

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Communication, Coping, and Connections: Campers' and Parents' Perspectives of Self-Efficacy and Benefits of Participation in Deployment Support Camps

Clary, C. D., & Ferrari, T. M. (2015). Communication, coping, and connections: Campers' and parents' perspectives of self-efficacy and benefits of participation in deployment support camps. *Journal of Youth Development*, 10(2), 31-54.
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SUMMARY: Adolescent dependents of Service members experience unique challenges related to military life; deployment support camps may help them cope with some of these challenges. Campers and their parents answered questionnaires regarding campers' experiences before and three months after the camp ended. Results indicated positive outcomes of camp participation in areas of communication, coping, and social skills.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The most significant improvements after camp was reported in communication skills, followed by social skills, and then coping skills.
- Making new friends and reconnecting with old friends were perceived as the greatest benefits of attending the camp.
- Youth were able to handle responsibilities better, work better with others, and be more independent after the camp.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer camps for adolescent dependents of Service members to help them learn important life skills and cope with military-related life events (e.g., deployment of a parent, relocation)
- Disseminate information regarding programs and services that can benefit adolescent dependents of Service members and improve their well-being
- Provide support groups for adolescent dependents of Service members before, during, and after their parents' deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage additional research on programs and activities that can promote adolescent dependents of Service members' well-being
- Continue to support deployment support camps that aim to help adolescent dependents of Service members adjust to parental deployment
- Encourage education of youth workers working with adolescent dependents of Service members regarding their strengths and challenges

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from Operation: Military Kids (OMK) camps; method of recruiting was not reported.
- Three months after camp, youth and their parents or guardians answered online questionnaires about youth's communication, coping, and social skills.
- Data from both groups were analyzed to examine the differences in youth's communication, coping, and social skills before and after the camp.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included adolescent dependents of Service members (N = 35, response rate = 20%) who attended one of the OMK camps in Indiana or Ohio and their parents or guardians (N = 48, response rate = 27%).
- The average age of the youth was 12 years (age range = 9-15) and the average age of the adult participants was not indicated; gender of participants was not reported either.
- All military branches were represented, and most youth (49%) were connected to Service members in the Army National Guard (the military branches of the rest of the Service members were not indicated).

LIMITATIONS

- The response rate was low, so results of the study may not represent the opinions of other youth in those camps.
- Youth who experienced more positive changes were more likely to take the survey; therefore, the study results could be biased.
- The questionnaire was new and developed solely for the study; without further research, the validity of the questionnaire is unknown.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Use methods (e.g., giving incentives for participation) to increase the response rate so that more youth's opinions could be heard
- Examine how youth's age and gender may potentially influence their perception of the camp
- Explore what features of the camp lead to youth's improved self-efficacy in communication, coping, and social skills

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