
Communication, Coping, and Connections: Campers' and Parents' Perspectives of Self-Efficacy and Benefits of Participation in Deployment Support Camps

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Abstract: Military youth have unique challenges, particularly when a parent is deployed. Camp participation has been linked to multiple positive outcomes, thus camps have become popular as a setting for addressing these youth's unique needs. With limited existing research on outcomes related to participation, this study explored to what extent participation in OMK camps affected military youth's self-efficacy for communication, coping, and social skills. Participants responded to an online instrument three months after camp. Both campers and parents reported the largest increase in self-efficacy for communication skills, followed by social skills, and then coping skills. Open-ended responses overwhelmingly supported that developing friendships was one of the greatest benefits of attending a camp. The results are consistent with the literature regarding the importance of connectedness. Recommendations for conducting camps are offered. These findings may also be useful to those working with other special populations in the camp setting.

Introduction

U.S. military deployments have occurred at an unprecedented rate in the past decade (Department of Defense, 2010). An estimated 2 million children in military families have been affected by deployment. In response, programs have been created to support military children and youth during deployment. For the past 10 years, the U.S. Army collaborated with 4-H to support youth who are impacted by deployment through a program titled Operation: Military Kids (OMK). OMK was designed especially for those who had a family member in the National Guard or Reserves and were geographically dispersed throughout their respective states, as they are often lacking in support resources. Programs such as OMK are recognized for providing support for children of military personnel (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013; Huebner,

Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009; Lara-Cinisomo, Chandra, Burns, & Lau, 2013), but there is a lack of published research describing their effects.

Through collaboration with the 4-H program, camps for military youth have been conducted in some states for as long as 10 years. 4-H has a well-established camping program in many states that was readily adapted to this audience. Since 2009, with funding from the Department of Defense (DoD), grants have been made available to conduct camps that addressed needs of youth who have experienced the deployment of a family member. To date, evaluation data have been collected from campers at the conclusion of these residential camp sessions. However, while this method may document immediate reactions, it does not capture longer-term effects. As one way to address this gap in the literature, we conducted a study that collected data three months after camp participation, with both campers and parents as respondents. Specifically, the study reported here was designed to explore the extent to which participation in OMK camps affected military youth's self-efficacy for communication, coping, and social skills.

Review of Literature

Deployment

Military youth have challenges that set them apart from their peers. When a parent is deployed, they may experience changes such as taking on more responsibilities at home, changes to everyday activities, and disruption of family routines (Bailey, Lang, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ferrari, 2015; Knobloch, Pusateri, Ebata, & McGlaughlin, 2015). Upon return, military families must renegotiate boundaries (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2013; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009). During deployment, some military youth experience worry, greater anxiety, and emotional difficulties (Castenada et al., 2008; Knobloch et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2010; Mmari et al., 2009) and more stress (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; Gorman, Eide, & Hisle-Gorman, 2010). Adolescents may worry not only about the deployed parent, but the parent who remains at home (Knobloch et al., 2015; Mmari et al., 2009). There may be increased behavior problems (Barker & Berry, 2009), problems at school (Pfefferbaum, Houston, Sherman, & Melson, 2011; Richardson et al., 2011), and increased family conflict (Knobloch et al., 2015). However, a meta-analysis of 16 studies of children of deployed service members showed small effect sizes and mixed results (Card et al., 2011). The authors of this meta-analysis caution that these results do not mean that children are unaffected by deployment. Rather, the issues may be with measurement and instrumentation.

Although it is easy to recognize all the changes and challenges that military youth face, it is also important to recognize the strengths they have and the resilience they demonstrate. Effectively dealing with challenging circumstances may be a catalyst for growth (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Both youth and adults have reported strengthened relationships and family cohesion (Knobloch et al., 2015; Knobloch & Theiss, 2012) and increased independence and autonomy (Castenada et al., 2008; Knobloch et al., 2015; Knobloch & Theiss, 2012; Mmari et al., 2009) as a result of deployment. Pride in their deployed parent's service is also a positive theme that has been reported (Ferrari & Leonard, 2007; Houston et al., 2009; Knobloch et al., 2015). Other outcomes include being prepared for future deployments (Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Knobloch et al., 2015) and having new or unique experiences as a military family (Knobloch et al., 2015).

