

About the VA GLA Healthcare System

The VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (VAGLAHS) is one of the largest health care facilities within the Department of Veterans Affairs. VAGLAHS consists of two ambulatory care centers, a tertiary care facility and 8 community based outpatient clinics. VAGLAHS serves Veterans residing throughout five counties: Los Angeles, Ventura, Kern, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo. There are 1.4 million Veterans in the VAGLAHS service area. VAGLAHS is affiliated with both UCLA School of Medicine and USC School of Medicine, as well as more than 45 colleges, universities and vocational schools in 17 different medical, nursing, paramedical and administrative programs.



Wartime Military Service and Children

Military-connected youth differ from their school peers¹:

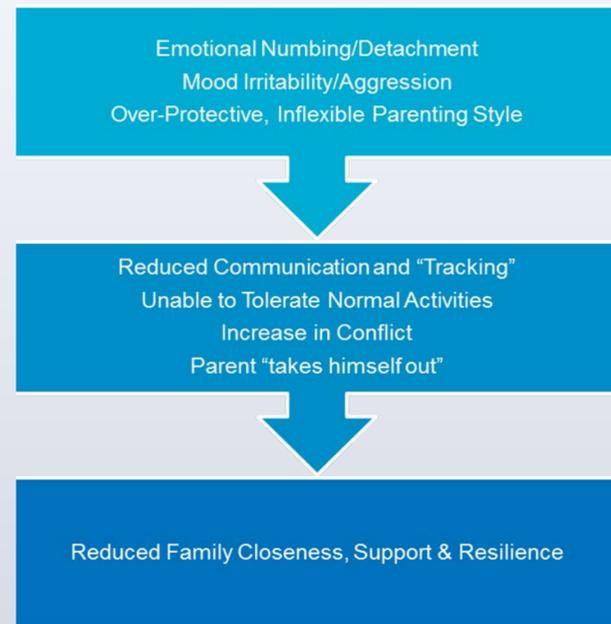
- Perception of school: poorer sense of belonging, supportive relationships, and participation
- Higher rates of peer victimization (physical and relational aggression)
- More likely to carry a weapon
- Higher rates of substance use

Family processes contribute to adjustment:

- Changes in parenting are associated with PTSD², including parent-, teacher-, and child self-reported internalizing and externalizing symptoms³
- Parents' marital relationship quality associated with child maladjustment during reintegration⁴

Better child adjustment associated with:

- Family involvement in military community⁵
- Family process (e.g., positive family functioning) and community-level (e.g., health infrastructure) promotive factors⁶



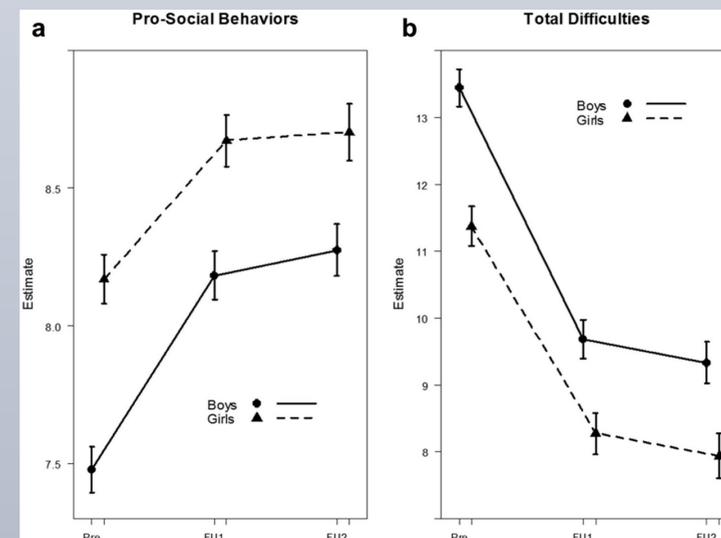
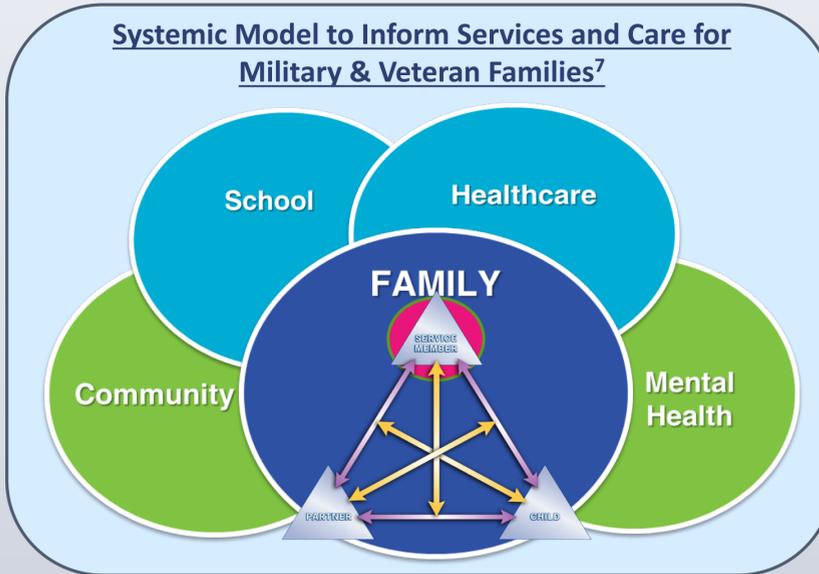
Translating Research into Practice: FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress) Model

