

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Prevalence and Correlates of Victimization and Weapon Carrying Among Military- and Nonmilitary-connected Youth in Southern California

Gilreath, T. D., Astor, R. A., Cederbaum, J. A., Atuel, H., & Benbenishty, R. (2014). Prevalence and correlates of victimization and weapon carrying among military- and nonmilitary-connected youth in Southern California. *Preventive Medicine, 60*, 21-26. doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2013.12.002

SUMMARY: Military-connected and nonmilitary-connected public school students participated in a study examining the rates and correlates of school victimization and weapon carrying. Youth with a military-connected parent had higher rates of physical victimization, nonphysical victimization, and weapon carrying compared to those with siblings serving in the military and with nonmilitary-connected youth.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Almost half of the sample reported some type of physical victimization at school in the previous year, including 30% being pushed/shoved, 26% had property stolen, 28% had seen someone with a weapon, and 20% were afraid of being attacked.
- Approximately 62% reported some type of nonphysical victimization, with 46% reporting sexual jokes/gestures, 41% had rumors spread, 39% were made fun of for their appearance, and 22% had rumors spread on the internet.
- Students with parents and siblings in the military had higher rates on all physical victimization measures, overall nonphysical victimization, and any weapon carrying compared to those without a parent or sibling in the military.
- Number of deployments and changing school many times predicted physical and nonphysical victimization and weapon carrying. Two or more family deployments was associated with a 71% increase in the odds of reporting physical victimization and a 54% increase in weapon carrying. Having a parent in the military was associated with increased odds of weapon carrying by 29%.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military parents about the increased risks of physical and nonphysical victimization among their children and effective means of helping their children manage these stressors
- Offer mentoring programs to military youth struggling with victimization issues in school
- Disseminate information to military youth regarding ways to deal with victimization in school

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that aim to prevent bullying in school, specifically towards military youth
- Encourage collaboration between military family programs and schools to identify students who are being victimized and to offer supportive services when appropriate
- Encourage the development of youth support groups for military youth coping with bullying victimization at school or within their neighborhoods

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METHODS

- Data were taken from the California Healthy Kids Survey of 7th, 9th and 11th graders in six military-connected districts in Southern California.
- Students and parents were asked to consent, and interested students completed a paper and pencil survey during class; 87% of students completed the survey.
- Students completed demographic questions and measures of being the victim of school physical violence, non-physical victimization, and weapon carrying at school (gun or knife).

PARTICIPANTS

- Fourteen thousand five hundred twelve students in Southern California (7th, 9th, and 11th grade) participated.
- Thirty-five percent were in 9th grade, 33% in 7th grade, and 32% in 11th grade.
- Eighty-seven percent of the youth reported no military connection; 9% had a parent in the military and 4% had a sibling in the military.
- The majority of the sample was female (52%) and Latino/Latina (49%).

LIMITATIONS

- The data are cross-sectional, and causal conclusions are inappropriate.
- Important possible confounding variables (e.g., socioeconomic status) were not included and may bias the results.
- The majority of the sample was female and Latino/Latina; therefore, results may not be generalizable.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess the risk factors that mediate the relationship between victimization and weapon carrying
- Include assessment of family members to measure how their attitudes and behaviors influence weapon carrying
- Continue to examine rates of victimization among military and non-military youth, including online victimization

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