Many factors could affect whether outcomes are positive or negative. It is possible that deployment effects vary by age, gender, and number and length of deployments experienced

(Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2010). The effects may be different for reserve component families because they may have less access to resources and social support compared with active duty families located on or near military installations (Castenada et al., 2008; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2013; Park, 2011). Other factors include individual and contextual factors such as personal characteristics, coping style, social support, parent and family functioning, and the availability of community supports (Card et al., 2011). The issues faced by military youth co-occur with normative developmental changes (Millburn & Lightfoot, 2013). Even if deployment by itself does not have a negative effect on outcomes, it is possible that it may reduce youth well-being when combined with other risk factors (Lucier-Greer, O'Neal, Arnold, Mancini, & Wickrama, 2014).

Camp as a Setting for Positive Youth Development

Why is a camp setting chosen to reach military youth? Camp participation has been linked to positive outcomes including growth in self-esteem, social skills, positive behaviors and attitudes, responsibility, physical abilities, and creative thinking (Baughman, Garst, & Furhman, 2009; Garst, Browne, & Bialeschki, 2011; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Camps can create a supportive environment that allow youth to take risks, try new things, and become more confident (Arnold, Bourdeau, & Nagele, 2005). Campers, parents, and staff endorse these positive outcomes (Thurber et al., 2007).

In particular, camps are a way to bring together those who share similar situations. The literature contains reports of using the camp setting as a means to bring together those with the same chronic illnesses and health conditions, such as cancer (Conrad, & Altmaier, 2009; Gillard & Watts, 2013; Martiniuk, 2003), HIV/AIDS (Gillard, Witt, & Watts, 2011), and spina bifida (Holbein et al., 2013), among others, and with shared life circumstances such as bereavement (Creed, Ruffin, & Ward, 2001; Nabors et al., 2004). A systematic review of 21 studies of camps for children with chronic illnesses showed a high level of satisfaction and improvements in social-related outcomes, but noted some methodological limitations (Moola, Faulkner, White, & Kirsh, 2013). Features related to social support include fostering a sense of belonging and participants having the sense that they could relate to other campers (Gillard & Watts, 2013; Roberson, 2010). Roberson (2010) concluded that "condition-specific" camps may offer certain benefits not offered by attending camps with a broad range of participants (p. 258).

Camps for Military Youth

The positive youth development outcomes derived from camp participation align with those desired for military youth who are coping with the negative aspects of deployment (Huebner & Mancini, 2005, 2010). Thus, camps have gained popularity as a setting to conduct programs to address military youth's unique needs. At least three groups have sponsored camp initiatives for this audience: the National Military Family Association's Operation Purple camps; Camp Corral, which is sponsored by Golden Corral; and two initiatives through 4-H: deployment and reintegration support camps and military teen adventure camps.

Ferrari and Leonard (2007) surveyed campers attending an Operation Purple camp. They found that campers benefited by finding a sense of belonging, building self-confidence, and learning to help others in the same situation. Campers' comments indicated that, overall, after camp they viewed deployment more positively, and attending camp helped them to feel proud of their parents' service.

Chandra and her colleagues (Chandra, Lara-Cinisomo, Burns, & Griffin, 2012) studied Operation Purple camps, which were week-long camps targeted to youth with deployed parents. Camps focused on communication, military culture, sense of service, and engagement in outdoor activities. There were no significant differences between youth who attended camp and those who did not. At the three-month follow up, parents of campers reported a significant increase in their child's ability to make himself or herself feel better and greater improvement in their interactions with their child compared with no-camp parents. From open-ended comments, Chandra et al. (2012) also found there were what they described as secondary benefits to attending an Operation Purple Camp, such as parents reporting that youth were more confident and more independent, and both parents and youth reporting that youth had improved coping skills.

Marek and her colleagues (Marek, Hollingsworth, Zhang, & Brock, 2011; Marek, O'Rourke, & Moore, 2013) used several subscales from the American Camp Association (ACA) Youth Outcomes Battery to measure camper outcomes from attending camps. These camps were all supported by DoD grants to the 4-H programs in their respective states. Campers were between the ages of 6 and 17 (with instruments for 6 to 10 and 11 to 17). Participants in these camps perceived gains in independence, competence, responsibility, friendship, and teamwork; their scores were at or above national norms for all areas except friendship skills. The majority of campers indicated that attending camp reduced their stress. Those who reported a reduction in stress also reported greater improvements in friendship skills, independence, competence, responsibility, and teamwork. Among older youth, Marek et al. (2011, 2013) found that females reported more positive changes than male campers.

