

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Influences of Cumulative Risk and Protective Factors on the Adjustment of Adolescents in Military Families

Lucier-Greer, M., Arnold, A. L., Mancini, J. A., Ford, J. L., & Bryant, C. M. (2015). Influences of cumulative risk and protective factors on the adjustment of adolescents in military families. *Family Relations*, 64(3), 363-377. doi:10.1111/fare.12123

SUMMARY: The well-being of adolescents in families with at least one Active Duty military parent was examined in light of risk factors (both general and specific to military families) as well as protective factors. Experience of cumulative risk factors was a predictor of increased depression, decreased academic performance, and decreased persistence. Social support, from within the family and from outside the family, minimized relationships between cumulative risk factors and adolescents' outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Adolescents in Active Duty military families who reported at least one positive social connection experienced better developmental outcomes.
- While in general, there was a strong relationship between cumulative risk and youth outcomes, high levels of family support minimized the impact of that risk on depression, grades, and persistence.
- Engagement in formal supportive programs lessened the relationship between the presence of numerous risk factors and adolescents' grades.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop curricula that encourage parents to provide high levels of family support to adolescents in active military families, for example, increasing parents' ability to effectively listen to the adolescent
- Create programs that encourage mentoring and the fostering of social support for youth in military families
- Consider delivering programs for at-risk adolescents at both individual and family levels

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend the continual development of formal programs for adolescents of Active Duty military families
- Encourage programs to consider creating avenues for mentorship of youth in military families
- Suggest training for professionals who work with military families regarding the specific cumulative stressors faced by adolescents who have Active Duty military parent(s)

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METHODS

- Researchers used multiple community-based methods to recruit adolescents in Active Duty military families.
- Surveys were administered in computer laboratories on post and included questions about risk factors, family support, informal social connections, formal program engagement, depressive symptoms, academic performance, and persistence.
- Data were analyzed to examine the relationship between risk factors and youth outcomes with particular attention to the buffering effect of social support.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 1,036 youth with at least one Active Duty military parent located at four U.S. Army installations.
- Youth ranged in age from 11 to 18 (mean age was 13.39 years, SD=1.98years).
- This sample consisted of an equal proportion of genders, with 62% reporting being part of a racial/ethnic minority and 34% not living with both biological parents.

LIMITATIONS

- Data collected in the study are cross-sectional and therefore do not allow for interpretations of causality.
- Adolescents themselves completed the survey, so they may have underreported certain difficulties.
- Individuals who participated opted into the study; there may be important differences between those who decided to participate and those who did not.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize longitudinal designs to explore the trajectory of military youth well-being over time and its relationship to examined protective factors, with particular attention to transition periods
- Include measures from multiple reporters (for example, youth, parents, teachers, etc.) in order to give a more well-rounded understanding of youth well-being
- Focus on methods of identifying high-risk youth in Active Duty military families

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