



## Military Enlistment and Family Dynamics: Youth and Parental Perspectives

Legree, P.J., Gade, P.A., Martin, D.E., Fischl, M.A., Wilson, M.J., Nieva, V.F., McCloy, R. & Laurence, J. (2000). Military enlistment and family dynamics: Youth and parental perspectives. *Military Psychology*, 12, 31-49.



*2,731 young men and one of their parents participated in a telephone survey to understand factors associated with military enlistment. Youth's perceptions of parental attitudes toward the military were not accurate, but these perceptions predicted enlistment propensity which predicted military enlistment.*

### Key Findings:

- Youth's perceptions of parental attitudes toward the military and parents' actual attitudes had a small correlation (.14-.22).
- Youth's perceptions of parental attitudes to the military predicted the likelihood the young person would enlist.
- Parental perceptions of the military predicted the likelihood their child would enlist, independent of the youth's own enlistment propensity.

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs that work with youth could offer classes for families to support open discussions about young people's career and educational aspirations.
- Programs could sponsor a career day for youths and have representatives available to provide information about multiple options and careers.

### Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend that military recruitment campaigns specifically address attitudes, beliefs, and fears of parents as well as potential enlistees.
- Policies could recommend funding to create awareness and outreach campaigns, in which military personnel could talk to youth in high school and higher education about the benefits of a military career.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could attempt to replicate this research to see if the findings differ today compared to 1987.
- Additional studies could assess longitudinally how parental attitudes and youth perception of those attitudes relate to later military performance.



## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Data were drawn from the Army Communications Objectives Measurement System (ACOMS) survey.
- In 1987, families of male youths (16-24 years of age) were randomly contacted via telephone for study recruitment. If the youth did not have prior military service and was currently in high school or college, they were invited to participate in the study.
- Youths answered questions about their attitude toward the Army, broad career intentions, behavior associated with those intentions, whether youth similar to them were enlisting, and perceived parental military attitudes.
- Parents were also interviewed via telephone. Parents were asked about their military attitudes, demographic data, prior military service, career and military discussions they had had with the youth, and their encouragement of enlistment
- The youth's social security number was used to identify those who went to a Military Enlistment Processing Station to pursue military enlistment and what actions they had taken (test taking, physical exam, application, and enlistment).
- Correlations of all variables were run, and structural equation modeling assessed how youth attitudes toward the Army, alternate work and college intentions, parental approval, attitudes, and communication with youths contributed to youth intention to enlist and how far they proceeded in the enlistment process.

### Participants:

- 2,731 young men and one of their parents participated.
- 21% of the youth surveyed had taken some enlistment action.
- Racial/ethnic composition: 75% White, 14% Black, 9% Hispanic. No additional demographic information was presented.

### Limitations:

- The recruitment process was unclear, making it difficult to understand how the study was conducted.
- Demographic information was incomplete, making generalizability of these findings difficult to ascertain.
- Telephone surveys contain inherent limitations, which may introduce bias into the results.

## Assessing Research that Works

Assessing Research that Works					Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
Research Design and Sample	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)		
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Research Methods	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Limitations	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Implications	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications						
Overall Quality Rating						★ ★ ★