

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Parental Military Service and Adolescent Well-Being: Mental Health, Social Connections, and Coping Among Youth in the USA

Lucier-Greer, M., Arnold, A. L., Grimsley, R. N., Ford, J. L., Bryant, C., & Mancini, J. A. (2014). Parental military service and adolescent well-being: Mental health, social connections, and coping among youth in the USA. *Child & Family Social Work*, 21(4), 421-432. doi:10.1111/cfs.12158

SUMMARY: Adolescents who had at least one Active Duty military parent participated in a study examining the associations among demographic information, military-related factors, and well-being. Parental paygrade/rank and youth participation in military sponsored activities were associated with adolescent well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Adolescents with enlisted parents reported more depressive symptoms (particularly for females), fewer close relationships, and less available social support.
- Youth participation in a military-sponsored event was positively associated with strong social connections and healthy coping.
- Female adolescents who lived in the same neighborhood for less than two years and had an enlisted parent were less likely to draw upon family support than males.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer professional development opportunities for school personnel about available resources for military youth and families
- Engage military-connected youth in educational workshops that discuss stress and effective coping strategies
- Distribute information to military parents about the impact of military-related stressors on youth functioning

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage military-connected youth to participate in military-sponsored activities through campaigns and advertising
- Continue to provide support for strengths-based programs and activities for military-connected youth
- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community-based programs that offer services to military-connected youth experiencing depression and low self-esteem in an effort to provide streamlined and continuous care

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

- Adolescents were recruited using advertising in the community and via email blasts to Service members.
- Survey questions assessed military-related factors (e.g., parental absence due to work, parental paygrade/rank, participation in military-sponsored activities) and well-being (e.g., depression, social connections, and coping).
- Questionnaires were completed on a computer.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 1,036 adolescents who had at least one Active Duty military parent participated (50% male).
- Nearly 50% of participants were male; the average age of participants was 13.39 years (SD = 1.98 years). Ethnicity/race of participants was not reported.
- Ninety-two percent had one Active Duty military parent; 8% were in a dual-military family.

LIMITATIONS

- Service branch and ethnic composition of the sample were not provided and could impact the results.
- Many variables were dichotomized (yes/no) which limits variability and the ability to examine nuanced findings.
- The sample was not random, and the results may not generalize beyond this sample.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include multiple respondents from the same family to explore perceptions of adolescents and parents
- Consider other factors related to the well-being of military-connected adolescents, including family relationship quality, type and duration of parents' deployment, and other stressors
- Examine other important youth outcomes, such as substance use and delinquent behavior

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>