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1–23

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DOI: 10.1177/0044118X15592296

yas.sagepub.com



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Abstract

Research has found that when compared with civilian students, military-connected students in the United States have more negative mental health outcomes, stemming from the stress of military life events (i.e., deployment). To date, studies on military-connected youth have not examined the role of protective factors within the school environment, such as school climate, in the mental health and well-being of military-connected adolescents. Given this gap in the research on military adolescents, this study draws from a large sample of military and non-military secondary adolescents in military-connected schools ($N = 14,943$) and examines associations between school climate, military connection, deployment, and mental health. Findings show that multiple components of school climate are associated with a lower likelihood of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation and increased likelihood of well-being among students in military-connected schools, after

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controlling for student demographics, military connection, and deployments. The authors conclude with a discussion of school climate interventions for military-connected youth.

Keywords

school climate, mental health, adolescents, military-connected youth

Introduction

In the United States, nearly four million children and adolescents have a parent (or both parents) who is on active duty, in the National Guard or Reserve. Over two million children have a mother or father who has served in Iraq or Afghanistan, many of whom have served multiple times (see <http://www.militarychild.org>). In the past decade, the mental health of military-connected adolescents has become a critical issue for researchers and practitioners in education, public health, and psychology throughout the United States (Cederbaum et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2011; Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012; Gilreath et al., 2015; Lester & Flake, 2013). Empirical data from clinical studies in the past 10 years indicate that stressors surrounding parental deployment adversely affect the mental health of military-connected adolescents. A recent retrospective cohort study, for instance, found that among military youth with a deployed parent, the number of mental and behavioral health visits increased by 11% during the 2005-2006 fiscal year (Gorman, Eide, & Hisle-Gorman, 2010). In addition, behavioral disorders increased by 19%, and stress disorders increased by 18% (Gorman et al., 2010). Furthermore, recent studies have found that adolescents with a deployed parent have higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation than peers who have not experienced parental deployment (Cederbaum et al., 2014; Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; Galovski & Lyons, 2004).

Studies have identified deployment-related stressors within the family context that contribute to poor mental health outcomes among military-connected youth. These include prolonged separation, household financial stress, left-behind parent anxiety, and exposure to veteran war trauma (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2010; Chartrand & Seigel, 2007; Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007; Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009; Lester & Flake, 2013). In addition, recent research has begun to examine factors in multiple social contexts that protect military adolescents and other family members from the stress of deployment and other military life events. Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, and Lerner (2013) and Masten (2013) showed that military-connected youth and parents have the innate attributes that promote

resilience during parental deployment and reintegration. Both studies note that self-regulation is a key factor that helps military-connected youth cope and thrive in the face of adverse experiences. When other family members (i.e., a left-behind parent) possess strong self-regulation skills, military-connected children are resilient during times of stress. Conceptual papers also have highlighted community and societal protective factors such as strong connections with a local military installation, connectedness to military culture, pride in contributing to an important mission, community mental health care supports, and support networks that protect military families from the stress of deployment and other military life events (Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013; De Pedro et al., 2011).

At present, there is a dearth of studies examining the contributing role of protective factors within school environments, such as school climate, in the mental health and well-being of military-connected youth. Overall, studies on military-connected youth have focused on risk issues by utilizing clinical or convenience samples (Astor et al., 2013). Astor and Benbenishty (2013) highlighted the need for research to explore factors in normative supportive developmental settings, such as school environments, that promote the well-being of military-connected youth in times of war. This is surprising given that every school district in the United States has children and adolescents from military families (Esqueda et al., 2012). The vast majority (80%) of military-connected students attending public schools are concentrated in 214 public school districts in the United States, also known as military-connected school districts. These districts serve at least 400 students or more than 10% of their total student enrollment (Kitmitto et al., 2011).

Recent qualitative studies provide nascent knowledge informing how supportive and caring school environments protect military-connected youth from negative social and emotional outcomes and support healthy development (De Pedro, Atuel, Esqueda, & Malchi, 2014; Mmari et al., 2008). Studies have suggested that caring teacher relationships, peer support, school connectedness, and school leaders' awareness of military-specific life challenges are critical in promoting the well-being of military-connected youth during times of war (De Pedro, Atuel, et al., 2014; De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, & Astor, 2014; Garcia, De Pedro, Astor, Lester, & Benbenishty, 2015; Mmari et al., 2008). However, these studies utilize small, purposive, and/or convenience samples and hence lack generalizability to the development of school-based interventions.

