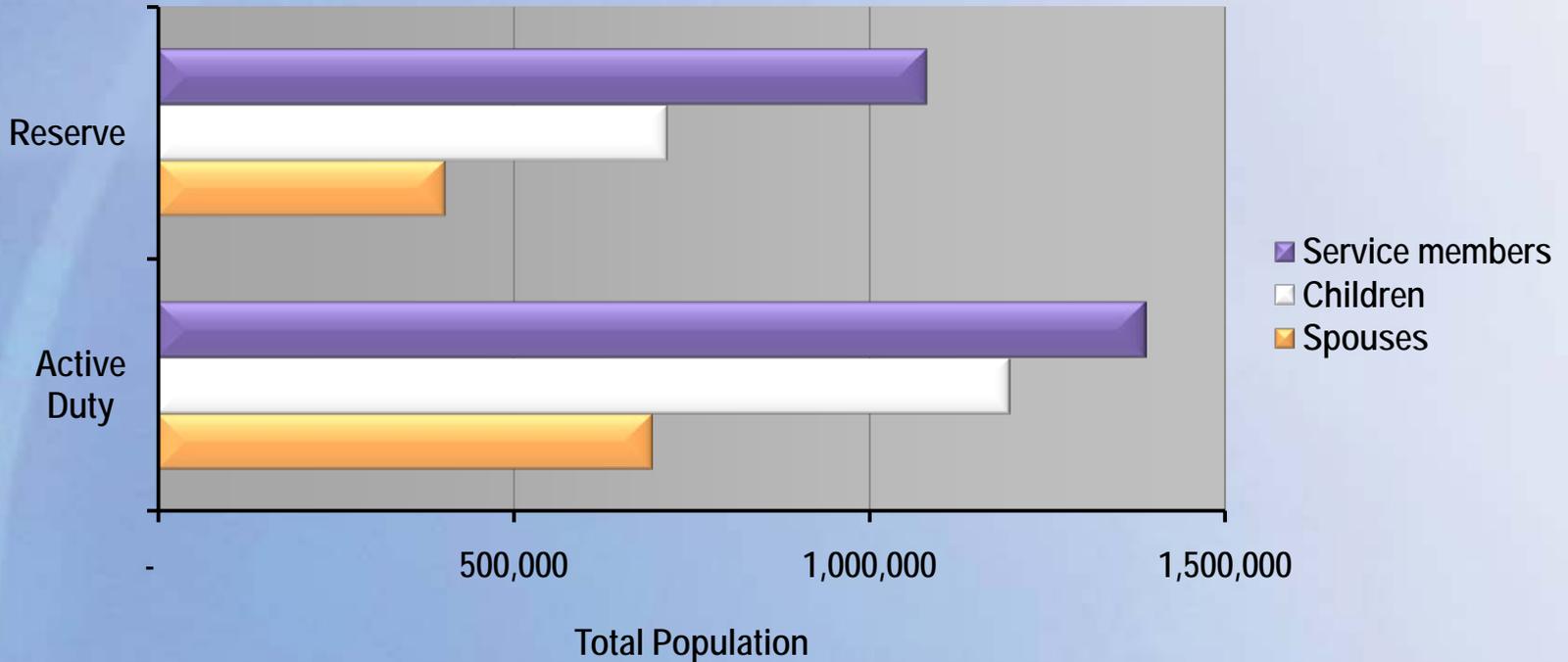
More than 40% of service members are parents



- Average number of children: 2
- Average age at birth of first child: 27
- Most children are age 7 or less



