

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Well-Being and Suicidal Ideation of Secondary School Students From Military Families

Cederbaum, J. A., Gilreath, T. D., Bennishty, R., Astor, R. A., Pineda, D., DePedro, K. T., ... Atuel, H. (2014). Well-being and suicidal ideation of secondary school students from military families. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 54*(6), 672-677.  
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**SUMMARY:** Survey data were utilized to examine the influence of military connectedness and parental deployment on adolescent mental health (i.e., feeling sad or hopeless, suicidal ideation, well-being, and depressive symptoms). Results indicate that military connected youth reported more negative mental health symptoms, particularly among adolescence with parents who had deployed.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Thirty-four percent of adolescents with a military parent and 35% with a military sibling reported that in the past year, they felt sad or hopeless for more than two weeks.
- Twenty-five percent of adolescents with a military parent and 26% with a military sibling reported that they seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.
- Compared to their non-military-connected peers, military-connected adolescents who experienced one or more familial deployments were more likely to report symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation.
- Compared to their non-military-connected peers, military-connected adolescents reported poorer well-being.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to military parents regarding mental health issues common among adolescents in military-connected families and those experiencing deployment
- Collaborate with community-based mental health centers to increase access to services for military connected youth
- Provide evidence-based intervention training to service providers that have been shown to reduce the long-term consequences of deployment-related stressors

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support ongoing assessment and service provision to military-connected youth experiencing distress
- Encourage the development of programs that promote resilience in Service members and their families
- Continue to support family readiness programs pre-deployment

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## METHODS

- Researchers used data from the 2011 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), a statewide survey of public school students (response rate was 87%).
- This study focused on military-connected adolescents.
- Military branch, component, and rank were not specified.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Fourteen thousand two hundred ninety-nine adolescents in 7th, 9th, and 11th grade participated.
- A total of 12,385 were not military-connected, 1,305 were military-connected by parent, and 609 were military-connected by a sibling.
- The majority of youth were female (52%) and 50% were Latino.

## LIMITATIONS

- Outcome variables were measured with a single item, which may bias results.
- This study focused on military-connected youth living in one region of the country; therefore, findings may not generalize to military-connected youth living in other parts of the United States.
- Data were cross-sectional; hence, causation cannot be inferred.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine adolescent mental health at multiple points during the deployment and reintegration process
- Test outcomes associated with the deployment of more than one military-connected family member (e.g., parent and sibling)
- Explore the influence of deployment on youth by deployment length, location, or type (e.g., combat mission, peacekeeping, military installation training)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>