

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Examination of Veteran Fathers' Parenting and Their Adolescent Children's Substance Use in the United States

Lipari, R., Palen, L. A., Ashley, O. S., Penne, M., Kan, M., & Pemberton, M. (2017). Examination of veteran fathers' parenting and their adolescent children's substance use in the United States. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 52(6), 698-708. doi:10.1080/10826084.2016.1253748

SUMMARY: National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs) data were used to examine the association between Veteran father and non-Veteran father's parental involvement, parent-child communication, and parental beliefs about child substance use on adolescent substance use. Parenting characteristics were associated with adolescent substance use, and some difference between Veteran and non-Veteran fathers were found.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Adolescents of Veteran and non-Veteran fathers reported similar rates of parental involvement and parental involvement was associated with lower odds of adolescent substance use.
- A higher proportion of Veteran fathers believed their adolescent had used substances within the last year compared to non-Veteran fathers; adolescents of Veteran fathers self-reported more substance use than non-Veteran adolescents.
- Compared to adolescents of non-Veteran fathers, adolescents of Veteran fathers self-reported higher rates of lifetime, past year, and past month substance use, particularly tobacco and prescription drug abuse.
- Compared to non-Veteran fathers, Veteran fathers were less likely to have communicated with their adolescent about the dangers of substance use. No association was found between parent-adolescent communication and lifetime or past year substance use, except for past year tobacco use.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military parents about how to talk with their children about the risks associated with substance use
- Disseminate information regarding the programs and services available to military families dealing with substance use issues
- Educate military families about the association between mental health and substance abuse issues and provide information about healthier ways to cope

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that work with military children and families struggling with substance use issues.
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs that provide services to military families struggling with substance use issues for more comprehensive and streamlined care.
- Recommend education for service providers working with military families regarding the unique risk and protective factors associated with military culture and substance use.

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METHODS

- Paired father-adolescent NSDUHs data from 2004-2013 were used to examine the association between parenting characteristics and adolescent self-reported substance use.
- Veterans were those who indicated they had been a member of the U.S. military in their lifetime; those who currently identified as Active Duty were not included in the sample.
- Only father-adolescent data were analyzed due to the small number of Veteran women in the sample.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 9,200 non-Veteran and 1,500 Veteran father-adolescent pairs.
- To be included in the sample, adolescents must have been between the ages of 12-17 years and lived in the same household as their father.
- Fathers included in the sample were either a biological, step-, adoptive, or foster parent and were between the ages of 30-62 years.
- No other demographic information was provided regarding adolescents race/ethnicity or gender.

LIMITATIONS

- No data on deployment characteristics, such as length or number of deployments, were available which could have had an influence on parenting characteristics and child substance use outcomes.
- This study did not examine parental substance use which may have had an important influence on adolescent substance use.
- Self-reported data for adolescent substance use may not accurately capture rates of substance use due to underreporting.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the association between non-Veteran and Veteran parental substance use and adolescent substance use.
- Explore potential protective factors that may mitigate substance use among military and non-military adolescents.
- Examine the association between the number and length of parental military deployments and adolescent substance use.

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