The military community includes more family members than service members



Family Resiliency and Risk

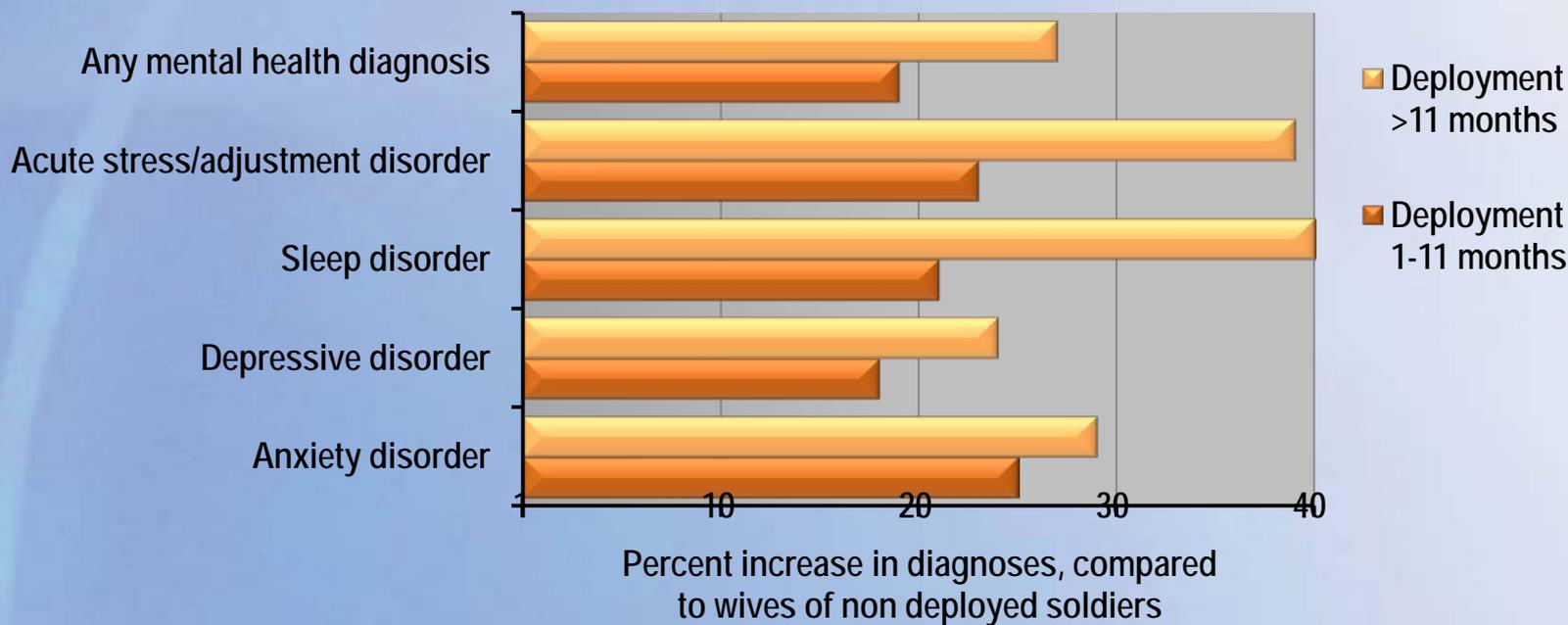
- **Family stress theory:** impact of deployment is determined by
 - *Characteristics of the deployment:* timing, length, risk
 - *Family resources:* stability, parenting skills, support network
 - *Family's interpretation of event:* expectations, traditions

- **Emotional Cycle of Deployment:** responses will vary by time
 - *Pre-deployment:* shock, anger, anticipation of loss, conflict, withdrawal
 - *Deployment:* disorganization, stabilization, anticipation of homecoming
 - *Post-deployment:* honeymoon, renegotiation, stabilization



