

# OMK Camps Help Youth Develop Self-Efficacy to Deal with the Challenges of Military Deployments

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## BACKGROUND: WHAT WE KNOW

Military youth have unique challenges that set them apart from their peers.

When a parent is deployed, they may experience the following situations:

- More responsibilities at home, changes to everyday activities, and disruption of family routines
- More stress, greater anxiety, and emotional difficulties
- Increased behavior problems and problems at school

### Why Camp?

Attending a summer camp has been linked to many positive outcomes including:

- Growth in Self-Esteem
- Social Skills
- Positive Behaviors and Attitudes
- Physical Abilities
- Creative Thinking

These outcomes align with suggestions made to help military youth cope with the negative outcomes of deployment.



### OMK Camps

Camps have become quite popular as a setting to conduct programming to address the unique needs of military youth.

- Operation: Military Kids (OMK) is the U.S. Army's collaborative effort with 4-H to support youth who are impacted by deployment.
- OMK has conducted camps in some states for as long as nine years. However, there has been limited research published on the specific outcomes related to participation.



*"It is our ONLY opportunity to get together with military youth. Our [family readiness group] is located over an hour away and our company is spread throughout the state. This makes spending time with other [military] youth difficult. Camps offer us that connection."*



# WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW

Supplemental grants to provide camps for military youth were offered to OMK programs through a partnership with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Four specific skills were identified for the camps to focus on in 2012: (1) self-efficacy, (2) communication, (3) coping, and (4) social skills. Camp programming was designed to target these skill areas. The impact of the camp on these skills was investigated by looking at military youth's self-efficacy in relation to the other three skills.

## Research Questions

To what extent do military youth who attended an OMK/OSD-funded camp feel more efficacious about their ability to:

1. Communicate about being a military child?
2. Cope with obstacles related to being in a military family?
3. Handle the social aspects of their life?



## Methods

**Participants:** Recruited from the Indiana and Ohio 2012 OMK/OSD-funded camps. Campers and a parent or guardian who provided consent and informed assent were asked to complete the questionnaire.

**Instrument:** The questionnaire was structured using an 11-point Likert-type response scale and used a posttest /retrospective pretest methodology. It also included demographic items and open-ended questions.

**Procedure:** E-mails were sent to participants with links to the online questionnaires approximately 3 months after the end of camp.

**Data analysis:** (1) Paired sample *t*-tests and (2) themes from open-ended responses.

Respondents		
Total # Camp Participants	Youth	Adult
Indiana <i>N</i> = 43	<i>n</i> = 13 (30%)	<i>n</i> = 12 (28%)
Ohio <i>N</i> = 133	<i>n</i> = 22 (17%)	<i>n</i> = 36 (28%)
Total <i>N</i> = 176	<i>n</i> = 35 (20%)	<i>n</i> = 48 (27%)

## Framework

### Self-Efficacy Theory

- *Self-efficacy* is a person's belief in their capability to complete tasks.
- A higher level of self-efficacy can improve an individual's ability to handle and adapt to challenging situations.
- Research about self-efficacy in general and youth self-efficacy is extensive.
- Examination of self-efficacy in a camp setting is limited, and no known studies have looked at military youth's self-efficacy.



## Demographics

### Youth Respondents

- **Average age :** 12
- **Gender distribution:** 40% Males; 60% Females
- **First year campers:** 51%
- **Number of deployments experienced:**
  - One deployment (29%)
  - Four or more deployments (26%)
- **Service member:**
  - Relationship: Father (77%)
  - Branch: Army National Guard (49%)

### Adult Respondents

- **Service member:**
  - Relationship: Campers' father (88%)
  - Branch: Army National Guard (52%)
- **Number of deployments experienced:**
  - Two deployment (40%)
  - Four or more deployments (31%)



# RESULTS: WHAT WE FOUND

- Youth self-reported an average increase in their self-efficacy of 1 point or higher on all but 5 items (out of 39 items).
- All posttest scores were above the moderately confident level (5 or more on an 11-point scale).
- **Youth:** Changes from pre to post were statistically significant on all but 7 items (out of 39 items).
- **Adult:** Changes from pre to post were statistically significant on all items.

## Increased Confidence

Confidence increased the most in the following areas:  
Mean increase of 2 or more points (11-point scale)



### Youth

- Telling others about pride in being from a military family (COMMUNICATION)
- Explaining to community members what it means to be a military youth (COMMUNICATION)
- Staying friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Making friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)

### Parents

- Making friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Staying friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Talking with friends about being part of a military family (SOCIAL)

*“I learned I am not the only one going through this, so I’m more able to speak [about deployment and being from a military family].”*

## Areas of Most Confidence

- Having pride in being part of a military family (COMMUNICATION)
- Working well with those in their age group (SOCIAL)
- Making friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Handling added responsibilities at home (COPING)
- Accepting that family member will miss important activities during deployed (COPING)

## Areas of Least Confidence

- Talking with someone they don’t know well (SOCIAL)
- Asking for help when feeling stressed about deployment (COPING)
- Giving themselves a pep talk when feeling low (COPING)
- Talking with community members or someone they’ve just met about what it’s like to be a military youth (COMMUNICATION)
- Preventing arguments with those in their age group (SOCIAL)
- Talking with teachers about deployment (COMMUNICATION)



*“The best thing about attending OMK is meeting the other kids who understand what it’s like to have family in the military.”*





# CONCLUSIONS: USING THE FINDINGS

Camps can increase self-efficacy for deployment-related skills and produce beneficial outcomes for military youth.

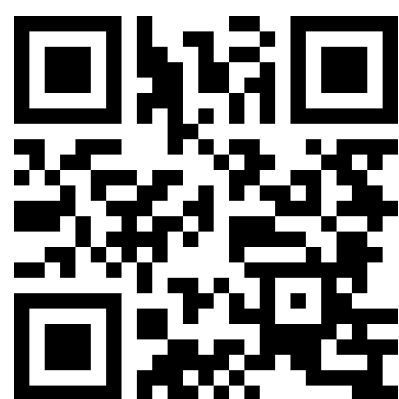


*“The best part was the high adventure activities, it showed her how well she can do, and that she can take risks and enjoy the outcomes.”*

## Recommendations for Research

1. Analyze data for differences based on camper demographics.
2. Continue to be informed by multiple perspectives and use a mixed methods approach.
3. Follow up with participants after camp by conducting focus group or interviews to obtain rich description of outcomes.
4. Take steps to increase the number of respondents such as traditional pre/posttest and offering incentives.

Scan the QR code to find more information on this study.



## Recommendations for Practice

1. **Continue offering camps for military youth**, paying particular attention to the areas where youth feel less confident.
2. **Include both informal and structured discussion about aspects of military culture.**
  - Allow time each day for introducing a topic related to military culture to prompt discussion among campers.
  - Provide staff with talking points they can use to talk to campers.
3. **Include a variety of activities geared towards targeted outcomes.**
  - Encourage youth to practice decision making, and also introduce them to activities they may not otherwise try.
  - Use challenging, novel activities when possible.
4. **Use trained counselors and adult staff.**
  - Consider 4-H camp counselors and young alumni.
  - Use military youth who have aged out of attending camp.



## Reference List Available Upon Request

Research conducted in partnership with Purdue University Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education



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