Using a large sample of students, attending middle and high schools surrounding military installations in Southern California, this study addresses a gap in the research by exploring the role of school climate in the mental health outcomes of both military and non-military youth. We believe that findings from this study could inform the creation of school-based interventions that

can transform school climate to promote the healthy development of military-connected youth. School climate in this study refers to students' perceptions of five key dimensions in a school environment. These include meaningful participation, relationships with caring adults, school connectedness, high expectations from school adults, and feeling safe (see Austin, Bates, & Duerr, 2013, for a description of the California Healthy Kids Survey [CHKS] scales). Overall, we believe that findings from this study could provide researchers and educators with meaningful information about school climate interventions in military-connected schools.

Military Adolescents' Experiences With Deployment Stressors

Routine military life can be challenging for military families (Cozza, Lerner, & Haskins, 2014; De Pedro et al., 2011; Lester & Flake, 2013). Military families are often separated, move multiple times, and sometimes have financial problems. Moreover, military families have little choice about where they are stationed. Military adolescents' lives are framed by constant change and adaptation to new settings (Esqueda et al., 2012; Lester & Flake, 2013). For instance, military-connected youth change schools approximately every 2.9 years, or sometimes as many as 9 times (Esqueda et al., 2012).

The cycle of deployment is a critical dimension surrounding the stress of being in a military family. Lester and Flake (2013) conceptualized a multi-stage deployment cycle. This cycle begins with a period of anxious planning as a family receives notice that a parent will be sent to combat, then preparing for departure, and the deployment phase. During the deployment phase, left-behind family members must cope with long months of separation. They manage a household with one parent gone and often encounter challenges with finances, the redistribution of household responsibilities, and accessing social supports in the civilian community and/or military installation. Lester and Flake (2013) stated that the most stressful period of the cycle is the post-deployment phase. During this period, service members come home from war and reintegrate into a family system where routines have changed and adolescents have adopted increased household roles and responsibilities.

For military-connected adolescents, a parent's deployment can cause elevated stress and worry (Cozza et al., 2014). This includes repeated and prolonged separation from a parent, anxiety about changes in family dynamics and fear when loved ones are in harm's way, (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Flake et al., 2009; Mmari et al., 2008). Military adolescents also have increased household roles and responsibilities when a parent is deployed (Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008; Huebner et al., 2009; Lester &

Flake, 2013). Mmari and colleagues (2008) found that adolescents performed household duties normally reserved for adults, including taking care of younger siblings. The experience of reintegration can also be stressful. Studies have found that reintegrated military families must deal with shifting household responsibilities and roles, the stress of a veteran's re-establishment of employment, and the veteran's process of re-establishing a relationship with the military child after months or even years of separation (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Doyle & Peterson, 2005; Lester & Flake, 2013). Given that deployment can be a time of stress for military adolescents, we hypothesize family deployment is associated with negative mental health outcomes.

Having a Sibling in the Military

Siblings play a critical role in the emotional development and psychological well-being of adolescents (Cederbaum et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2013; Rodriguez & Margolin, 2011). A review of the literature reveals that there is little empirical data on adolescents who have a sibling in the military. A recent qualitative study examined in detail that the deployment of a sibling creates psychological strain for an adolescent. Rodriguez and Margolin (2011) found that a sense of loss and anxiety permeates the family system, which, in turn, leads to families isolating themselves from support systems and retreating from previously enjoyable activities. Youth are also aware of their parents' pain, sadness, and worry about the sibling's safety. Similar to parental deployment, Rodriguez and Margolin (2011) found that parents would become more protective of a left-behind sibling with the goal of keeping them from being lonely or sad. However, the study uncovered possible protective factors in the family context, such as parental support and the enlisted sibling serving as a role model of hard work, self-sacrifice, and discipline toward personal goals. More recent studies on large normative samples of adolescents in military-connected schools indicate that sibling military service is associated with depression, suicidal ideation, school victimization, and weapon carrying (Cederbaum et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2014). Given the preceding findings on sibling military service, this study posits that sibling military service is associated with negative mental health among adolescents.

The Protective Role of School Climate in Adolescent Mental Health

In times of stress, a caring and supportive school climate could have protective effects on the mental health and well-being of adolescents in military families. Decades of research on school climate's impact on other student

populations, including at-risk and psychologically strained student populations, indicate that researchers and educators should explore military-connected school environments for factors that promote well-being among military adolescents. School climate research and theory have spanned several decades with early philosophical roots in Dewey and Piaget, who recognized the significance of the school environment on the learning and emotional well-being of students. This research has also been translated to practice for more than a century. The development and implementation of caring school environments that support healthy social and psychological development for youth living in poverty and high-crime neighborhoods arose in the late 19th century and into the 20th century with the Hull House in Chicago, in Comer's (1984) School Development Program in the New Haven Public School District in the 1970s, and Dryfoos's (1995) conceptualization of the full-service urban school in the 1980s. Recent research and reviews highlight that the protective role of school climate is associated with reductions in school violence, increased academic achievement, enhanced motivation, and resilience after experiencing war trauma (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009; Cohen, 2014; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). To date, the relationship between school climate and the mental health and well-being of military-connected youth has not yet been examined in studies with large samples of military and non-military students in the same school environments. We hypothesize that a positive school climate is associated with positive mental health and well-being.

