

Children and siblings of deployed military more likely to use drugs

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Youth with a deployed military parent or sibling use drugs and alcohol at a higher rate than their peers, finds a new study in *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

The team of researchers used data from more than 14,000 responses from the 2011 California Healthy Kids Survey that asked youth in grades 5–11 questions including whether they had either a parent or [sibling](#) in the [military](#) and the number of deployments they had served. They were also asked about lifetime or recent (past 30 days) use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, [prescription drugs](#), and other drugs (inhalants, [cocaine](#)/crack, [methamphetamine](#)).

Study results found that multiple deployments by a parent or sibling were associated with an increased likelihood of lifetime and recent use among related youth, except for lifetime smoking. For instance, a high number of deployments were associated with a 14 percent increase in likelihood of lifetime [drug use](#). There was an 18 percent increase in likelihood for recent use.

In addition, youth with a sibling in the military used drugs at a higher rate than those with a parent in the military.

"Everyone talks about the impact of parents, but no one talks about the impact of other close family members, such as siblings," said lead author Tamika Gilreath, Ph.D., from University of Southern California's School of Social Work. "There is research to suggest that the deployment of a sibling is similarly disruptive as parental deployment. Parental concern may influence their interactions with the younger sibling who is left to cope with their own sense of loss as well as their parents'."

With the long wars waged in Afghanistan and Iraq, the number and length of deployments for active U.S. military members are higher than any time in history.

"This study is timely because recently, there has been greater focus on the effects of deployment on veterans and their families and this focus has stimulated data collection among this population so that we can better understand the issues," commented Randi Alter, Ph.D., of the Indiana Prevention Resource Center at Indiana University School of Public Health, Bloomington, who was not a part of the study.

The study authors concluded that schools with a high density of students with deployed family members might provide substance-use education curricula and suggested that community medical providers could increase screening of these children for substance abuse.

More information: Gilreath TD, Cederbaum JA, et al. 2013.
Substance use among military-connected youth. *American Journal of Preventive Health*.

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