

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Multi-Wave Prospective Examination of the Stress-Reactivity Extension of Response Styles Theory of Depression in High-Risk Children and Early Adolescents

Abela, J. R., Hankin, B. L., Sheshko, D. M., Fishman, M. B., & Stolow, D. (2012). Multi-wave prospective examination of the stress-reactivity extension of response styles theory of depression in high-risk children and early adolescents. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 40(2), 277-287. doi:10.1007/s10802-011-9563-x

SUMMARY: There are many factors that affect depression onset and expression in adolescents, specifically, how thought patterns and behavior change in response to negative life events. The study examined the effect of age, sex, and type of thought patterns on individuals' depressive symptoms given a negative event. Regardless of age, passively and repetitively focusing on negative life events increased depressive symptoms in girls but not in boys.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Adolescents who spent significant time dwelling on negative life events experienced an increase in depression symptom severity.
- Girls were more likely than boys to dwell on negative life events.
- Age did not seem to influence dwelling on negative events and depression symptomology.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Work with parents diagnosed with depression to identify whether their children are at-risk for depression
- Encourage youth at-risk for depression to visit mental health professionals in their school or community

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Host workshops and other activities for youth on how to reduce stress resulting from negative life events
- Teach youth different strategies to help them cope with negative emotions and build resilience

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage education for school and program faculty to be aware of youth stress responses and cognitive vulnerabilities that increase the risk of depression in youth
- Encourage education for professionals who work with military families to be aware of youth stress responses and cognitive vulnerabilities that increase the risk of depression in youth

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Data were collected by self-report at six random times over a period of two months via handheld laptops.
- Participants answered a self-report questionnaire about the level of hassles in their life, dwelling on negative events, and their depressive symptoms.
- The effects of age and sex on the association between depression symptoms and dwelling on negative events were analyzed.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants (N = 56), aged 7-14 (M = 10.6) years old, were recruited from a previous study that examined the effects of parental depression on children.
- Racial and ethnic composition was White (80%), Multiracial (17%), Native American (2%), and Asian American (2%).
- Sibling pairs were excluded from the study.

LIMITATIONS

- The self-report method used may lead to a bias in answers from inaccurate conclusions about oneself.
- The participant pool is from a study on parents with depression and therefore the children in this study may have additional genetic vulnerabilities to depression that make the study's results less generalizable.
- Focusing on past negative life events for self-report measures may unintentionally increase the amount of time participants spent focusing on reported negative life events.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Identify the effects of dwelling on negative events on depression symptomology in adolescents using interviews
- Measure the effect of negative thought processes in adolescents on other mental health disorders such as anxiety
- Repeat the study with a larger, more diverse, and random sample from the community to increase the results generalizability

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