Measuring School Climate

Until recently, definitions and measures of school climate have varied widely. Hence, translating school climate research to practice (i.e., school-based interventions) was challenging for researchers and practitioners. Recent reviews of school climate have called for studies to utilize multiple and valid measures of school climate (Thapa et al., 2013; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). A recent study of students in military-connected schools utilized multiple constructs for caring relationships with adults and peers, awareness and respect for student's family background, risky behavior perceptions, sense of safety and order, and meaningful participation and belonging (De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty, & Esqueda, 2014). Thapa et al. (2013) identified several dimensions in the school climate research literature, including safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment (i.e., school connectedness, physical layout), and the school improvement process. Given the need for assessing multiple dimensions of school

climate, this study utilizes five key climate measures available in a widely used statewide survey on adolescent risk behavior and perceived school climate—safety, caring relationships, high expectations, school connectedness, and meaningful participation.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To date, research has not yet systematically examined the role of school climate in the mental health outcomes of military-connected adolescents. Given this gap in the research literature, this study explores school climate, military connection, deployment, and mental health among youth in military-connected schools. We hypothesize a positive relationship between the number of deployments and higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation and a lower level of well-being. In addition, we anticipate that when compared with non-military students, adolescents with a military parent and/or sibling have higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation and lower rates of well-being. We also posit that high levels of caring relationships, school connectedness, high expectations, and meaningful participation are associated with an increased likelihood of well-being and decreased likelihood of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation.

Method

The data utilized in this study were drawn from the California Department of Education's (CDE) administration of the CHKS. The CHKS is the largest statewide survey of elementary, middle, and high school students' perceptions of school climate, resiliency, and risk behaviors in the United States (Austin et al., 2013). The CHKS is comprised of a required core module and several optional survey modules. All schools are required to administer the core module, which is comprised of items that cover student demographics, school climate perceptions, school victimization, substance use, and gang involvement. One survey module of interest is the military-connected school module, which includes items on military connection, deployment, military family issues, military culture, and mental health. The CHKS is administered to 5th, 7th, 9th, and 11th graders in all public schools in all school districts in California.

Because the study is designed to assess school climate, military connection, deployment, and mental health among adolescents in military-connected schools, the data in this study focus on all secondary students in the 7th, 9th, and 11th grades in six military-connected districts in Southern California ($N = 14,493$). These districts administered the required core module and the

military-connected school module as part of their participation in a consortium developed to improve school climate in military-connected schools. Four of the six districts are suburban, one is rural, and one is urban. District-level rates of the proportion of students receiving free/reduced-price lunch ranged from 37.5% to 66%, and the mean rate is 52.3%. The final response rate was 86.73%.

Dependent Variables

Well-being and depressive symptoms. Participants answered six items related to depressive symptoms in the CHKS military-connected school module. This scale was adapted from the Positive and Negative Affect-Expanded Form and Kessler 6. All questions began with “In the past 30 days, how often did you feel . . .” Examples from the well-being items included “proud,” “strong,” and “excited.” Examples of depressive symptoms included “nervous,” “like everything feels hard to do,” and “nothing can cheer you up.” Responses were on a 5-point Likert-type scale and ranged from 0 = *none of the time*, 1 = *a little of the time*, 2 = *some of the time*, 3 = *most of the time*, and 4 = *all of the time*. The composite score for each participant was derived by summing up the depressive symptoms items. The measures were pilot tested with 50 youth in the school districts via focus groups in November 2010. A factor analysis was completed; a two-factor solution showed a total explained variance of 56%. For each scale, the appropriate items were summed, and a 75% cut off was used to mark high levels of well-being and depressive symptoms. The internal reliability of the well-being and depressive symptoms scale was .894 and .812, respectively.

Suicidal ideation. Participants answered one item related to suicidal ideation in the CHKS core module: “During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider suicide?” Response categories were yes/no.

