

## **Poster Number 34**

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### **Comparing the risk of outpatient mental health diagnoses for Canadian children and youth in military families with civilian children and youth: a retrospective cohort study**

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#### **Background:**

A parent's military career may increase their child's risk of negative emotional and behavioural outcomes given a high stress environment including occupational risk of parental injury or death, frequent residential relocation, and prolonged separations.

#### **Objective:**

There are no large population-based studies examining the impact of a parent's military career on the mental health of Canadian children and youth.

#### **Methods:**

This was a matched retrospective cohort study using Ontario administrative data. Children and youth in Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) families were identified using provincial health insurance data between 01/04/2008-31/03/2013. The civilian cohort was matched 4:1 on age, sex, and geographic location. We identified outpatient physician visits associated with mental-health related diagnoses according to standard ICES definitions. We compared the risk of having  $\geq 1$  mental health-related physician visits using Poisson regression, stratified by categories of mental disorders.

#### **Results:**

This study included 5,478 children and youth aged  $\leq 19$  with a CAF parent(s) and 21,912 matched civilians. CAF children and youth had a 14% (95%CI 1.04-1.24) higher risk of  $\geq 1$  outpatient visit for non-psychotic disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety), a 72% (95%CI 1.39-2.12) higher risk of  $\geq 1$  visit related to childhood psychoses (e.g., autism), and a 14% (95%CI 1.02-1.28) higher risk of  $\geq 1$  visit related to behavioral disorders (e.g., ADHD) than civilian children and youth. These associations varied by sex and age. For example, boys in CAF families had a greater risk of having visits related to non-psychotic disorders than boys in the general population, there was no increased risk for girls in CAF families.

#### **Conclusion:**

CAF children and youth have a higher risk of outpatient physician visits for specific mental health diagnoses than the general population. Our results reinforce the importance of understanding how CAF children respond to stressors inherent to the military lifestyle to provide additional support and increase resiliency among CAF families.