

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Examining the Relationship Between School Climate and Peer Victimization Among Students in Military-Connected Public Schools

De Pedro, K. T., Astor, R. A., Gilreath, T., Benbenishty, R., & Berkowitz, R. (2016). Examining the relationship between school climate and peer victimization among students in military-connected public schools. *Violence*, 31(4), 751-767. doi:10.1891/0886-6708.vv-d-15-00009

SUMMARY: Military-connected youth (i.e., having a parent or sibling in the military) may be more likely to experience peer victimization than their nonmilitary-connected counterparts. A large sample of 7th, 9th, and 11th graders completed surveys about their military connection, school climate, and experience of peer victimization. Results revealed that a nurturing school climate is important for military-connected students' well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- School climate was a protective factor against peer victimization among military-connected students.
- In particular, caring relationships (i.e., caring support from teachers and other school staff) and school connectedness (i.e., positive connections between students and teachers) were the most important school climate components that were related to a lower level peer victimization.
- Higher numbers of deployment and school transitions were significantly associated with higher level of peer victimization.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Design workshops for teachers of military-connected schools that focus on improving the school climate and reducing peer victimization
- Educate Service members about how to help their children and adolescents build positive relationships at school and prevent peer victimization
- Offer support groups for military youth who experience school transitions and parental deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for professionals working with military children and adolescents about the stress they experience as a result of parental deployment or school transitions
- Promote training for school personnel that will assist in a close, caring, and respectful school climate in military-connected school districts
- Raise awareness of the detrimental effects of peer victimization on military youth's well-being

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METHODS

- The data were drawn from the California Healthy Kids Surveys administered in 2011.
- There was a 87% response rate; students completed surveys about their experience of peer victimization in the past 12 months, whether or not they had a family member in the military and if so, how many times the family member had been deployed in the past 10 years, school transitions, and the school climate (caring relationships, high expectations, school connectedness, and meaningful participation).
- The relationships between military connection, school climate, and peer victimization were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 14,943 7th, 9th, and 11th graders who attended military-connected public schools; 52% of them were female.
- Most of the participants were Latino (51%), followed by White (27%), Asian American (8%), Black (3%), and other (11%).
- About 13% of the participants were military-connected.
- The average age of the participants were not reported in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- All data were self-reported by students, therefore they may be biased by the students' own perspectives and may affect the reliability of the study.
- Due to the cross-sectional design of the study, there is no clear evidence of the causal relationships between school climate, deployment, and peer victimization.
- The sample was students from military-connected school districts which may have distinct cultures from nonmilitary-connected school districts, so it is difficult to generalize the results to students from nonmilitaryconnected schools.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Measure the school climate both subjectively and objectively
- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationships between school climate, deployment, and peer victimization
- Investigate other factors that can protect military-connected youth from peer victimization.

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