



Screening Military Dependent Adolescent Females for Disordered Eating

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SUMMARY: Adolescent females and their parents were recruited from an adolescent medicine clinic at a large military medical center, and both completed a short survey after the appointment. Approximately one in five adolescents and 26% of the parents met criteria for disordered eating, rates higher than the civilian population. A strong relationship emerged between parental and youth disordered eating.

KEY FINDINGS

- Approximately 20% of youth and 26% of parents met the screening criteria for disordered eating.
- One in three adolescent females with disordered eating had a parent who was also at risk for eating disorders.
- In a subset of the sample in which the military member deployed in the past two years, 22% of the teens and 34% of the parents were at risk for an eating disorder.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Develop curriculum for military youth about healthy eating, including information about dangers of disordered health behaviors
- Include information in parenting curricula about the importance of role modeling healthy eating and warning signs for disordered eating among their children
- Teach families during reintegration events about the possibility of disordered eating during times of high stress, such as when managing deployments

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Recommend routine screening of both military youth and parents for disordered eating
- Allocate resources to comprehensive services for military youth who are engaging in unhealthy eating to prevent progression to more serious problems
- Encourage installations to host awareness events to inform military families about the signs of eating disorders and encourage them to seek support when needed

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were recruited between 2002-2004 from a National Naval Medical Center after an appointment in the adolescent medicine clinic.
- Parents and youth completed an eating disorder screening questionnaire separately.
- Approximately 85% of eligible parent-child dyads participated in the study.

PARTICIPANTS

- Female adolescents (n=340) ranged in age from 12-21 (mean was 15 years old).
- 64% of youth were White, 18% African American, and 7% Hispanic.
- Parents: 278 mothers, 62 fathers. 82% of parents were married. Average age was 45 years.
- Families were affiliated with the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard.

LIMITATIONS

- Researchers used a screening questionnaire which may not yield an accurate assessment of actual disordered eating.
- As the sample was drawn from a major military hospital in a large metropolitan area, it is unknown if differences may arise with other military populations.
- The sample may be biased due to the voluntary nature of participation.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Future research could assess eating behaviors among male adolescents.
- Research could use a standardized assessment of eating behaviors.
- Further research could examine differences between maternal versus paternal perspectives on youth disordered eating.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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