

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Effects of the Positive Action Program on Indicators of Positive Youth Development Among Urban Youth

Lewis, K. M., Vuchinich, S., Ji, P., DuBois, D. L., Acock, A., Bavarian, N., ... Flay, B. R. (2015). Effects of the positive action program on indicators of positive youth development among urban youth. *Applied Developmental Science*, 20(1), 16-28. doi:10.1080/10888691.2015.1039123

SUMMARY: Students in urban schools may have difficulties with their social-emotional and character development skills. This study interviewed students from 14 urban schools in Chicago in review of the Positive Action program to determine whether this intervention impacted their self-control, peer affiliations, ethics, and social skills development. Findings indicated that the Positive Action program did improve student's positive youth development and their social-emotional and character development skills.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The Positive Action program had a positive effect on self-control as indicated by less of a decline in students' reports of self-control over time.
- Students in the Positive Action program reported more positive peer affiliation over time than students not in the program.
- Students in schools with the Positive Action program showed more positive development in areas such as altruism and empathy than students in schools without the Positive Action program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Develop a training module for teachers in schools on military installations that demonstrates the benefits of school-based interventions on children's social emotional development
- Provide education for military parents on the advantages of school-based interventions and how parents can partner with education professionals to improve their children's outcomes

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide information on normative versus problematic children's responses to deployment and strategies to address the deployment-related distress
- Host workshops for parents on how best to help their children who have delays in social emotional development

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support the development of school-based interventions in military schools for children with developmental delays
- Recommend educational courses for professionals about how they can improve school-based interventions for children

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

- From 483 eligible schools, 14 elementary and middle public schools from Chicago, IL participated in the study. There were seven matched pairs: seven schools received the Positive Action program and seven did not receive an intervention.
- Surveys were administered to students during class time. During waves one through five, research staff read the instructions aloud and during waves six through eight, students read the survey instructions themselves.
- Data collected in the study were self-reported and were collected at all of the eight wave lengths.

PARTICIPANTS

- The total number of participants enrolled in the study was 1,170 students, ranging from grades three to eight.
- Of the students enrolled in the study, 53% were female and 47% were male.
- The students who participated in the study ranged in ethnicity where 48% were Black, 27% were Latinos, 7% were White, and 12% were identified as other.

LIMITATIONS

- The study assessed student outcomes through student self-reporting, which can lead to social desirability bias, which is when students may overstate their positive feelings and understate their negative feelings in response to the goals of the program.
- Schools with the Positive Action program may have felt greater pressure to give more favorable reports about the program because the outcomes were assessed through student self-reporting, which may lead to inflation of estimated program effects.
- Because of the small number of schools that were studied, the statistical power for detecting the effects of the Positive Action program intervention was limited.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore how more specific indicators of positive youth development may be influenced by programs such as Positive Action
- Test the effects the Positive Action program has on youth outcomes such as mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety)
- Examine whether Positive Action interventions can influence positive youth development characteristics at earlier ages and whether they are sustained at later time points

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>