

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Emotional Maltreatment, Peer Victimization, and Depressive Versus Anxiety Symptoms During Adolescence: Hopelessness as a Mediator

Hamilton, J. L., Shapero, B. G., Stange, J. P., Hamlat, E. J., Abramson, L. Y., & Alloy, L. B. (2013). Emotional maltreatment, peer victimization, and depressive versus anxiety symptoms during adolescence: Hopelessness as a mediator. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 42(3), 332-347. doi:1080/15374416.2013.777916

**SUMMARY:** Emotional abuse and neglect and peer victimization can have lasting negative consequences for youth. The effects of emotional abuse and neglect and peer victimization on adolescents' later anxiety and depression symptoms was assessed among 225 adolescents at baseline (Time 1), 9-month follow-up (Time 2), and 18-month follow-up (Time 3). Emotional abuse predicted increases in adolescent depression and anxiety symptoms, while peer victimization predicted greater depression symptoms.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Both emotional abuse and peer victimization predicted increases in depressive symptoms over time.
- Emotional abuse predicted increases in symptoms of anxiety (including social and physical anxiety) over time.
- Emotional neglect did not predict changes in depressive or anxiety symptoms.
- Hopelessness was a mediator between emotional abuse and depressive and social anxiety symptoms, with emotional abuse predicting hopelessness, which in turn predicted later depressive and social anxiety symptoms.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate support groups for youth experiencing emotional abuse or peer victimization
- Help develop school-based student health curricula about how to prevent and stop bullying

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes to military parents and families about how to recognize and combat bullying
- Collaborate with schools to help identify military children who experience bullying in school and refer them to resources (e.g., mental health care, peer support groups)

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that military youth be regularly screened for a range of mental health and broader wellness concerns and that families are provided tailored, accessible, affordable referral resources
- Recommend education for professionals working with military families on how to recognize and intervene with emotional maltreatment and victimization

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

- As part of a larger longitudinal study on adolescent cognition and emotion, White and Black students (12-13 years of age) and their mothers or female caregivers, were recruited from Philadelphia public and private schools through newspaper ads and school mailings.
- At baseline, mothers completed questionnaires about life stressors, and at both baseline (Time 1) and 19-month follow-up (Time 3), adolescents completed depression and anxiety questionnaires.
- At a nine-month follow-up (Time 2), adolescents completed questionnaires about emotional abuse and neglect, relationally-oriented peer victimization, and hopelessness.
- The associations between depression and anxiety symptoms and emotional abuse, emotional neglect, peer victimization, and hopelessness were evaluated over time.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 225 adolescent students from Philadelphia (59% female) with an average age of 12.84 years (SD = 0.60).
- Participants were 55% Black, with the rest of participants being either White or Multiracial (at least partially Black or White).
- Families were primarily low-income, with 45% of students qualifying for free lunch.

## LIMITATIONS

- All measures were self-report and could be subject to reporter bias.
- It is unclear whether the associations between peer victimization or emotional abuse or neglect and anxiety and depression symptoms would extend to clinical levels of anxiety and depression disorders.
- Although the average follow-up times were each 9 months apart, students' individual follow-up intervals varied.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the effects of emotional maltreatment and victimization using multiple informants and formal assessments of anxiety and depression
- Explore the associations between other types of maltreatment or victimization (e.g., relational, reputational) on mental health symptoms
- Conduct research with long-term follow-up assessments to understand how emotional maltreatment and victimization in adolescence may continue to have an impact into adulthood

## 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>