

Purpose

Many children who grow up in military families live in a unique environment that involves base living, multiple moves, school changes, deployment of a parent(s), and possible added stressors that typical children raised in civilian homes do not experience. While there are over 1.1 million children being raised in military homes today, there has been very little research looking at how this community and unique environment influences their development, mental health, and quality of life. The present study wanted to see how children of military members compared to children of civilians in experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences, and to see if their unique lives contribute to the development of perspective-taking and self-compassion compared to children of civilians.

Introduction

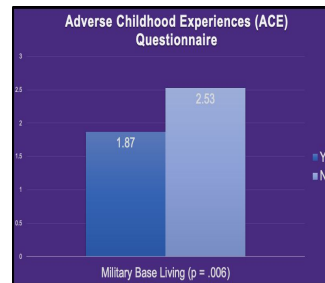
- Although there are more than 1.1 million children of military members in the United States, there is a lack of research that focuses on their well being and development (Russo & Fallon, 2014).
- Typically children of military members move every 2 to 3 years. Relocation has been shown to add extra stress to children's lives. Webb, Pederson, and Mok (2016) observed that relocating children had to adapt not only to the normal biological and developmental stresses of youth, but also to new environments, schools, and social networks.
- Research from Weber and Weber (2005) suggests that adjustment to relocation, deployment, and other military life situations can be positively influenced by developing adaptive coping strategies.
- Studies on self-compassion have demonstrated it to be an effective tool to help cope with and combat worry, impulsivity, and anxiety. Self-compassion strategies are an effective way to regulate emotion and lessen negative emotional patterns (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).
- There is a paradox that shows military youth faring well despite the significant stressors they experience (Sumner, Boisvert, & Andersen, 2015), however when non-military youth experience these stressors it is a significant predictor of antisocial behavior (Agnew, 2006).
- The present study hopes to further study the factors that contribute to differences in development of self-compassion and perspective-taking when examining military children and their lifestyle.

Results

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Questionnaire

- An independent samples *t*-test did not determine significant differences in number of adverse childhood experiences between children of military members ($M = 1.96, SD = 2.07$) and children of civilians ($M = 2.34, SD = 2.28$), $t(510) = -1.57, p = .116$ (See Figure 1).
- An independent samples *t*-test determined significant differences in number of adverse childhood experiences between individuals who were reared on a military base ($M = 1.87, SD = 2.00$) and those who were not ($M = 2.53, SD = 2.37$), $t(510) = -2.78, p = .006$ (See Figure 1).

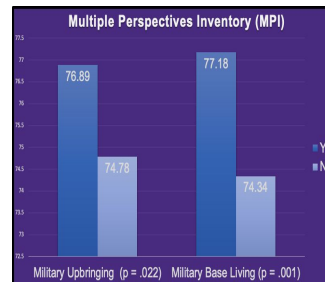
Figure 1



Multiple Perspectives Inventory (MPI)

- An independent samples *t*-test indicated significant differences in perspective-taking between children of military members ($M = 76.89, SD = 7.74$) and children of civilians ($M = 74.78, SD = 9.06$), $t(510) = 2.29, p = .022$ (See Figure 2).
- An independent samples *t*-test indicated significant differences in perspective-taking between individuals who were reared on a military base ($M = 77.18, SD = 7.73$) and those who were not ($M = 74.34, SD = 8.57$), $t(510) = 3.43, p = .001$ (See Figure 2).

Figure 2



Self-compassion Scale (SCS)

- An independent samples *t*-test demonstrated significant differences in self-compassion between children of military members ($M = 3.08, SD = 0.65$) and children of civilians ($M = 2.81, SD = 0.76$), $t(510) = 3.44, p = .001$ (See Figure 3).
- An independent samples *t*-test demonstrated significant differences in self-compassion between individuals who were reared on a military base ($M = 3.10, SD = 0.65$) and those who were not ($M = 2.79, SD = 0.72$), $t(510) = 4.53, p = .001$ (See Figure 3).

Figure 3



Method

Participants

- The study consisted of 512 participants who were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling online via such avenues as Facebook, Instagram, and email. This method of recruitment allowed for nation-wide participation.
 - Male $n = 70$, female $n = 440$, transgender $n = 2$
 - Ages range from 18-79
 - Children of military members $n = 421$, children of civilians $n = 91$
- Participation restrictions required subjects to be aged 18 years or older in order to give consent and participate in the study. Participation was strictly voluntary, and individuals were not compensated for their involvement.

Procedures & Measures

- Participants could participate from any setting of their choosing as long as they had Internet access and an Internet compatible device (computer, laptop, iPad, tablet, smartphone). Participants followed a Qualtrics link to the survey, read and signed an informed consent form, then completed a survey consisting of 91 items from a demographics form and the following measures:
 - Multiple Perspectives Inventory (Gorenflo & Crano, 1998)
 - Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983)
 - Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003)
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (Felitti et al., 1998)

*Not included for the scope of this presentation

Discussion

- Contrary to the common conception that many of the experiences typical to military families contribute to risk factors, the military culture and community may serve to promote resilience and positive coping skills instead.
- The results of this study suggest that sense of community may serve as a significant protective factor stemming from parental military membership. For instance, children of military members often endure high levels of adversity, stress, and change due to circumstances that are rare in civilian life (e.g. frequent relocation, separation from parents due to deployment, repeated disruption of peer relationships), yet despite these experiences, they appear to possess greater proficiency in self-compassion and perspective-taking than do their civilian counterparts.
- This relationship may be attributed to the fact that children of military members experience these situations in the context of the military culture and community, which inherently exposes them to greater understanding, empathy, and common humanity, even more so when children are enmeshed in the lifestyle of living on a military base, as opposed to children of military members who are not.
- Further benefits of being reared on a military base appear to include some level of protection from adverse childhood experiences that is not generally observed when comparing children of military members to children of civilians in general.

References

- Agnew, R. (2006). General Strain Theory: Current Status and Directions for Further Research. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 43, 101-123.
- Davis, M. H. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 44, 85-103.
- Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., ... Marks, J. S. (1998). Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Questionnaire. *Psychiatry*, 61, 973-982.
- Gorenflo, Daniel & Crano, William. (1998). The multiple perspectives inventory: A measure of perspective-taking. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 57, 163-177.
- Mantzios, M. (2014). Exploring the Relationship between Worry and Impulsivity in Military Recruits: The Role of Mindfulness and Self-compassion as Potential Mediators. *Stress and Health*, 29(5), 397-404.
- Neff, K. D. (2003). Development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2, 223-250.
- Neff, K. D., Hsieh, Y., & Dejitterat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, Achievement Goals, and Coping with Academic Failure. *Self and Identity*, 4(3), 263-287.
- Russo, T. J., & Fallon, M. A. (2014). Coping with Stress: Supporting the Needs of Military Families and Their Children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 42(5), 407-416.
- Sumner, J., Boisvert, D., & Andersen, J. P. (2015). The Effects of Stress and Social Support on Externalizing Behaviors Among Children in Military Families. *Deviant Behavior*, 37(3), 246-262.
- Webb, R. T., Pedersen, C. B., & Mok, P. L. (2016). Adverse Outcomes to Early Middle Age Linked With Childhood Residential Mobility. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 51(3), 291-300.
- Weber, E. G., & Weber, D. K. (2005). Geographic Relocation Frequency, Resilience, and Military Adolescent Behavior. *Military Medicine*, 170(7), 638-642.