Independent Variables

Independent variables included student self-reported demographic variables (grade level, race and ethnicity, and gender). Grade level was represented by 7th grade as the reference category and two dummy variables: 9th grade and 11th grade. Race and ethnicity were represented by White as the reference category, and the dummy variables were Asian, Black, mixed, and Hispanic/Latino. Military-related characteristics were represented in this study by type of military connection and deployment of a family member. Students were asked to report whether they had a family member in the military—*no one in*

the military, a parent, or a sibling. Students were also asked to report how many times a family member was deployed in the past 10 years—*none, one time, and two or more times.*

Perceived school climate was assessed by student self-reported items of multiple components of school climate, including caring relationships, high expectations, school connectedness, meaningful participation, and safety. These scales have been utilized in recent empirical studies on school climate in military-connected schools (De Pedro, Astor, et al., 2014;), and their psychometric characteristics were shown to be highly reliable. For each scale, appropriate items were reverse coded, and items were summed for each scale.

Caring relationships. The caring relationship scale included three self-reported items ($\alpha = .78$). Students reported whether there is a teacher or some other adult at school who tells them when they do good, who notices when they're not there, and who listens to them when they have something to say. The responses to these items were on a 4-point Likert-type scale and ranged from 1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *a little true*, 3 = *pretty much true*, and 4 = *very much true*.

High expectations. The high expectations scale included three self-reported items ($\alpha = .82$). Students reported whether at school there is a teacher or some other adult who tells them they do a good job, who always wants them to do their best, and who believes they will be a success. The responses to these items were on a 4-point Likert-type scale and ranged from 1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *a little true*, 3 = *pretty much true*, and 4 = *very much true*.

School connectedness. The belonging scale consisted of three student self-reported items ($\alpha = .80$). These items asked students whether they feel close to people at this school, are happy to be at this school, and feel like they are part of this school. The possible responses to these items were on a 5-point Likert-type scale and ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither disagree nor agree*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*.

Meaningful participation. The meaningful participation scale consisted of three items ($\alpha = .74$): I do interesting activities at school, I help decide things like class activities, and I do things that make a difference. The possible responses to these items were on a 4-point Likert-type scale and ranged from 1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *a little true*, 3 = *pretty much true*, and 4 = *very much true*.

Feeling safe. The feeling safe scale consisted of two items ($\alpha = .81$). One item is "I feel safe in my school." The responses to this item were on a 5-point Likert-type scale and ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither*

disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The second item is "How safe do you feel when you are at school?" The responses to this item were 1 = very safe, 2 = safe, 3 = neither safe nor unsafe, and 4 = unsafe, 5 = very unsafe. The second item was recoded so that responses in both items were congruent.

Analytical Plan

This study sought to assess the contribution of school climate to mental health above and beyond that of student demographics, military connections, and deployment. Hence, we conducted first a series of logistic regression analyses for each of the dependent variables with student demographics, military connection, and connected variables (see Table 3) followed by a series of logistic regressions that included school climate (Table 4). The data were analyzed using bivariate and multivariate analyses using SPSS version 21. Bivariate analyses were conducted to compare rates of well-being, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation among non-military students, students with a military parent, and students with a military sibling; and among students who reported no deployments in the past 10 years, one deployment, and two or more deployments. As the dependent variables in this study were dichotomous, multivariate analyses using logistic regression were conducted.

A hierarchical linear model was considered for this study. Several school climate studies have accounted for between-school variation. However, we found that intra-class correlation coefficients were well below .01, indicating that there was more within-school variation than between-school variation in school climate. Hence, school climate was analyzed as an individual-level variable.

As seen in Table 1, the sample is almost evenly split by male and female and by grade level (7th, 9th, and 11th grades). The sample of students reflects racial diversity, expected in California. Almost three fourths of the sample (72.7%) is non-White. Hispanic students comprise the largest racial/ethnic group in the sample (50.3%), while Black students comprise 3.0% of students. Almost 15% of students in the sample have a military connection. About 4.2% of the sample is comprised of students with a military sibling, while 8.8% of the students have a parent in the military. The rest of the sample, 86.9%, reported not having a connection to the military.

Results

Well-Being and Depressive Symptoms, Military Connection, and Family Deployment

As seen in Table 2, bivariate analyses were conducted to compare the well-being and depressive symptoms scores of military students (students with a

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N = 14,943).

	Total (N = 14,943)	No one in the military (n = 12,990)	Parent (n = 1,396)	Sibling (%) (n = 649)
	n (%)	%	%	%
Gender				
Female	7,606 (51.7%)	51.5	51.1	50.9
Male	7,181 (48.6%)	48.5	48.9	49.1
Grade				
7th	4,588 (32.9%)	32.3	40.6	25.6
9th	4,908 (35.2%)	35.4	33.6	33.9
11th	4,446 (31.9%)	32.3	25.8	37.5
Race/ethnicity				
Asian	1,189 (8.2%)	7.9	12.1	7.1
Black	432 (3.0%)	2.5	7.2	4.0
White	3,948 (27.3%)	27.3	25.6	31.7
Mixed race	1,606 (11.1%)	10.3	18.1	12.3
Hispanic	7,261 (50.3%)	52.0	36.9	44.8

