

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

School Transitions Among Military Adolescents: A Qualitative Study of Stress and Coping

Bradshaw, C. P., Sudhinaraset, M., Mmari, K., & Blum, R. W. (2010). School transitions among military adolescents: A qualitative study of stress and coping. *School Psychology Review*, 39(1), 84.

SUMMARY: Qualitative data from students, parents, and school staff were used to examine transition-related stressors experienced by mobile military students (i.e., those who experience multiple military-related moves), the efforts utilized to help these students cope with stress, and to identify strategies that schools can use to ease the transition process for mobile military students. A variety of stressors were experienced by mobile military students (e.g., adapting to a new school) but military youth were adaptable to school transitions, and making connections or getting involved in the new school helped students cope with this transition.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Stressors included tension at home, peer relationships issues, adapting to a new school environment, academic challenges, connecting with teachers, and missing out on extracurricular activities
- Students were able to cope with transition stressors by making connections with teachers, being adaptable, joining extracurricular activities, and connecting with other military youth and families.
- Increased communication between schools and military families, teacher training regarding military families, and establishing policies that support military youth were seen as ways to ease student's transitions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups and activities to military youth to help them make connections and build new support systems after a move
- Increase the visibility of resources for military students and their families may improve coping and help ease transitions
- Provide education to military parents regarding common stressors youth feel when transitioning into a new school and ways parents can support their children during this transition

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Provide support to the Military Child Education Coalition or other efforts aimed at developing standardized graduation requirements for military students
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and schools serving military youth to support students transition between schools following a parents change in duty station
- Recommend education for school counselors regarding working with military families, including the policies and requirements related to transitioning to a new school

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METHODS

- Focus groups were conducted with adolescents (4 focus groups), parents (3 focus groups) and teachers (4 focus groups) from eight different military bases.
- This article focuses on adolescents with parents in the Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, Reserves, and National Guard.
- Participants were recruited by a staff member at their military base.

PARTICIPANTS

- Thirty-nine adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 years (M = 14.6 years), 24 parents (M = 41.9 years), and 35 school staff members (M = 49.8 years) participated.
- Adolescents reported an average of 5.72 military-related moves.
- The majority of adolescent participants were female (61%), White (56%); parents were mostly female (71%) and White (67%).

LIMITATIONS

- Participating youth and adults may differ from non-participants in a way that is not measured, but affected the outcome variables. For instance, individuals who decided to participate may have been functioning better than individuals who did not participate.
- Parents, students, and staff may be trying to respond in the “best” way, which could limit the reliability of results.
- Service branch information was not provided and could limit the generalizability of the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore effective school-based intervention and prevention approaches to help military students and their families cope with the stress of deployment and military-related moves
- Examine transition stressors and ways of coping with a more diverse sample of military youth (e.g., race/ethnicity, special needs, gender)
- Investigate how number of school transitions with military youth impact educational achievement and college entrance rates

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