Spouses often experience stress and depression during deployment

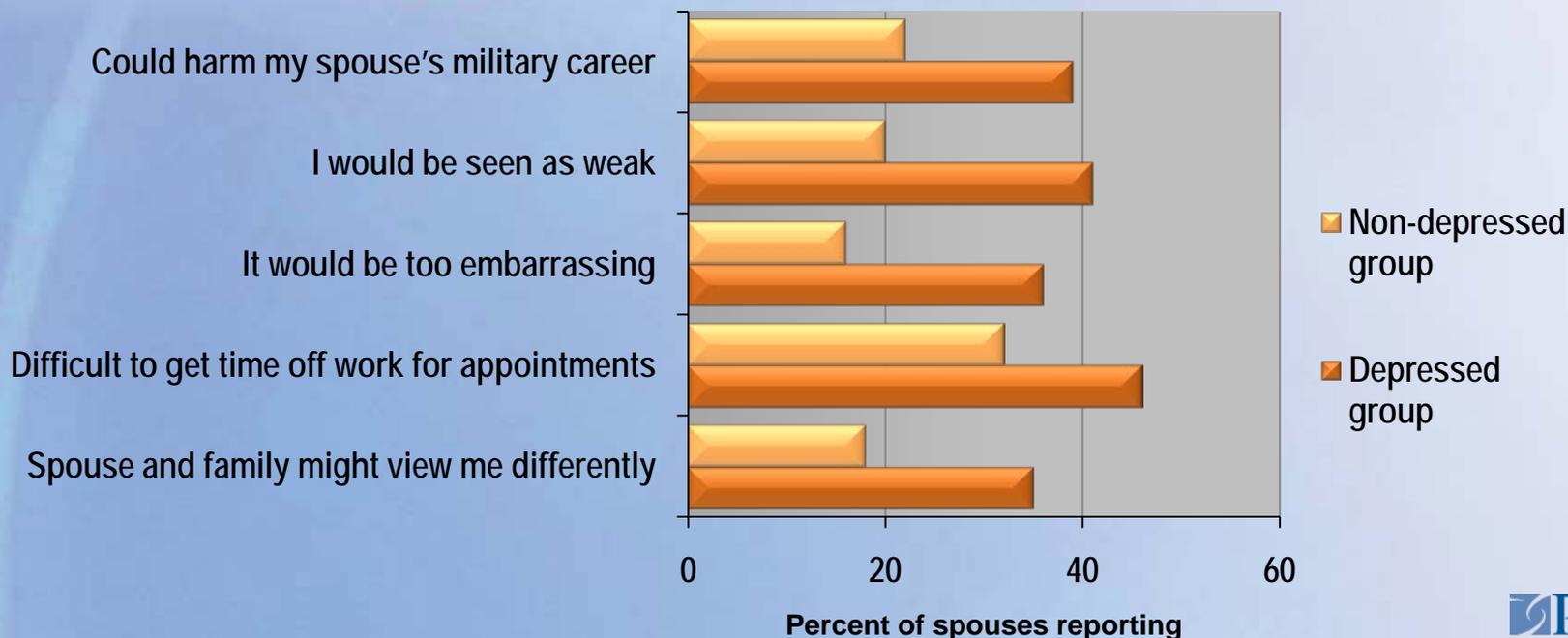
- Army wives experienced increases in mental health diagnoses during soldiers' deployments





Spouses report several barriers to mental health care

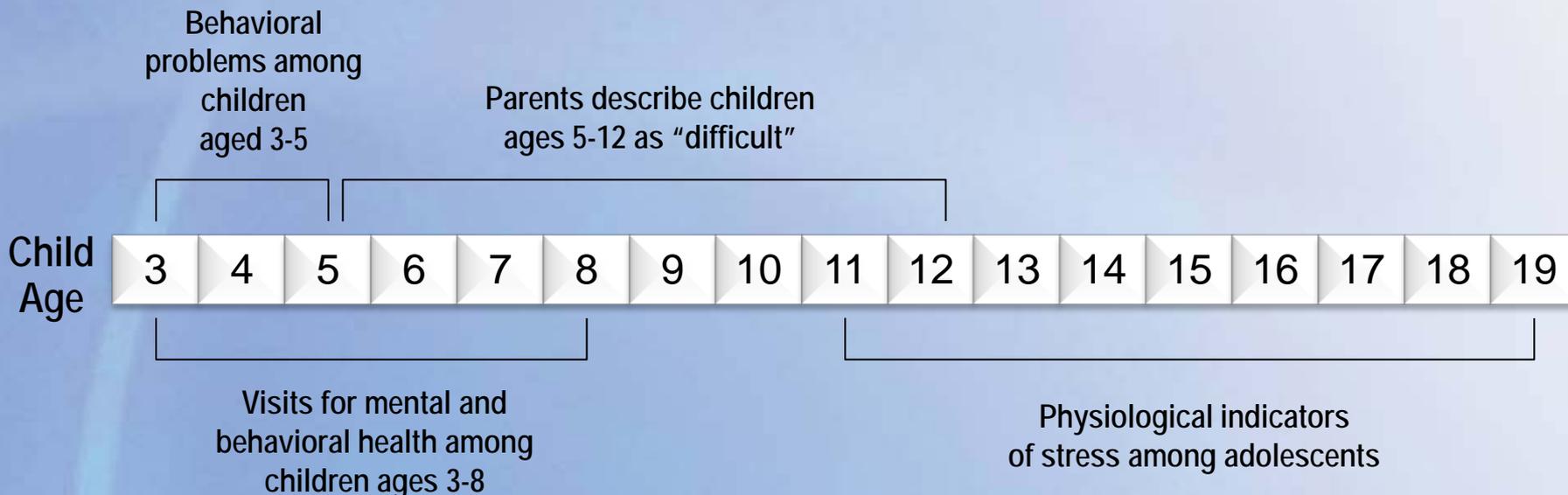
- Barriers are similar to those of service members following return from deployment
- Depressed spouses were most likely to report barriers to care