military parent, students with a military sibling) and non-military students. Table 1 indicates no significant differences among the three groups in terms of well-being ($\chi^2 = .052$, $df = 2$, $p = .97$). However, significant differences among the three groups were detected in depressive symptoms rates ($\chi^2 = 9.85$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). About 7.9% of students with a military parent reported high levels of depressive symptoms, slightly higher than students with a military sibling (6.9%) and non-military students (5.7%). A significant bivariate association was found between military connection and suicidal ideation ($\chi^2 = 31.753$, $df = 8$, $p = .000$). Students with a military sibling (27.6%) reported higher rates of suicidal ideation than students with a military parent (26.2%) and non-military students (19.6%).

As seen in Table 2, bivariate analyses were then conducted to assess rates of well-being, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation by the number of family member deployments in the past 10 years. Table 2 indicates no significant relationship between deployment and well-being. About 7.2% of students who reported two deployments reported high depressive symptoms, slightly higher than those reporting one deployment (5.4%) and no deployment (5.4%). A significant bivariate association was found between deployment and suicidal ideation ($\chi^2 = 31.753$, $df = 8$, $p = .000$). Of the students who reported two or more deployments (27.6%), 26% reported having suicidal thoughts, slightly higher than students reporting one deployment (23.5%) and no deployment (18.5%).

Table 2. Depression, Well-Being, and Suicidal Ideation by Military Connection (N = 14,943).

	Non-military (n = 12,990)	Military parent (n = 1,318)	Military sibling (n = 635)	Never (n = 12,990)	Once (n = 1,318)	Twice or more (n = 635)
Well-being						
High	1,133 (10.7%)	125 (10.7%)	60 (11.0%)	6,889 (89.8%)	892 (89.6%)	570 (89.7%)
Low	9,417 (89.3%)	1,046 (89.3%)	484 (89.0%)	780 (10.2%)	103 (10.4%)	65 (10.3%)
Depressive symptoms*						
High	559 (5.7%)	86 (7.9%)	36 (6.9%)	373 (5.4%)	51 (5.4%)	36 (7.2%)
Low	9,329 (94.3%)	1,001 (92.1%)	488 (93.1%)	6,854 (94.6%)	887 (94.6%)	488 (92.8%)
Suicidal ideation**						
Yes	1,622 (19.6%)	204 (26.1%)	121 (27.2%)	4,693 (18.5%)	162 (23.5%)	324 (26.0%)
No	6,671 (80.4%)	578 (73.9%)	324 (72.8%)	1,067 (81.5%)	527 (76.5%)	920 (74.0%)

*Significant χ^2 for differences by military-connected status, $p < .05$.

**Significant χ^2 for differences by military-connected status, $p < .001$.

Table 3. Logistic Regressions of Mental Health by Demographics and Deployment (N = 14,943).

Predictors	Well-being	Depressive symptoms	Suicidal ideation
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Constant	.12**	.04	.50**
7th (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
9th	0.60** [.52, 0.70]	1.01 [.81, 1.27]	0.54 [.05, 5.90]
11th	0.46** [.39, 0.54]	0.92 [.73, 1.15]	0.49 [.04, 5.46]
Gender			
Female (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Male	1.96** [1.71, 2.24]	1.03 [.85, 1.26]	0.60** [.53, 0.67]
Race/ethnicity			
White (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Asian	0.73 [.55, 0.97]*	1.69* [1.24, 2.31]	1.39** [1.12, 1.74]
Black	1.39 [.96, 2.02]	1.60 [.98, 2.61]	1.40 [.99, 1.98]
Mixed	1.10 [.85, 1.41]	1.34* [1.03, 1.87]	0.94 [.98, 1.24]
Hispanic	1.07 [.92, 1.25]	1.04 [.83, 1.29]	1.08 [.94, 1.24]
Military connection			
Non-military (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parent	.91 [.71, 1.16]	1.27 [.94, 1.71]	1.10 [.88, 1.37]
Sibling	.99 [.71, 1.37]	.95 [.61, 1.49]	1.17 [.90, 1.53]
Deployments			
One	1.03 [.82, 1.30]	1.06 [.77, 1.46]	1.27* [1.04, 1.56]
Two or more	1.11 [.91, 1.35]	1.31* [1.03, 1.69]	1.38** [1.16, 1.64]
Model evaluation			
Correctly predicted	89.6%	94.5%	80.0%
-2 Log likelihood	6,309.70	3,873.78	7,083.24
Cox & Snell R ²	.02	.01	.02
Nagelkerke R ²	.04	.01	.03
Block χ^2 (df)	201.57 (11)	37.87 (11)	122.03 (11)
Model χ^2 (df)	201.57 (11)	37.87 (11)	122.03 (11)
Goodness of fit			
Hosmer/Lemeshow	18.68	8.61	18.61

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Multivariate Analyses. As seen in Table 3, multivariate analyses were conducted to predict mental health variables based on background characteristics, military connection, and deployment. When compared with White students, Asian

Table 4. Logistic Regressions of Mental Health by Demographics, School Climate, and Deployment (N = 14,943).

