

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Discrepancies in Military Middle-School Adolescents' and Parents' Perceptions of Family Functioning, Social Support, Anger Frequency, and Concerns

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SUMMARY: In order to test levels of agreement between adolescents and their parents, researchers surveyed adolescent-parent dyads from U.S. Army families about their perceptions of family functioning, social support, the adolescent's frequency of anger, and the adolescent's concerns. Parents and adolescents frequently disagreed; parents rated family functioning and social support items higher than their adolescents.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents rated measures of family functioning (e.g., "When we argue, my family listens to 'both sides of the story'" and "My family pulls together when things are stressful") significantly higher than their adolescents.
- Parents rated measures of social support (e.g., "I have others who will listen when I need to talk about my problems" and "When I am lonely, there are several people I can talk to") significantly higher than their adolescents.
- Parents estimated a lower frequency of their adolescents' anger (average: 11-15 times per week) than the adolescents themselves (average: 21-25 times per week).
- Parents and adolescents agreed on the number of concerns they listed. The top 5 concerns were: (1) dealing with change/new situations, (2) difficulty controlling anger, (3) receiving one or more failing grades, (4) loss of a loved one, and (5) test anxiety.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups targeted at adolescents within a military family context, specifically for social support and expressing emotions
- Create workshops for military family during changes (i.e., relocations, deployments) that provide tools for positive adjustment and family functioning
- Provide information on normative versus problematic youth's responses to common military-related experiences (e.g., PCS) and how parents can best support youth during stressful times

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the ongoing provision of military family programs
- Encourage increased access to and availability of support services for military adolescents and families
- Continue to provide support for programs that work to increase family readiness

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METHODS

- Parents and students were recruited at a middle school attached to a large U.S. Army installation. Participants completed a one-time questionnaire designed to assess perceptions of family functioning, social support, frequency of adolescents' anger, and adolescents' concerns.
- Parents completed questionnaires during parent-teacher conferences while adolescents completed the questionnaires during the school day.
- Statistical analyses were used to explore potential relationships among family functioning, social support, frequency of adolescents' anger, and adolescents' concerns.

PARTICIPANTS

- Ninety one parent-adolescent dyads from Active Duty Army families participated in the study.
- The average age of adolescents was 12.45 years (age range was 11-14.8 years) and no data on adolescents' gender was reported.
- In this sample, parents were mostly mothers (73%) and no data on parents' ages were reported.

LIMITATIONS

- This study focused on a small sample of Active Duty Army personnel and their adolescent dependents who completed a one-time questionnaire. Hence, the findings may not generalize to adolescents of Service members in other branches of the military.
- Participants may differ from non-participants in a way that was not measured, but affected the outcome variables (e.g., parents may be more connected with their adolescents than parents who elected not to participate).
- The study was cross-sectional, which means no conclusions about causation can be determined based on the findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study in a larger, more demographically diverse sample
- Investigate the factors that explain discrepancies between parent-adolescent perceptions including the impact of parental deployment
- Design longitudinal studies that follow the relationship between family functioning, social support, and anger from middle childhood to early adulthood

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