

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

A Survey of Adolescent Military Family Members' Self-Image

Watanabe, H. K. (1985). A survey of adolescent military family members' self-image. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 14(2), 99-107. doi:10.1007/BF02098650

SUMMARY: Survey data were used to assess differences in self-image between civilian and military adolescents. Adolescents in military families scored similar to or better than civilian adolescents on levels of self-image.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Military adolescents scored higher on measures of impulse control, emotional tone, body- and self-image, social relations, morals, and vocational-educational goals than civilian adolescents.
- Family harmony and functioning did not differ between military and civilian adolescents.
- Overall, female military adolescents scored higher on self-image scales than male military adolescents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer professional development opportunities for professionals who work with military families regarding strengths-based approaches to supporting youth identity development
- Provide classes for military families about parent-child relationships and youth self-image
- Compile and make available resource directories for military family members about mental health services for adolescents

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families regarding healthy identity development and family relationships
- Continue to support programs for adolescents in military families who are at risk for maladjustment
- Recommend the development of training for military family members about self-esteem during adolescence

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METHODS

- Military adolescents were recruited from adolescent medicine clinics at military medical centers in Washington, D.C. and Virginia.
- Participants completed a questionnaire about self-image during the clinic visit.
- Data from military adolescents were compared to standard scores for civilian adolescents.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 135 adolescents in military families between the ages of 13 and 18 years old.
- Of the participants, 80% had a parent who was an officer.
- Most of the participants (66%) were from Active Duty military families; 33% were from retired military families.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample was of adolescents who were receiving services at military medical clinics. This group may differ from other military adolescents in important ways that may influence results.
- With most of the participants from families of officers, these results may not extend to populations of adolescents who are primarily in families of enlisted Service members.
- These data cannot support the idea that being affiliated with the military causes adolescents to have better self image. There are other factors that may differ between military and civilian families that contribute to these differences.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Use a longitudinal design to examine changes in military adolescents' self-images over time
- Recruit adolescents from schools or community centers
- Include other measures known to be related to adolescents' self-image such as parent-child communication and relationship quality

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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