Recurrent Headaches in Military Children and Adolescents and the Impact of Deployment

In a recent study by Swedean et al. both the prevalence of recurrent headaches in a population of military dependent children and adolescents and the impact of parental deployment on headache frequency, duration, and severity were evaluated. Recurrent headaches are common in children and are known to sometimes be intensified by stressful life events. It was observed that military dependent children and adolescents experience unique life stressors due to parental military duties, with the most significant of these duties being wartime deployment. It has already been shown that parental military deployment is associated with increased behavioral and emotional difficulties in dependent children. For this study, a parental cross-sectional questionnaire of patients 5 to 17 years old seen in pediatric or adolescent clinics at a regional military medical health system, was administered. The questionnaire established baseline headache frequency, duration, and severity during a 12 month period, the questions then queried parental deployment in the previous 12 months and any subsequent changes in headache frequency, duration, or severity. The information gathered from these questionnaires showed that 30% of the patients queried experienced recurrent headaches during the 12 month period and that all patients reported increases in headache severity, duration, or frequency regardless of whether their parents were deployed or not. As a whole it was found that females were affected more by deployment of a parent than males, with younger females having the highest rates of headache worsening during parental deployment. This data led the researchers to the conclusion that during military parental deployments, younger children report and higher incidence of worsening headaches. This trend may indicate a more detrimental effect of parental deployment on childhood headache in certain populations.