

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Social Stressors, Coping Behaviors, and Depressive Symptoms: A Latent Profile Analysis of Adolescents in Military Families

Okafor, E., Lucier-Greer, M., & Mancini, J. A. (2016). Social stressors, coping behaviors, and depressive symptoms: A latent profile analysis of adolescents in military families. *Journal of Adolescence*, 51, 133-143.
doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.05.010

SUMMARY: Adolescents in military families deal with stressors experienced by all adolescents as well as stressors inherent to having a Service member as a parent. This study explored the coping styles used by adolescents in Active Duty Army families. Findings suggest four unique coping strategies that were related to adolescents' adjustment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Researchers identified four coping styles of adolescents in Active Duty Army families: disengaged (i.e., typically did not engage in many coping behaviors), troubled (i.e., tended to engage in mostly coping behaviors oriented toward other people), humor-intensive (i.e., were most likely to use humor as a coping strategy), and active (i.e., frequently engaged in all adaptive coping behaviors).
- Adolescents were most likely to engage in active coping (40%) or humor-intensive coping (32%), which were associated with the lowest levels of symptoms of depression.
- The use of troubled coping (by 24% of adolescents) was most strongly associated with increased symptoms of depression, while disengaged coping (used by 4% of adolescents) was associated with slightly increased symptoms of depression.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop strengths-based programming for adolescents in military families that focuses on building resilience and adaptive coping strategies
- Offer classes that teach parents in military families how to encourage their adolescents to use adaptive coping strategies
- Create a mentoring program for military-connected youth in which youth can foster positive relationships with adults who can help them negotiate challenging situations

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training for professionals who work with military-connected youth regarding adaptive coping strategies
- Promote the development of programs that enhance the resilience of adolescents in military families
- Continue to support programs that help families as they encounter military-related stressors (e.g., relocations, deployment)

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

- Participants were recruited from U.S. Army Installations in the U.S. and Europe through flyers, emails, radio announcements, and verbal announcements during family programs.
- Surveys with questions about coping styles, sources of stress, and depressive symptoms were completed in a computer lab on the installations.
- Data were analyzed to determine what types of coping styles were used and the relationship between coping styles and depressive symptoms.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 1,036 youth between 11 and 18 years old who had at least one parent who was an Active Duty Soldier.
- Most (72%) of the sample were younger adolescents (between 11 and 14 years old), with 50% males and 50% females.
- The adolescents were White (37%); Black (19%); Latino (11%); Native American (2%); Multiracial (20%); or another race/ethnicity (9%). There seems to be missing information from 2% of participants.

LIMITATIONS

- Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data collected, it is unclear whether certain coping styles caused increased symptoms of depression, or increased symptoms of depression caused the use of certain coping styles.
- Most participants lived on an Army installation; results may not be able to be generalized to those who do not live on an installation or those who are connected to a different military branch.
- Researchers did not collect data regarding family structure, so it is unclear whether findings are limited to adolescents in certain types of families.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize a longitudinal design to discover the long-term impact of certain coping styles
- Replicate this research with adolescents in military families connected to other branches or living off of military installations
- Collect information about adolescents' family structure and examine its possible role in the use of different coping styles

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>