

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Depressed Mood in Childhood and Subsequent Alcohol use through Adolescence and Young Adulthood

Crum, R. M., Green, K. M., Storr, C. L., Chan, Y. F., Jalongo, N., Stuart, E. A., & Anthony, J. C. (2008). Depressed mood in childhood and subsequent alcohol use through adolescence and young adulthood. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 65(6), 702-712. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.65.6.702

**SUMMARY:** Participants were recruited during childhood and interviewed in early adolescence and adulthood to assess the association between childhood depressed mood and adolescent and young adulthood alcohol use. A high level of depressed mood during childhood was associated with an earlier onset and increased risk of alcohol intoxication, alcohol-related problems during late childhood and early adolescence, and the development of alcohol dependence in young adulthood.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Individuals who experienced a depressed mood in childhood were more likely to engage in alcohol during late adolescence.
- Higher levels of depressed mood in childhood were associated with earlier onset of alcohol involvement.
- Children with low levels of depression were not significantly different than children with no depressed mood in regards to both groups later alcohol use.
- Males and participants that were not White were at elevated risk for stronger associations between mood and alcohol use.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with community-based organizations to improve referrals for military families
- Participate in training about how to recognize mental health difficulties in children and discuss these observations with their parents

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes for military parents to learn how to recognize depressed mood in their children and to empower them with potentially useful resources
- Offer courses for military youth about the dangers of alcohol use and alternative methods of coping with stress

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development of programs aimed at the prevention and treatment of childhood depression in military youth
- Recommend professional development and training in recognizing childhood depression for professionals who work with military families

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from their elementary schools via a bigger, longitudinal study about academic achievement and classroom behavior.
- Participants were followed over time, and they were assessed via semi-structured interview in later childhood/early adolescence and in young adulthood.
- At each time of data collection, participants were interviewed about their mood. Once children entered middle school, they were asked additional questions about alcohol use.

## PARTICIPANTS

- During the initial data collection, participants included 2,311 first grade students from 19 elementary schools in an urban, mid-Atlantic region of the United States.
- During the second time point, data were collected from 1,092 students (mean age = 10.0 years).
- At the third time point, data were collected from 1,920 participants (mean age = 21 years). Of these participants, 50% were male, 69% Black, 55% had qualified for subsidized lunch in school, and 39% were classified as having high conduct problems in school.

## LIMITATIONS

- The assessment of depressed mood in children was done via questionnaires instead of clinical interviews, which may have limited how accurately symptoms of depression were assessed.
- The measure of alcohol use was stringent and may have excluded individuals with milder forms of this problem.
- There was significant attrition over time and it is unclear how this attrition may have impacted the findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Extend the time period studied to see how these findings translate into later adulthood
- Explore the trajectories of youth with high levels of anxiety, including possible increased risks for substance use and abuse
- Conduct longitudinal studies on depressed mood among military youth

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>