

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Positive Youth Development Among Diverse Racial–Ethnic Children: Quality Afterschool Contexts as Developmental Assets

Smith, E. P., Witherspoon, D. P., & Osgood, D. W. (2017). Positive youth development among diverse racial–ethnic children: Quality afterschool contexts as developmental assets. *Child Development, 88*(4), 1063–1078. doi:10.1111/cdev.12870

**SUMMARY:** The relationship between after-school program quality and positive youth development has been mostly studied among adolescents but not among younger children. This study assessed the quality (i.e., structure, support, and engagement) of 71 after-school programs and the performance (i.e., competence, caring, connection, and cultural values) of 663 children from those programs. Results indicated that good after-school program quality was associated with positive child development among children of a diverse racial/ethnic background.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Child performance was positively associated with after-school program quality, especially on the scales of prosocial behavior, connection, respect, and collective efficacy.
- The association between child performance and program quality held up at Wave Two after controlling for child performance at Wave One (baseline).
- Program quality was associated with respect for adults only among Black children but not White children.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Create a healthy and safe environment for children of various racial/ethnic background
- Attend training about positive child development to enhance their ability to provide support to military families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Design after-school programs that aim to promote competence, connection, and cultural values in military children
- Offer after-school programs that are tailored to children of a diverse racial/ethnic background

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development of evidence-based after-school programs for military families
- Recommend training of professionals who work with children in military families to promote positive child and youth development

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## METHODS

- Children were recruited from after-school programs by letters to their parents.
- Children completed electronic surveys in a group format at Wave One (fall) and Wave Two (spring); the attrition rate was 9%.
- Each after-school program was evaluated by several observational measures that assessed the structure, support, and engagement of the program; child performance was assessed in the dimensions of competence, caring, connection, and cultural values.
- Data were analyzed to examine the relationship between program quality and child performance.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 663 children (at Wave One) from 71 after-school programs.
- The average age of the children was 8.80 years (SD = 1.12).
- About half of the children were White (48%), followed by Black (24%), Latino (8%), and other (20%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Only White and Black children were included to analyze the cultural differences, so the results cannot be generalized to children of other racial/ethnic background.
- It was not clear how long the children were enrolled in the after-school program, which may have confounded the results.
- Children were tested in a group format, so their answers may be influenced by others and the results may be subject to social-desirability bias.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term relationship between program quality and child performance
- Recruit children from various racial/ethnic background so that the results can be better generalized
- Examine how the age of children influences the association between program quality and child performance

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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