

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Comparison of Overweight and Obese Military-Dependent and Civilian Adolescent Girls With Loss-of-Control Eating

Schvey, N. A., Sbrocco, T., Stephens, M., Bryant, E. J., Ress, R., Spieker, E. A., ... Tanofsky-Kraff, M. (2015). Comparison of overweight and obese military-dependent and civilian adolescent girls with loss-of-control eating. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 48(6), 790-794. doi:10.1002/eat.22424

**SUMMARY:** Many female youth suffer from disordered eating, and stress, including military stress, may play a role in eating habits. Eating disorder and depression symptoms, as well as social adjustment, were compared between female military and civilian dependents. Across a variety of measurements (e.g., eating and body image questionnaires, insulin and glucose measurements), military youth had greater disordered eating and depression than civilian youth.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- More military dependents (17%) met the criteria for binge eating disorder (BED) than civilian dependents (2%).
- Military dependents reported having greater concern with eating, weight, and body shape and more objective binge episodes than their civilian counterparts.
- Military dependents reported greater depressive symptoms than civilians, placing them in the mild depression range on average.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes in stress-management for military dependents in order to help prevent or treat the development of eating disorders
- Offer workshops that increase awareness about healthy eating habits for military families
- Educate military families about the signs of disordered eating among youth

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support the development of programs for female military dependents who are struggling with, or are at risk of developing, eating disorders
- Recommend professional development for community providers that serve military families and may encounter disordered eating among youth
- Encourage military families and dependents to receive regular health screenings

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from two other studies' samples, a pilot study of military dependents and an efficacy trial of civilian youth, as well as via flyers and mailed advertisements.
- Body mass index (BMI), waist-circumference, and insulin and glucose levels were measured, and youth completed questionnaires regarding eating disorder symptoms, depression symptoms, and social adjustment; inclusion criteria included experiencing a loss of control while eating during the past month and having a BMI between the 85th-97th percentile.
- Eating disorder symptoms, depression symptoms, and social adjustment were compared between military and civilian youth, controlling for age, race, and BMI.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 23 military and 105 civilian female dependents who were overweight or obese.
- Average age was 14.66 years (SD = 1.72) for military dependents and 14.49 years (SD = 1.64) for civilian dependents.
- Military youth were 52% White, 22% Black, 17% Multiracial, and 9% unknown; civilian youth were 62% White, 24% Black, 9% Multiracial, 3% Asian American, and 4% unknown.

## LIMITATIONS

- Since data were cross-sectional, no causal conclusions can be drawn.
- Different processes were used to determine insulin and glucose levels between military and civilian youth, and results of these analyses should be interpreted with caution.
- The samples sizes differed greatly, potentially causing error in analyses.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect longitudinal data among military youth to help clarify whether and how the stress associated with military life contributes to the development of eating disorders over time
- Explore mediating factors that may explain the differences between military and civilian youths' rates of disordered eating (e.g., irregular schedules, stress levels, social support)
- Conduct in-depth, qualitative interviews of military youth to understand how disordered eating develops within this population

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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