Through a deployment support camp grant to 4-H in 2011, Hill and Francis (2014) conducted several camps in the state of Utah. They targeted areas of the state with high deployment rates. The camps emphasized communication, self-efficacy, competence, relationships, and resilience. They found that 100% of campers said they would return if the camp were offered in future years. As with the Marek et al. (2011, 2013) studies, Hill and Francis used the ACA Youth Outcomes Battery. Their results mirrored those obtained by Marek et al. (2011, 2013).

Le (2014) reported on military teen adventure camps conducted in Colorado and Hawaii where the participants were between the ages of 13 and 18. Camps used a mindfulness curriculum that was embedded into camp activities. The mindfulness activities were ranked as the most useful in dealing with stress. The provision of free time was ranked by the majority of participants as most useful in terms of helping to make new friends and form strong connections. About one-third of participants indicated mindfulness and other activities were also helpful for making friends. Teens were highly satisfied with their camp experience.

Overall, campers attending camps for military youth and their parents have been satisfied with the camp experience and report positive effects of participation. A variety of measures have been used to study the outcomes of interest. Most studies of camps were conducted at the conclusion of the camp session and most collected data only from campers, with the exception of the study of Operation Purple camps (Chandra et al., 2012). In this study, campers and parents were surveyed at the beginning of camp, at the conclusion, and three months later. The desire to learn more about the effects of camp participation on military youth motivated the current study.

Relevant Theories

Resilience

The challenges presented by a parent's deployment can place military youth at risk for negative outcomes. Resilience theory can be useful for those who work with military youth, because the goal is for them to be able to handle adversity and grow from their experience. Developing resilience depends first on exposure to risk or adverse circumstances and then coping successfully with the risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; MacDermid, Samper, Schwarz, Nishida, & Nyaronga, 2008). Another way to describe resilience is "good outcomes in spite of serious threats" (Masten, 2001, p. 227). Authors emphasize that resilience is not a fixed trait; it is a dynamic process and there are multiple paths to resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Masten & Obradovic, 2006).

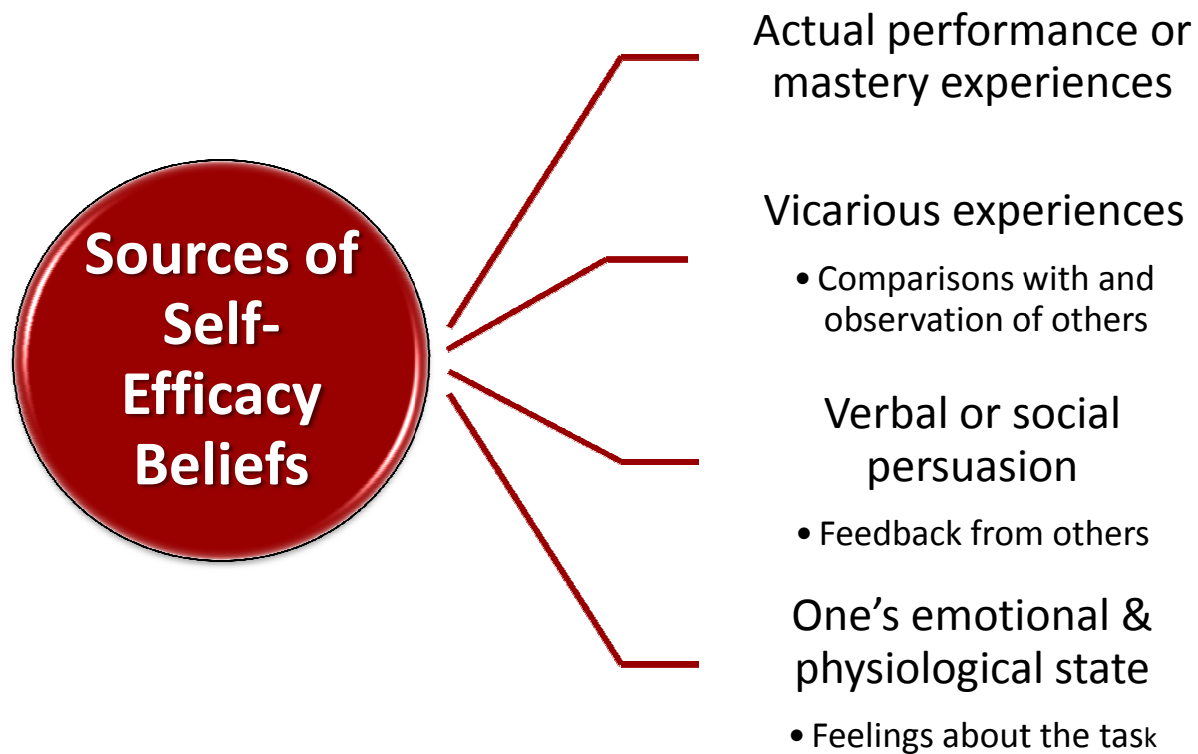
Resilience is affected by both internal and external factors (MacDermid Wadsworth, 2010; MacDermid et al., 2008; Richardson, 2002). Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) categorize the positive factors that promote resilience as *assets* and *resources*. Assets such as competence, coping skills, and self-efficacy reside within the individual. Resources are external to the individual and include parental support, adult mentoring, or community organizations that promote positive youth development. These factors may interact in complex ways to foster positive outcomes.