Predictors	Well-being	Depressive symptoms	Suicidal ideation
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Constant	0.10**	0.34*	3.29**
7th (reference)	1.00	1.00	0.91* [.86, 0.97]
9th	0.59** [.50, 0.71]	0.91 [.71, 1.16]	1.02 [.98, 1.50]
11th	0.42** [.35, 0.51]	0.80 [.62, 1.03]	0.86 [.08, 1.63]
Gender			
Female (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Male	1.93** [1.67, 2.23]	1.03 [.85, 1.26]	0.55** [.49, 0.63]
Race/ethnicity			
White (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Asian	0.77 [.56, 1.05]	1.48* [1.06, 2.07]	1.28* [1.01, 1.61]
Black	1.74* [1.16, 2.62]	1.14 [.66, 1.99]	1.10 [.76, 1.60]
Mixed	1.10 [.85, 1.41]	1.15 [.83, 1.59]	1.21 [.98, 1.50]
Hispanic	1.29* [1.09, 1.54]	0.92 [.72, 1.16]	0.92 [.79, 1.07]
Military Connection			
Non-military (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parent	0.96 [.73, 1.23]	1.19 [.72, 1.45]	1.07 [.85, 1.35]
Sibling	1.02 [.71, 1.46]	0.97 [.61, 1.56]	1.24 [.94, 1.63]
Deployments			
One	1.06 [.83, 1.36]	1.02 [.72, 1.45]	1.27* [1.02, 1.57]
Two or more	1.16 [.93, 1.43]	1.34* [1.03, 1.76]	1.35** [1.12, 1.62]
School climate			
Caring relationships	1.26** [1.10, 1.44]	1.02 [0.85, 1.22]	0.90 [.79, 1.02]
Connectedness	1.08 [0.98, 1.19]	0.76** [.67, 0.85]	0.80** [0.75, 0.87]
Meaningful part	1.59** [1.45, 1.74]	1.16* [1.03, 1.32]	0.87* [.80, 0.95]
High expectations	0.96 [0.83, 1.10]	0.75** [0.64, 0.89]	0.95 [.84, 1.07]
Safety	1.10* [1.01, 1.21]	0.75** [0.67, 0.84]	0.81** [0.74, 0.87]
Model evaluation			
% Correctly predicted	89.9%	94.6%	80.0%
-2 Log Likelihood	5,906.43	3,642.23	6,710.86
Cox & Snell R ²	.04	.02	.06
Nagelkerke R ²	.09	.06	.10
Block χ^2 (df)	429.39 (16)	187.21 (16)	428.02 (16)
Model χ^2 (df)	429.39 (16)	187.21 (16)	428.02 (16)
Goodness of fit			
Hosmer/Lemeshow	17.32	24.96	10.19

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

students (odds ratio [OR] = .73; 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.55, .97]) had a decreased likelihood of reporting high well-being. When compared with female students, male students were more likely to report high well-being (OR = 1.96; 95% CI = [1.71, 2.24]) and less likely to report suicidal ideation (OR = .60; 95% CI = [.53, .67]). In Table 4, the results indicate that although bivariate relationships indicated that military connectedness was associated with suicide ideation and depressive symptoms (Table 2), these associations are not significant in the presence of the other predictors in the regression. In contrast, deployment, and especially two or more deployments, remained a significant predictor of depressive symptoms and suicide ideation, even when all other predictors were present. As seen in Table 3, two or more deployments were significantly associated with depressive symptoms (OR = 1.31; CI = [1.03, 1.69]). In addition, one family deployment was associated with suicidal ideation (OR = 1.27; CI = [1.04, 1.56]). Moreover, students who reported two or more deployments had a 38% increased likelihood of suicidal ideation.

In Table 4, school climate components were added to the regression model. The inclusion of school climate added significantly, above and beyond the variables included in Table 3, to the prediction of mental health outcomes. The strongest contribution was to the prediction of suicidal ideation from Cox and Snell R^2 of .02 to .06. A higher degree of caring relationships was significantly associated with an increased likelihood of high well-being (OR = 1.26; 95% CI = [1.10, 1.44]). A higher degree of meaningful relationships is significantly associated with high well-being (OR = 1.59; 95% CI = [1.45, 1.74]).

