

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Substance Use Among Military-Connected Youth The California Healthy Kids Survey

Gilreath, T. D., Cedarbaum, J. A., Astor, R. A., Benbenishty, R., Pineda, D., & Atuel, H. (2013). Substance use among military-connected youth: The California Healthy Kids Survey. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 44(2), 150-153. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2012.09.059

SUMMARY: Young people in military-connected families may be exposed to negative stressors, related to family member deployment, and as such be more likely to engage in substance use. An examination of the prevalence and associations of lifetime and recent substance use in youth who were either connected or not connected to the military was conducted. Data were drawn from a subsample of the 2011 California Healthy Kids Survey (N = 14,149) given in Southern California.

KEY FINDINGS:

- There were significant associations between the number of youth-reported deployments of a parent and youth's lifetime levels of tobacco and other drug use.
- Youth who reported having a sibling in the military had the highest prevalence of lifetime use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, other drugs and prescription drugs.
- Youth who reported having a parent serving in the military had the highest level of recent substance use.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer pre- and post-deployment support groups for youth and their families to support the development of positive coping skills
- Incorporate social_emotional supports around deployment for youth and their family members to help cope with the Service members' absence
- Support campaigns that bring attention to the needs of youth and families with deployed family members

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education of school professionals (e.g. counselors, teachers, principals) on the needs of youth of deployed parents
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can support military-connected youth and their families health and well-being
- Support collaboration between the DoD and local education units (e.g. elementary, middle, and high schools) in providing substance use prevention and coping skills curricula for military-connected youth

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METHODS

- The study used the 2011 California Healthy Kids Survey questions about students' health-related behaviors, tobacco use, alcohol use, drug use, violence behaviors, and school safety.
- Recent levels of substance use were defined as use within the past 30 days; whereas, levels of lifetime substance use were defined as the likelihood that there may be a substantial portion of youth who, although they may have "ever" tried alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana, had not used within the past 30 days.
- Analysis was conducted in order to compare demographics and key variables related to military connection and predict the probability of lifetime versus never use (separately for alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, other drugs, and prescription drugs), and recent versus non-recent use.

PARTICIPANTS

- Fifty-two percent of youth respondents were female and 48% were male.
- Respondents identified as Asian-American 9%, Black 3%, White 28%, Other 12%, and Latino 48% and were equally distributed across the 7th, 9th, and 11th grades.
- Seventy-three percent of youth did not have a family member who had deployed, 10% of youth had a parent who deployed once, and 18% had a parent who deployed two or more times.

LIMITATIONS

- The study used preexisting data; therefore, there were a number of contextual factors that couldn't be controlled (e.g. mental health of parents, types of deployment, and families).
- The survey from which the data were drawn was administered in one region of the US; therefore, generalizability to other military contexts cannot be made.
- It is unclear in article how many variables were included in each analysis which affects the strength of the association between them.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore how maternal deployment may affect youth and their substance use differently than paternal deployment
- Identify and test different measures and variables to better understand the active contributors to military-connected youth outcomes such as substance use and well-being
- Examine qualitatively military-connected youth's experience having a family member deployed

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