

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Weapon Carrying, Physical Fighting and Gang Membership Among Youth in Washington State Military Families

Reed, S. C., Bell, J. F., & Edwards, T. C. (2014). Weapon carrying, physical fighting and gang membership among youth in Washington state military families. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 18(8), 1863-1872. doi:10.1007/s10995-014-1430-2

SUMMARY: Washington State 8th, 10th, and 12th graders were surveyed to examine the association between parental military status (civilian, military non-deployed, and military deployed within the previous six years) and school based physical violence, weapon carrying, and gang membership. There were significant associations between parents' military service and school-based weapon carrying, physical violence, and gang membership in both girls and boys and among younger and older youth.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Significant associations emerged between parents' military service and school-based weapon carrying, physical violence, and gang membership. These findings held for both girls and boys and among younger and older youth.
- Eighth grade girls with military parents had higher odds of reporting gang membership compared to those with civilian parents; eighth grade boys with deployed parents had higher odds of physical fighting and gang membership compared to those with civilian parents.
- Tenth and 12th grade girls with military parents had higher odds of weapon carrying, physical fighting and gang membership compared to those with civilian parents; 10th and 12th grade boys with military parents had higher odds of physical fighting and those with deployed parents had higher odds of weapon carrying and physical fighting compared to those with civilian parents.
- Youth with deployed parents reported more negative educational issues and substance use, which varied by grade and gender.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to military parents about the increased risk for negative behaviors among children during deployment
- Provide support groups for military youths, especially those with deployed or previously deployed parents
- Release information regarding normative and problematic behaviors military youth may exhibit during deployment and ways to support struggling youth

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs focused on violence prevention in military families and youth
- Recommend disseminating information to military families regarding interventions aimed at violence prevention
- Encourage service provider trainings regarding the influence of parental deployment on youth violence

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METHODS

- Data were obtained from the 2008 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, which is a semi-annual survey administered in Washington State in October.
- Schools are randomly chosen to participate, and student participation is voluntary and anonymous.
- Students answered questions about school-based physical fighting, school-based weapon carrying, gang membership, parental military service, parental deployment, and demographic variables.

PARTICIPANTS

- Nine thousand nine hundred eighty-seven 8th, 10th and 12th graders responded to the three questions of interest (52% female, 59% in 10th or 12th grades).
- Most were White (range of 44-66% depending on gender, grade and military status) or other (20-39%), 7-15% were Latino/Latina and 3-12% were Black.
- Twelve percent of the participants had parents that were military but had not deployed to a combat zone in the previous six years; 6% had a parent who had deployed recently. No information about military branch was available.

LIMITATIONS

- The data were cross-sectional and causality cannot be inferred.
- All data were self-reported which may introduce biases.
- The researchers did not control for several potential confounding variables such as timing, duration and frequency of deployment or socio-economic status beyond maternal education, which could influence the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Employ longitudinal strategies with a population-based sample to further examine youth violence as it related to military deployment
- Determine how to best target and disseminate violence prevention programs for military youth
- Examine the effectiveness of violence prevention programs currently offered to military youth

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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