As seen in Table 4, the results also show that school connectedness, meaningful participation, and feeling safe were significantly associated with depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. An increasing level of school connectedness was associated with a decreased likelihood of being depressed (OR = .76; 95% CI = [.67, .85]) and a decreased likelihood of suicidal ideation (OR = .80; 95% CI = [.75, .87]). In addition, a higher level of meaningful participation was associated with depressive symptoms (OR = 1.16; 95% CI = [1.03, 1.32]) and a lower likelihood of suicidal ideation (OR = .87; 95% CI = [.80, .95]). Higher levels of feeling safe were associated with 25% lower odds of depressive symptoms (OR = .75; 95% CI = [.67, .84]) and a 19% reduced likelihood of suicidal ideation (OR = .81; 95% CI = [.74, .87]).

Discussion

Recently, researchers have begun to utilize large data sources to assess risky behaviors and mental health outcomes of military-connected students in different geographical locations. These studies have demonstrated that military

connection and deployment are significant predictors of youth outcomes such as mental health, substance use, and violence (Cederbaum et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2013; Gilreath et al., 2015; Reed, Bell, & Edwards, 2011a, 2011b). This study makes an important contribution to the existing research literature by assessing the contributing role of school climate to mental health above and beyond deployments and military connection. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that examines the critical role of the school environment in the mental health and well-being of military-connected students and their civilian peers in schools.

Military Connection and Deployment

The results of this study show that adolescents with a connection to the military have higher rates of depression when compared with non-military adolescents in the same schools. These findings support previous research on military adolescent mental health. Collectively, previous studies have shown that rates of depressive and psychiatric symptoms among military adolescents are significantly higher than civilian adolescents in the Iraq and Afghanistan war context (Cederbaum et al., 2014; Chartrand & Seigel, 2007; Gorman et al., 2010; Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007; Huebner et al., 2009). In this study, the greatest discrepancies between military-connected students and non-military students were found in suicidal ideation. Military-connected youth experience unique family and community stressors in the current Iraq and Afghanistan war context. These include issues such as geographic relocations and household financial stress. Furthermore, a large proportion of military families are Reservist and in the National Guard. They reside in civilian communities where local networks of support and mental health care that address deployment challenges are limited or not available (De Pedro et al., 2011; Lester & Flake, 2013; MacDermid, Samper, Schwarz, Nishida, & Nyaronga, 2008). This lack of access could potentially delay the utilization of care and social support for stress and anxiety related to family deployment and thereby exacerbate depressive symptoms. Future research is needed to assess potential associations between access to care and social support and mental health among Reservist and National Guard families.

The results of this study also show that adolescents with a sibling in the military have the highest rates of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation, when compared with students with a military parent and non-military students. Few previous studies have examined the experiences of adolescents with siblings serving in the military. This study finding adds to emerging knowledge about the psychological stress of adolescents with a sibling serving in the military. Rodriguez and Margolin (2011) found that youth experienced

stress and anxiety when a sibling enlisted in the military, especially during periods of deployment. The sibling relationship is often the most enduring family bond that adolescents experience. Stable and positive sibling relationships are linked to enhanced cognitive, emotional, moral, and psychosocial outcomes (Rodriguez & Margolin, 2011). During times of family and household stress, sibling relationships may provide a buffering effect for adolescents when household and financial stability is at risk. This study indicates that such interventions need to include strategies for helping youth cope with and understand a sibling's service in the military.

Multivariate analyses show that military connection does not remain a significant contributing factor in explaining mental health, when accounting for school climate. Family deployment, however, remains a significant contributing factor in depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. This indicates that in the current war context, deployment is a critical source of military family stress. Present-day experiences of family deployment are unique from previous wars. Service members are deployed multiple times, and service is often prolonged (more than 1 year). During a family deployment, military-connected youth cope with parental separation, the fear of a loved one's death and injury, and the stress and anxiety of a left-behind parent or caregiver (Huebner et al., 2009; Lester & Flake, 2013). This finding supports current educational reform initiatives, partnerships, and programs in military-connected school districts throughout the United States, and their focus on helping youth cope with deployment stress. University-district consortia such as Building Capacity in Military-Connected Schools (Building Capacity) and Welcoming Practices That Address Transition Needs of Military Students in Public Schools (Welcoming Practices) have developed school-based approaches to deployment-related stress and anxiety among students. For instance, Garcia, De Pedro, Astor, Lester & Benbenisht (2015) examined the implementation of a school-based intervention known as FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress), which helps military-connected youth develop skills to communicate with teachers, cope, problem solve, and manage stress during deployment.

