

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Substance Abuse and Other Adverse Outcomes for Military-Connected Youth in California: Results From a Large-Scale Normative Population Survey

Sullivan, K., Capp, G., Gilreath, T. D., Benbenishty, R., Roziner, I., & Astor, R. A. (2015). Substance abuse and other adverse outcomes for military-connected youth in California: Results from a large-scale normative population survey. *Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics*, 169(10), 922-928. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.1413

SUMMARY: Data from the 2013 California Healthy Kids Survey (N = 688,713) were used to examine associations between military affiliation and youth substance use, violence, and weapon carrying. Military-connected youth were more likely than their civilian peers to report using substances, experiencing both physical and nonphysical violence, and carrying weapons.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Although most military-connected youth demonstrate resilience, some may be more likely to engage in risky behaviors during wartime.
- Military-connected youth were 59% more likely than civilian youth to report recent cigarette use and 50% more likely to report recent alcohol use.
- Youth whose parents/caregivers were in the military were 48% more likely to have experienced physical violence (e.g., being pushed, shoved, or slapped) and 42% more likely to have endured non-physical harassment (e.g., having rumors spread) than civilian youth.
- Military-connected youth were twice as likely to report carrying a gun than civilian youth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for military-connected youth focused to increase social support and access to resources
- Provide classes for military parents about talking to children about substance use and other risky behaviors
- Include information about violence and bullying in family program curricula

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support collaborations between school personnel (i.e., teachers, counselors) and parents to develop initiatives to support military-connected youth and military families
- Recommend assessing substance use and experience of violence among military-connected youth

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METHODS

- Data were drawn from the 2013 California Healthy Kids Survey (completed by 85% of the school districts in the state).
- Participants completed scales of parents' participation in the military, lifetime and recent substance use, physical violence, nonphysical harassment (e.g., rumors spread about respondent), and weapon carrying.
- Logistic regression was used to examine associations among violence, harassment, weapon carrying, and the odds of substance use between military-connected and civilian youth.

PARTICIPANTS

- Youth (N = 688,713) in 7th, 9th, and 11th grades participated, approximately 7.94% of whom (n = 54,684) were military-connected.
- Regarding gender: 50% female, 50% male.
- Racial/ethnic composition: 51% Latino, 21% White, 13% other, 11% Mixed, 4% Black.
- The majority (92%) were civilian youth; 8% military-connected.

LIMITATIONS

- Data were cross-sectional; therefore, causality cannot be inferred.
- All measures were self-report, and youth may have been reluctant to report actual substance use, physical, or non-physical aggression.
- Analyses did not control for other variables likely to be associated with youth substance use and aggression, such as deployment, socioeconomic status, mental health functioning, or parent-child relationship quality.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Future research could examine the impact of parental deployment on children's substance use and aggression.
- Additional studies could evaluate the impact of programs and policies focused on supporting military-connected youth.
- This study could be replicated in other states outside of California.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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