Like positive youth development, resilience is focused on strengths rather than deficits, with an emphasis on positive development, resources, and understanding healthy development in spite of risk exposure (Masten, 2014). Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) recommend a focus on developing the assets and resources of youth exposed to risk. For instance, if youth are more persistent, they may be more resilient when faced with challenges (Lucier-Greer et al., 2014). Social interventions with peers and caring adults have proven to be the most successful in building resilient assets in youth (MacDermid Wadsworth, 2010; MacDermid et al., 2008). Camps can be considered one such resource, and thus hold promise as a context for supporting resilience.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy theory provides another conceptual framework for this study. Authors suggest that understanding how to foster self-efficacy is necessary in order to support and enhance military youth's ability to thrive in the face of adversity (Cozza & Lerner, 2013). Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her capability to complete tasks (Bandura, 2006). A higher level of self-efficacy can improve an individual's ability to handle and adapt to challenging situations. Self-efficacy is quite malleable, subject to influence from multiple sources of information. Bandura (1997) identified four sources that influence the development of efficacious beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and one's emotional and physiological state (see Figure 1). Self-efficacy is task specific, that is, one can have high efficacy in one area, but have low self-efficacy in another. Therefore, researchers must define the area of interest.

Figure 1
Sources of Self-Efficacy



Research about self-efficacy is extensive, but few studies have looked at self-efficacy in a camp setting, and no known studies have looked at military youth's self-efficacy. The belief is that by increasing military youth's self-efficacy for deployment-related communication, coping, and social skills, they will become more resilient in dealing with everyday issues and also with those stressors unique to having a parent serving in the military.

Study Context

The goal when working with military youth is to capitalize on their strengths and build resilience, which aligns with the recommendation to use a strengths-based approach (Park, 2011). Camps provide the opportunity to meet others experiencing a similar situation, which is particularly important in states where the military population is largely geographically dispersed from any military installations. In 2012, OMK camps intentionally targeted four areas: self-efficacy, communication, coping, and social skills. Camp directors could choose how they incorporated the targeted areas into the design of the camp program.

The youth participants in this study attended one of two five-day, four-night residential camps in one of two states (Ohio and Indiana). Campers slept in cabins with 8 to 10 other youth of the same age. The camps were staffed by teenage and young adult camp counselors under the guidance of adult staff. The camps were offered for a low cost due to funding from grants and donations. At their respective camps, OMK camp directors used multiple opportunities to embed the targeted skills into the design of the camp environment and the activities. Although the activities differed, there were some common themes. Many activities were designed to facilitate

teamwork and cohesion. For example, as a way to enhance teamwork (i.e., social skills), various icebreakers and teambuilding activities were part of the opening day of camp. These fun activities were designed to create a welcoming environment that facilitates immediate belonging to the camp community.

Other activities were specific to the military audience, such as devoting a portion of the program for military service personnel from different branches of service to have a structured time to interact with the campers. This aspect of the program was designed to communicate about military values and instill pride in being a military kid. Some aspects of military culture were more subtle such as service members teaching about flag reveille and retreat and staffing an operations tent that served as a hub for supplies and communications, much like its military counterpart.

Many of the activities also offered a degree of novelty and challenge, such as water activities on the lake. By placing campers in situations where they are tackling challenging activities and living and working with others, the camp experience promotes a sense of accomplishment and fosters the development of responsibility, adaptation to change, cooperation, and self-efficacy. Other activities on the schedule would be considered typical camp activities, such as crafts and campfires. These activities, along with everyday activities such as mealtimes and cabin time, are times when campers experience camp traditions, have fun, and develop connections to each other.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent military youth who attended deployment support camps reported greater self-efficacy regarding their ability to:

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

Participants

The participants were military youth ($n = 35$) who attended one of the 2012 OMK camps offered in two states (Indiana and Ohio) and their parents or guardians ($n = 48$), for a 20% and 27% response rate, respectively (see Table 1).

