

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Adjustment Among Youth in Military Families: The Protective Roles of Effortful Control and Maternal Social Support

Morris, A. S., & Age, T. R. (2009). Adjustment among youth in military families: The protective roles of effortful control and maternal social support. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30*(6), 695-707. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2009.01.002

SUMMARY: This study examined the relation between adolescents' coping, ability to regulate emotions (called "effortful control" in this study), parental support, and adjustment as reflected in their conduct problems and emotional symptoms. The authors compared adolescents with parents who had returned from deployment in the past year to those who had not experienced a parental deployment in the past year.

KEY FINDINGS:

- There were no differences in coping style, ability to regulate emotions, parental support, or adjustment between adolescents with recently returned parents and those with non-deployed parents.
- Military youth had similar levels of emotional symptoms compared to youth in the general population, but were more likely to exhibit conduct problems than the general population.
- Higher levels of ability to regulate emotions predicted fewer emotional symptoms and conduct problems. In addition, lower levels of avoidant coping predicted fewer emotional symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate youth about healthy coping strategies (e.g., regulating emotions, not using avoidant coping strategies) to decrease emotional and behavioral problems
- Offer workshops focused on increasing parents' ability to support adolescents' use of positive coping skills during the year after their parents have returned from deployment
- Create mentoring programs for military youth in which youth can develop a more extensive network and learn more skills for coping with life's challenges

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for parents and youth during and immediately following parental deployment, particularly programs that address youth coping
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military youth regarding the specific challenges military youth face and effective coping strategies they can use
- Encourage investigation into factors that may underlie the presence of conduct problems in military youth

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METHODS

- Adolescent participants and their parents were recruited through a charter school on a Navy Air Station-Joint Reserve Base.
- Of those who qualified to participate, 30% completed questionnaires regarding adolescent coping and emotional and behavioral symptoms.
- Data were analyzed to determine whether youth who had experienced a parental deployment in the last year differed from those who had not, whether military youth differed from the general population of youth in terms of emotional and conduct symptoms, and associations between coping styles and symptoms.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 65 military-affiliated youth, ages 9-15 years with an average age of 11.75 years old (SD = 1.56).
- The participants included 48% White youth, 33% Black youth, 5% Latino youth, 6% Multiracial youth, and 2% Asian American youth.
- Of the youth, 55% had experienced a parent or parents deployed in the last year, ranging from one to six deployments, with an average of 1.83 deployments (SD = 1.08).

LIMITATIONS

- Adolescents and parents who chose to participate may be different from those who chose not to participate in ways that may influence results.
- Most of the variables were measured through adolescent self-report. Adolescents may have answered in more socially-desirable ways that may have influenced results.
- Only two youth in the sample had parents who were currently deployed. Results may be different for youth experiencing current parental deployment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize a longitudinal design to determine whether coping and adjustment change over time during reintegration
- Investigate the long-term benefits of different types of coping for military-affiliated youth
- Explore coping, emotion regulation, parental support, and adjustment during parental deployment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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