

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Changes in Perceived Social Support and Socioemotional Adjustment Across the Elementary to Junior High School Transition

Martínez, R. S., Aricak, O. T., Graves, M. N., Peters-Myszak, J., & Nellis, L. (2011). Changes in perceived social support and socioemotional adjustment across the elementary to junior high school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40(5), 519-530. doi:10.1007/s10964-010-9572-z

SUMMARY: To investigate school transitions, changes in functioning across a 1-year transition period, from the end of the last year of elementary school to the end of the first year of junior high school, were explored. Specifically, children's changes in perceptions of social support (peer, parent and teacher support) as it related to socioemotional adjustment (school problems, internalizing problems, inattention/hyperactivity, and personal adjustment) during the elementary to junior high school transition were examined.

KEY FINDINGS:

- When considered separately, girls' total social support, close friend support, and school support declined significantly across the transition to junior high school, while no significant changes were noted for boys.
- For boys and girls, socioemotional adjustment increased significantly across the transition to junior high school. However, when examined by gender, differences in school problems only increased significantly for boys.
- Changes in perceived social support during the transition to junior high was not associated with socioemotional adjustment and functioning after the transition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Develop programming that includes recreational activities between military youth and their families in order to provide opportunities for increased social support
- Host workshops for military parents with educational resources about factors that enhance youth's adjustment during academic transitions

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes with content related to social support based on gender, to acknowledge the different perceptions in social support that boys and girls bring to the transition from elementary school to junior high school
- Offer workshops focused on building positive peer support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage research that investigates strategies to improve teachers' and parents' involvement with military youth's school transitions
- Recommend professional development training related to military culture for community schools or school districts to help increase feelings of connectedness between military youth and teachers

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METHODS

- Participants were from two cohorts and recruited in their schools at the end of their fifth grade school year. Data were collected at two time points: at the end of fifth grade and at the end of sixth grade.
- Youth completed self-report surveys that assessed social support and socioemotional adjustment
- Statistical analyses examined youth's reports of social support and socioemotional adjustment during school transitions.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 140 fifth and sixth graders and were predominately White (92%).
- In the first cohort, there were 48 girls and 43 boys, with an average age of 11.5 years. In the second cohort, there were 32 girls and 17 boys, with an average age of 11.2 years.
- Among the sample, most students (92%) did not participate in special education classes or programs.

LIMITATIONS

- The homogeneity of the sample (92% White) severely limits the generalizability of the findings to a more diverse population.
- Additional reports of behavior, for example, by teacher or parent, would provide improved reliability to self-report measures.
- Measuring change across only two time-points does not provide a complete picture of children's transition experiences; additional data points would provide more informative data.
- The methods provided no way to determine if changes were due to the onset of adolescence or the grade transition in school.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Expand the research timeline to two or three years looking at the adjustment beyond elementary school through the 7th and 8th grades
- Investigate a larger sample size with more demographic diversity to enable the researchers to better examine the potential differences associated social support and socioemotional adjustment
- Utilize a longitudinal study design that includes more time points to further assess effects of junior high school transition

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