Impacts of deployment vary with children's developmental stage

Studies have found increases in diverse problems during deployment



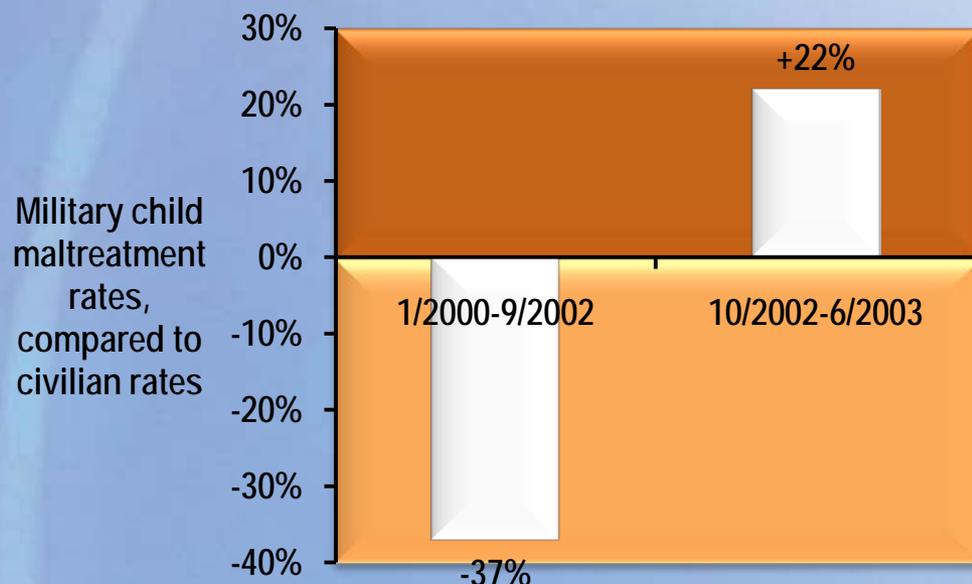


Child maltreatment increases during parents' deployment

- Comparison of military and civilian data in one state found rates of child maltreatment in military families doubled with large-scale deployments

- Rates of child maltreatment by female civilian spouses tripled during deployment

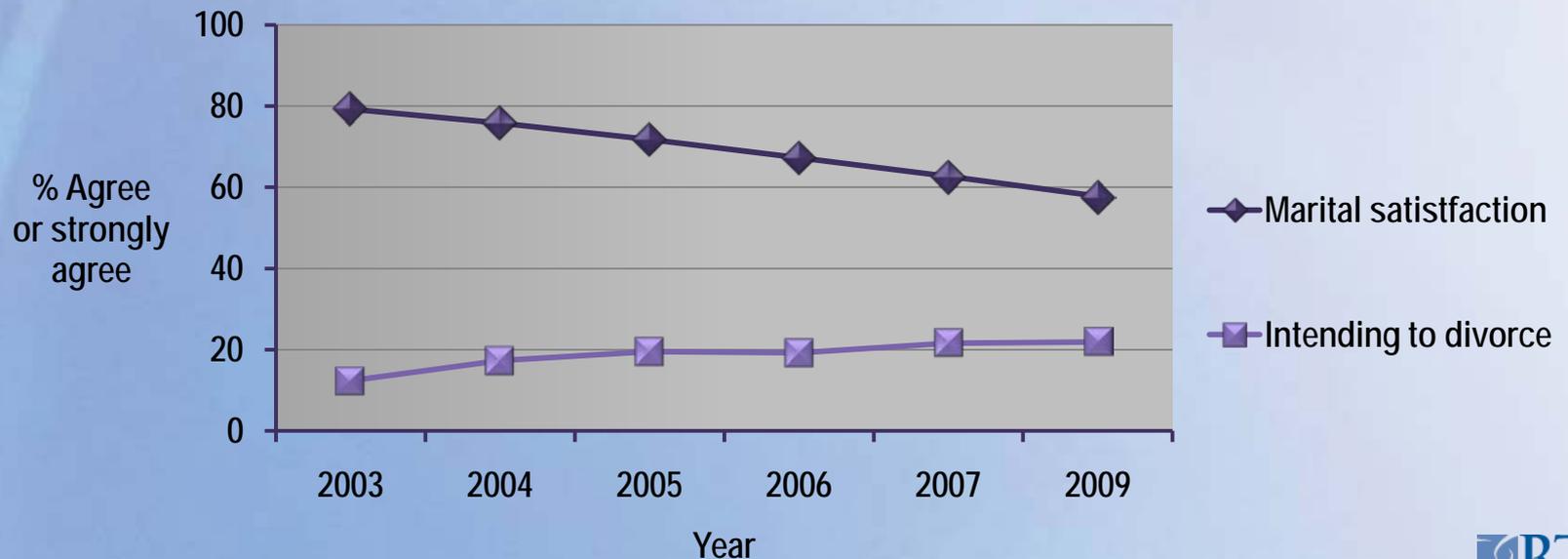
- Rates of child neglect nearly four times higher
- Rates of physical abuse nearly double