The Protective Role of School Climate

The findings show that while deployment remains a strong predictor of mental health outcomes, relationships between school climate and each mental health category are still significant. This finding supports theoretical work and studies finding that a supportive school environment still significantly influences mental health outcomes and well-being, even among high-stress student populations (Thapa et al., 2013).

The results of this study also deepen our knowledge of how multiple dimensions of school climate influence student mental health outcomes in military-connected schools. Recent qualitative studies on military-connected schools have found that, on one hand, some school staff are struggling to address the social and emotional needs and challenges of military children, while on the other hand, teachers and other school adults are developing their own homegrown strategies for making schools more welcoming to military students (Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010; De Pedro, Esqueda, et al., 2014; Mmari et al., 2008). This finding provides empirical support that multiple components of school climate are associated with lower rates of depression and suicidal ideation as well as enhanced well-being. More detailed analyses can be conducted in schools to explore how teachers facilitate school connectedness, caring relationships, high expectations, and the safety of military students. Findings from these potential studies can uncover promising strategies specifically addressing the school-related challenges of military students.

This study yielded detailed information about the relationships between each component of school climate and three indicators of mental health. This information can inform the future development of school climate interventions and programs. Caring relationships were significantly associated with well-being. This finding mirrors previous school climate research and adds to emerging research on the role of adult support in the schooling experiences of military-connected youth (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003; Elliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010). De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, & Astor, (2014), for instance, found that military children were able to cope with deployment stress when adults in their school community provided them with emotional support and encouragement. However, caring relationships were not associated with depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation.

School connectedness was associated with negative mental health, specifically a lower likelihood of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. This finding adds to recent qualitative research, which suggests that feeling connected to their school community can help military-connected youth cope with deployment stress. These studies have indicated that school-based approaches that promote belonging, such as school assemblies, activities, clubs, cultural displays (i.e., bulletin boards), and extracurricular activities, facilitate school connection and can help create a sanctuary for students experiencing deployment-related psychological strain (Chandra et al., 2010).

Feeling safe was associated with all three indicators—a higher likelihood of well-being and lower odds of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. This finding shows that school climate intervention programs may need to focus on safety. School climate interventions that incorporate safety may

prove to be effective in addressing the mental health as well as the social and emotional needs of middle and high school students in military-connected schools. This study found that meaningful participation had a positive relationship with depressive symptoms. Past studies have well established that school engagement is positively associated with self-concept, self-esteem, and general well-being; hence, more research is necessary to examine this unexpected finding.

Limitations

Several limitations in this study must be noted before generalizing findings to current practice. First, we recognize that socioeconomic status is an important variable for studies on military adolescents. Students from military families have widely varied socioeconomic backgrounds, reflecting the range of military ranks and statuses. The CHKS does not have a variable indicating student socioeconomic status. We recommend that future studies on military students include socioeconomic status as a demographic variable. Second, logistic regression analyses on mental health by school climate were conducted in separate samples of military and non-military children. These analyses were conducted to compare the magnitude of associations between the two groups of students. Future investigations also could explore the relationship between school climate and mental health among students with a military sibling. Last, causality cannot be assumed due to the cross-sectional design of this study.

To assess causal relationships between school climate and mental health in military-connected schools, future studies need to assess longitudinal data. Large-scale data collection on school climate and military connection, such as the CHKS, is currently being conducted in various states. In addition, detailed qualitative studies are needed to examine how school staff and students in military-connected schools improve school climate perceptions among students. These studies can generate homegrown practices as well as provide more detailed information on how each component of school climate can enhance well-being and curb depression and suicidal ideation rates among students in military-connected schools.

This study also examined the multiple components of school climate as static and global variables. Future studies on school climate need to assess the impact of school climate at critical points of a student's schooling experience. For instance, a relationship with a teacher may be more critical in the life of a military-connected student at specific times of stress (e.g., when a parent deploys). The work of a current large-scale educational reform initiative in military-connected school districts, Welcoming Practices, shows that dimensions of school climate should be examined during events and times of stress.

The Welcoming Practices consortium is a large Department of Defense–funded partnership of universities and five school districts that is currently developing strategies and resources to address the needs of students from military families who are transitioning to new public schools. Preliminary data from Welcoming Practices suggest that the impact of school climate is stronger at specific points in time, including when a military-connected student enters school for the first time, during registration, during the first few months of school, and before a student moves to another school district due to military reassignment (Astor & Benbenishty, 2013). Future research on school climate and military-connected schools could incorporate more textured and layered dimensions of climate surrounding times of stress, transitions, and other events.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was partially supported by the Department of Defense Education Activity Grant HE 1254-10-1-0041.

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