

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Anxiety Sensitivity Among Children of Parents With Anxiety Disorders: A Controlled High-Risk Study

Mannuzza, S., Klein, R. G., Moulton, L. J., Scarfone, N., Malloy, P., Vosburg, S. K., & Klein, D. F. (2002). Anxiety sensitivity among children of parents with anxiety disorders: A controlled high-risk study. *Anxiety Disorders*, 16(2), 135-148. doi:10.1016/S0887-6185(01)00095-0

**SUMMARY:** When a parent has a mental health disorder, it may affect the environment in which children live, which may have certain effects on the children. Researchers interviewed 340 children and their parents with and without mood disorders, anxiety disorders, or both to evaluate whether parental mental health status predisposed children to elevated anxiety sensitivity. Results suggested that parental psychopathology did not predispose children to anxiety sensitivity.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Children did not have greater fear of anxiety if they had a parent with a mental health diagnosis.
- The type of mental health diagnosis a parent had was not associated with children's fear of anxiety either.
- Children in this study did, on average, express some fear of anxiety.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Educate children about the physical sensations of anxiety, why they occur, and what they mean
- Form relationships with military youth in order to identify those who may be most at risk for the development of high anxiety

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop workshops for military-affiliated youth that include strategies for managing anxiety (e.g., breathing exercises, imagery, muscle relaxation)
- Provide opportunities for highly anxious military youth to engage with peers and adults in a supportive environment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for military youth that work to lessen anxiety during potentially high-stress times
- Encourage training for professionals who work with military families regarding youth anxiety and how to lessen the experience of it

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## METHODS

- Potentially eligible families were identified from three outpatient psychiatric clinics and a dental clinic in New York State.
- Parents and children participated in standard diagnostic interviews, and children completed a questionnaire about their fear of symptoms of anxiety.
- Data were analyzed to determine if children's fear of anxiety differed based on parental mental health diagnoses.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 340 children of parents with (n = 261) and without (n = 79) past or present diagnoses of anxiety disorders, mood disorders, or both.
- The sample included 46% boys and 54% girls. Of the children, 76% were White, 11% were Black, and 8% were Latino.
- The average age of the children was 11.5 years old (range: 6 to 17 years, 11 months).

## LIMITATIONS

- Youth diagnostic interviews were performed; however, youth diagnoses were not included in analyses. It is possible that there are aspects of youth anxiety aside from fear of anxiety that are related to parent diagnoses.
- The authors note that youth with parents without mental health diagnoses had more fear of anxiety than general samples have had in other studies. This may have contributed to the resulting lack of significant differences between controls and other study groups.
- The findings are based on a sample exclusively from the New York metro area, so they may not be applicable to other youth.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate the associations between parental mental health diagnoses and other difficulties youth encounter
- Consider the relationship between parental mental health diagnoses and youth mental health diagnoses
- Examine the efficacy of programs to help decrease youth stress

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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