

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Increased Risk of Alcohol and Drug Use Among Children From Deployed Military Families

Acion, L., Ramirez, M. R., Jorge, R. E., & Arndt, S. (2013). Increased risk of alcohol and drug use among children from deployed military families. *Addiction*, 108(8), 1418-1425. doi:10.1111/add.1216

SUMMARY: Scores were compared on a self-report measure of drug and alcohol use in a sample of Iowa adolescents who had a parent that was currently deployed, had recently returned from deployment, or had neither parent affiliated with the military (non-military). The findings indicate that compared to the non-military group, the currently deployed group was more likely to drink alcohol, binge drink, and use illegal drugs regardless of grade level.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Military adolescents with deployed parents were more likely than non-military children to drink alcohol, binge drink, use marijuana, use other illegal drugs, and misuse prescription drugs regardless of grade level.
- Military adolescents were more likely to live with someone other than their parent during deployment and those with parents currently deployed were not living with an immediate relative.
- Military adolescents not living with a parent or relative were at particular risk of binge drinking or using marijuana compared to non-military adolescents not living with a relative.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes to military parents about how to talk to their children openly about healthy choices surrounding refraining from alcohol and illicit drug use
- Provide support groups to military children that recognize the unique challenges faced by children of deployed parents who live with non-relatives and their risk of substance use
- Disseminate information regarding the negative effects of drug use and resource available for military families and children seeking help with substance use issues

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support research that examines the unique risk factors associated with substance use among military families
- Support programs that offer mental health and substance use screening for adolescent children of parents who are deployed or who have recently returned from deployment
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs that provide services for military families and children coping with substance use issues to provide seamless and comprehensive care

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

- This study used data from the 2010 Iowa Youth Survey (IYS); all public and private schools in the state are invited to participant in the survey.
- Participants included Children where from the 6th, 8th, or 11th grade from participating public and private schools.
- Participants completed a self-report online survey that assesses youth's drug and alcohol use and perceptions of peers, family, school, and community. Participants were also asked about their parents' military and deployment status.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 78,240 youth completed the survey; however, those who failed to answer questions regarding their parent's involvement in the military were removed from the sample, resulting in a total of 58,395 participants.
- About 1% of participants (n = 775) had a currently deployed military parent, 1.7% (n = 983) had a recently returned military parent, and 97% (n = 637) had a non-military parent.
- The majority of participants were White (77% military; 87% non-military) and were on average 13 years old; gender was nearly even (military children = 59% male; non-military = 49% male).

LIMITATIONS

- Future studies could include a more varied sample of military families, equally sampling all branches of the military.
- Most of the military families in the study were in the Reserve or National Guard, which may not be representative of the larger military context.
- This study collected no data on socio-economic status, important aspects of deployment (e.g., length of current or previous deployment), or characteristics of adolescent mental health, which may impact the results found herein.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine differences in alcohol and drug use among military children with currently or recently deployed parents compared to military children with both parents home
- Include a more varied sample of military families, equally sampling all branches of the military
- Examine protective factors that prevent substance use among children in the military

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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