Deployments have been linked to marital instability

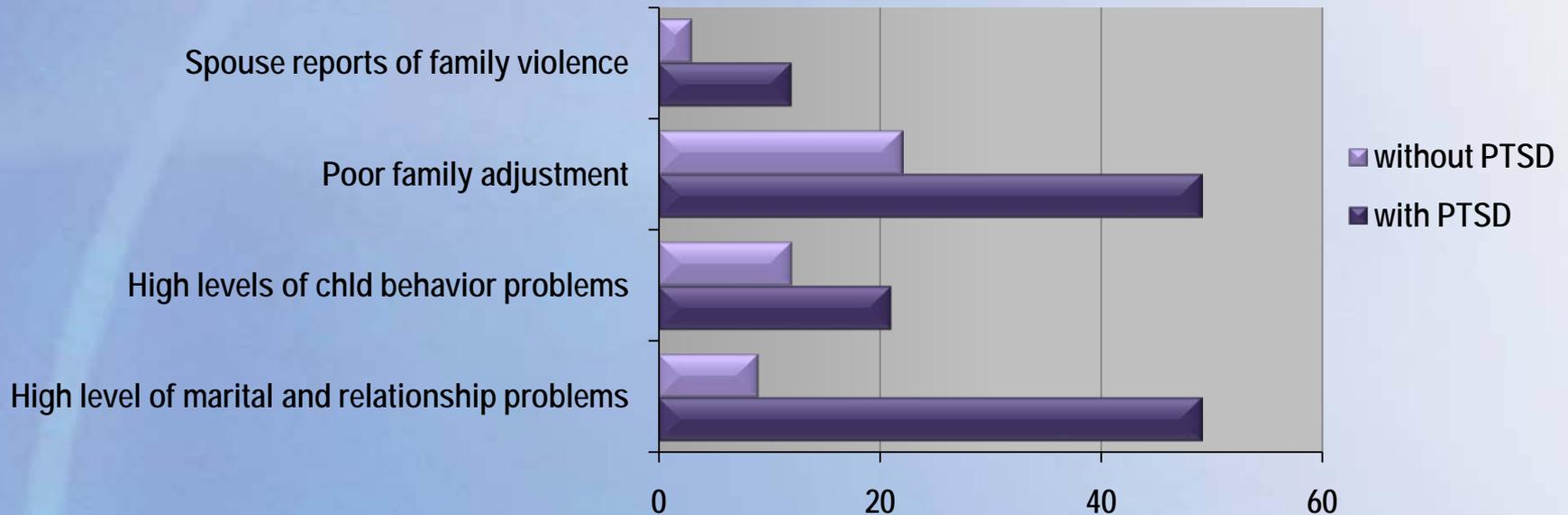
- Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT) surveys in OEF and OIF between 2003 and 2009 have found
 - Decreases in marital satisfaction
 - Increases in intention to divorce
- Relationship problems were implicated in 58% of 2009 military suicides





PTSD mediates family impacts following deployment

- The National Vietnam Veterans' Readjustment Study found rates of family problems consistently higher among male veterans with PTSD



- More recently, PTSD symptoms have been associated with poor couple adjustment and higher levels of parenting problems among Army National Guard

Summing Up

- More than 50% of service members are married; more than 40% are parents
- Family reactions to deployment are diverse and may vary over time
- Family challenges during deployment include
 - Stress and anxiety for spouses
 - Behavioral and emotional difficulties for children
 - Increased rates of child maltreatment
- Deployment is associated with increased divorce and decreased marital satisfaction
- PTSD is a key factor in post-deployment family impacts