

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

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Introduction

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

Attending a summer camp has been linked to many positive outcomes that align with suggestions made to help military youth cope with the negative outcomes of deployment



Methods

As part of a camping initiative through Operation: Military Kids (OMK) that was funded by grants from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), four specific skills were identified as a focus in 2012: (1) self-efficacy, (2) communication, (3) coping, and (4) social skills. Camp programming was designed to target these skill areas.

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?



Participants: 35 military youth ages 9 to 17 from the Indiana and Ohio 2012 OMK/OSD-funded camps and 48 parents

Instrument: Retrospective post-then-pre format with communication (11 items), coping (17 items), and social skills (11 items) using an 11-point scale; open-ended questions; and demographic questions

Data Collection: Internet-based survey completed 3 months after camp

Data Analysis: *t*-tests and thematic analysis of open-ended responses

Results

Increased Confidence

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

Campers

- 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)

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)

Lessons to Share

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 toward 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 as campers

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



Reference List Available Upon Request

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

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