

Children of military parents, caregivers at greater risk for adverse outcomes

August 17 2015



Credit: Robert Kraft/public domain

Children with parents or caregivers currently serving in the military had a higher prevalence of substance use, violence, harassment and weapon-carrying than their nonmilitary peers in a study of California school children, according to an article published online by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

While most young people whose families are connected to the military demonstrate resilience, war-related stressors, including separation from parents because of deployment, frequent relocation and the worry about future deployments, can contribute to struggles for some of them, according to the study background.

Kathrine Sullivan, M.S.W., of the University of Southern California School of Social Work, Los Angeles, and coauthors analyzed data collected in 2013 that included 54,679 military-connected and 634,034 nonmilitary-connected secondary school [students](#) from public civilian schools in every county and almost all the school districts in California. Students were defined as military connected if they had a parent or caregiver currently serving in the military. Latino students were the largest percentage of the sample (51.4 percent) and 7.9 percent of students indicated having a parent in the military, according to the results.

The results indicate military-connected students reported higher levels of lifetime and recent substance use, violence, harassment and weapon-carrying compared with nonmilitary-connected students. For example:

- 45.2 percent of military-connected youth reported lifetime alcohol use compared with 39.2 percent of their nonmilitary-connected peers
- 12.2 percent of military-connected youth reported recently smoking cigarettes in the previous 30 days compared with about 8.4 percent of their nonmilitary peers
- 62.5 percent of military-connected students reported any physical violence compared with 51.6 percent of nonmilitary-connected students
- 17.7 percent of military-connected youth reported carrying a weapon at [school](#) compared with 9.9 percent of nonmilitary students

- 11.9 percent of military-connected students reported recent other drug use (e.g., cocaine and lysergic acid diethylamide [LSD]) compared with 7.3 percent of nonmilitary peers

The authors note the data they used were cross-sectional and therefore cannot infer causality. The data also come from a self-report survey and students may have been reluctant to report risky behavior.

"Based on the totality of findings from this study and others, further efforts are needed to promote resilience among [military children](#) who are struggling. More efforts in social contexts, including civilian schools and communities, to support [military](#) families during times of war are likely needed," the study concludes.

More information: *JAMA Pediatr.* Published online August 17, 2015.
[DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.1413](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.1413)

Provided by The JAMA Network Journals

Citation: Children of military parents, caregivers at greater risk for adverse outcomes (2015, August 17) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-children-military-parents-caregivers-greater.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--