A new resource to study the health of military families in Ontario

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Accessing health care and maintaining continuity of care during mandatory moves remains a persistent challenge for military families.^{1,2} The re-establishment of medical services is the number one concern of military spouses for a new posting.^{2,3} In Canada, there is little population-based data on the health and health services utilization of military families, making it difficult to understand the health issues they experience. For the first time, we have identified a method of studying the health of military families in Ontario. Data are gathered from existing provincial administrative health care data sets housed at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) and linked to administrative codes for provincial health care collected by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The following is a brief introduction to the variables available in this new resource, and its potential uses for future research.

1 There are over 57,000 military families in Canada.⁴ Our research cohort is made up of 9,397 spouses and dependants of Canadian Armed Forces members and Reservists who have relocated to Ontario since 2007. The majority of families relocated to Ontario because of a new posting.

MILITARY FAMILIES IN COHORT, BY ORIGIN

3 60% of our research cohort are dependents (age ≤18 years). The median age of the dependents in the cohort is 7 years (IQR: 3–12 years). The proportion of female to male dependents in the cohort is roughly equal (49% female).

2 88% of military families in our cohort live in three of Ontario's Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN's); the South East LHIN (CFB Kingston), Champlain region (Ottawa, DND) and North Simcoe Muskoka (CFB Borden). Twenty-one percent of these families live in rural locations. Nine percent live in the lowest income communities.

LHIN MAP OF ONTARIO

10 South East **11** Champlain **12** North Simcoe

64,100

CHILDREN IN CANADA HAVE A PARENT IN THE MILITARY⁴

4 Approximately 13% of all military spouses in Canada are male.⁴ Our cohort has a smaller proportion of male spouses than expected. The median age of military spouses in our cohort is 35 years (IQR: 29–42 years).

CIVILIAN SPOUSES IN COHORT

5 With these data, we will be able to study the prevalence of physical and mental disorders, their treatment, and compare outcomes to civilian families.

**HEART DISEASE
ASTHMA • STROKE
DIABETES • CANCER
MENTAL HEALTH
INJURIES**

6 The health services utilization data will allow us to study continuity of care and identify potential gaps in the provision of healthcare for military families.

**FAMILY PHYSICIAN VISITS
SPECIALIST PHYSICIAN VISITS
EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS
HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS
PSYCHIATRIC ADMISSIONS**

Understanding how relocations impact the continuity of care and health of military families will provide a baseline to study interventions targeted at facilitating access to primary and specialist healthcare and system navigation for military families in the future.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

None declared.

DISCLAIMER

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CONTRIBUTORS

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