

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Suicidality Among Military-Connected Adolescents in California Schools

Gilreath, T. D., Wrabel, S. L., Capp, G. P., Roziner, I., Benbenishty, R., & Astor, R. A. (2015). Suicidality among military-connected adolescents in California schools. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 25(1), 61-66.  
doi:10.1007/s00787-015-0696-2

**SUMMARY:** Using data from students in 9th and 11th grades in California schools who completed the California Healthy Kids Survey in 2012-2013, researchers compared the rates of suicidal thoughts and behavior between military-connected and civilian students. Military-connected youth were at higher risk than their civilian peers for all suicide variables measured, including thinking about suicide, making plans to attempt suicide, attempting suicide, and attempting suicide that required medical treatment in the past year.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Military-connected youth had thought seriously about suicide at a significantly higher rate than their civilian peers (24% of military and 18% of civilian youth).
- Military-connected youth attempted suicide in the past year at a significantly higher rate than civilian youth (12% of military and 7% of civilian youth).
- In the past year, almost 4% of military youth and approximately 2% of civilian youth had attempted suicide which required medical treatment, a statistically significant difference.
- Military-connected youth were 1.4 times more likely to have engaged in suicidal ideation, 1.2 times more likely to have made a suicide plan, 1.7 times more likely to have attempted suicide, and 1.7 times more likely to have attempted suicide that required medical treatment in the past year compared to civilian youth.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information regarding suicidal ideation and behavior among military youth and resources available for youth coping with these issues
- Provide public awareness campaigns on installations to increase attention to the risk factors and warning signs for suicide and promote help-seeking when appropriate
- Offer support groups for military teens experiencing distress

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend routine screening of military youth for suicidal ideation
- Support programs that work with military youth struggling with mental health issues and suicidal thoughts
- Continue to support school liaison staff who are familiar with military culture and can support school personnel in addressing the unique needs of military students

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



## METHODS

- Data were drawn from the 2012-2013 ongoing California Healthy Kids Survey conducted on behalf of the California Department of Education.
- Students completed the anonymous surveys in class, and average time to complete was 50 minutes.
- Approximately 80% of schools with 9th and 11th grade students participated, and student participation rate was 85%.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Three hundred ninety thousand and twenty-eight youth (grades 9 and 11) from California schools participated.
- Nine percent of the participants were connected to the military.
- Of the military students, 53% were male and 57% were in 9th grade; 51% were Latino/Latina, 19% were White, 15% were Asian American, 10% were multiple races, and 4% were Black.
- Of the civilian students, 47% were male, and 51% were in 9th grade; 49% were Latino/Latina, 25% were White, 13% were Asian American, 9% were multiple races, and 3% were Black.

## LIMITATIONS

- Students were drawn from only one state; the extent to which these findings apply to other youth is unknown.
- Data were exclusively based on self-report questions administered in a school setting; the extent to which these other variables (e.g., stigma, students' interpretation of yes/no questions) influenced their responses is unknown.
- Potentially important family functioning variables related to military service (e.g., parental deployment) were not examined, which could influence the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the contribution of parental deployment or parental mental health to youth functioning
- Replicate this study with military students from other state
- Supplement this self-report, quantitative study with qualitative inquiry to more fully understand youths' experiences and potential avenues for prevention and support

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>