FOCUS is A family-centered prevention program developed at the UCLA Semel Institute and Harvard University that was developed as a selective and indicated prevention service that builds resilience and wellness within the military and Veteran family. In active duty settings, services have been embedded in the continuum of behavioral health care services for service members, spouses and children through the FOCUS program at 28 military installations, serving over 900,000 children, service members, and community members since 2008. The FOCUS Model aims to:

- Educate families about stress reactions, PTSD, TBI, etc.
- Provide developmental guidance and parent leadership training
- Develop Family Level Skills to support emotional regulation, communication, goal setting, problem solving, and managing trauma and loss reminders.
- Share individual narratives and the create a family narrative to enhance perspective-taking
- Develop shared goals and support co-parenting
- Increase affect identification and regulation across the family
- Enhance family communication about periods of increased reactions and progress in the course of transitions
- Build family structure and closeness
- Develop a family coping plan
- Create meaning out of adversity

Family Centered Prevention and Care

The well-being of children and teens and their families are inextricably linked. Family members can play a significant role in enhancing or impeding the recovery of youth affected by trauma or adversity. Families represent an opportune point of entry for prevention and intervention efforts, and families prefer family approaches over individual approaches for mental health care.



Child Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) outcomes for boys and girls at pre-FOCUS (Pre), 1 month (FU1) and 6 months (FU2) post-completion.⁸

UCLA VA Veteran Family Wellness Center

The Center launched in the summer of 2017 by providing remote virtual service delivery using the Tele-FOCUS platform. Full on-site service delivery began shortly thereafter, including a range of individual consultations, groups, and couples and family programs. To create easier access, services are available at the Center and have also been embedded within other West Los Angeles VA campus programs and local veteran service organization locations. Notably, the current parenting groups have been well received at the West Los Angeles VA Domiciliary, the LA Dream Center, and in Building 220. Veterans from across Los Angeles County, seeking to improve their resilience, relationships and parenting skills, have been enthusiastic participants.



As part of the fabric of a vibrant Veteran and family community, team members have been honored to lead and participate in community initiatives and events such as the Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative, the recent Inaugural LA County Veterans



Job and Resource Expo at the Pomona Fairplex, the VAGLAHS Quarterly Veterans Town Hall, and Los Angeles Fleet Week. The VFWC staff also participated in the recent State of the American Veteran Conference and the VA Clay Hunt Mental Health Summit, both organizing and taking part in the event's Family Advocacy Panel. We look forward to participating in the upcoming VAGLAHS Homeless Veteran Stand Down.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Patricia Lester, MD and Catherine Mogil, PsyD of the UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior and Tess Banko, MSW/MPA, ACSW, Executive Director of the UCLA VA Veteran Family Wellness Center for assistance in poster preparation. Dr. Hunter received funding from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Nathanson Family Resilience Center to travel to the 64th Annual AACAP meeting to present this poster.