Table 1
Camper and Parent Participants by Location

Total Number of Camp Participants	Campers	Parents
Indiana ($N = 43$)	$n = 13$ (30%)	$n = 12$ (28%)
Ohio ($N = 133$)	$n = 22$ (17%)	$n = 36$ (28%)
Total ($N = 176$)	$n = 35$ (20%)	$n = 48$ (27%)

The campers ranged in age from 9 to 15, with 12 being the average age of respondents; 60% of campers were female. Approximately half (51%) were first-year campers; an additional 20%

had attended camp for two years. The remainder of campers had participated between three and seven years. Approximately one in three campers (29%) had experienced one deployment. One quarter (26%) had experienced four or more deployments. Although all branches were represented, half of the campers (49%) were connected to a service member in the Army National Guard. For the majority of campers (77%), their father was the service member; a few had an older sibling and a few were from dual-service member families.

Instrumentation

We created a self-efficacy instrument for military youth because self-efficacy is task specific and no existing instruments were available to measure the concepts of interest (Clary, 2013). In addition to demographic questions, the instrument contained items regarding deployment-related communication, coping, and social skills.

Communication. Communication self-efficacy (11 items) included being able to express feelings, and the ability to explain to others including parents, peers, and the public about deployment.

Coping. Coping self-efficacy (11 items) included their ability to handle added responsibilities while a parent is deployed, to understand the stress related to not knowing what their deployed parent is facing, to cope without having the added support of the deployed parent, and to successfully seek out support.

Social. The social self-efficacy (17 items) items included aspects of feeling more connected to other military youth, the ability to discuss with friends what youth are going through, feeling part of a group, and the ability to make new friends.

We developed the items for the military self-efficacy scales based upon Bandura’s (2006) *Guide for Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales*. Bandura (2006) recommended a 100-point response scale, but the instrument for this youth population used an 11-point scale as recommended by Muris (2001). There were two parallel forms, one for youth and one for parents. The scale for all items was 0 – *not confident*, 5 – *moderately confident*, 10 – *highly confident*. Reliability coefficients ranged from .87 to .97 (see Table 2). These scores fall within the good to excellent range (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 2
Reliability Coefficients for Self-Efficacy Scales

Self-Efficacy Scale	Number of Items	Campers		Parents	
		Post	Pre	Post	Pre
Communication	11	.87	.97	.93	.96
Social	17	.90	.96	.96	.96
Coping	11	.94	.97	.93	.96

The instrument format was a retrospective post-then-pre, which allows for comparisons but avoids response shift bias (Marshall, Higginbotham, Harris, & Lee, 2007; Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000). We also asked several open-ended questions to gain further insight into perceptions of camp participation and its influence on the aforementioned skills.

Data Collection

We surveyed participants approximately three months after camp. To collect data we used a modified version of Dillman's (2000) Tailored Design Method. Data were collected using the Qualtrics web-based survey software. Research shows that self-report paper-and-pencil and Internet data collection methods are generally equivalent (Weigold, Weigold, & Russell, 2013).

Data Analysis

After running descriptive statistics, paired *t*-tests between the post and pretest were conducted for both respondent groups. We reviewed open-ended responses for major themes and representative quotes that would give more meaning to the quantitative analysis.

Results

We computed means for each self-efficacy item and computed the difference between post and pre scores. Then we conducted paired *t*-tests of the difference pre and post self-efficacy scores for both campers and parents. There were significant differences for campers across all but seven items, two each in communication and social skills, and three in coping. The paired *t*-tests for parents showed that all items were statistically significant. We also reviewed the findings to determine specific areas with the greatest increase in self-efficacy from pre to post and areas with the least increase.

Communication

In the area of communication self-efficacy campers' pre means ranged from 4.97 to 7.20, whereas post means ranged from 6.11 to 9.65. Parents rated their child's communication self-efficacy items from 6.13 to 7.62 at pre and 7.73 to 9.51 at post. Both campers and parents indicated self-efficacy was highest for pride in being from a military family. Youth also experienced the greatest increase in self-efficacy for this item. The differences between post and pre were significant for all items for parents and all but two items for campers. All items were at least assessed at a moderate level of self-efficacy at post. There were very few items with a mean below 7.00. Items with the lowest self-efficacy were talking to someone they just met and to community members. Table 3 displays these results for campers and parents for all three areas.

Table 3**Communication Self-Efficacy: Comparison of Post and Pre Means for Campers and Parents**

	Campers			Parents		
	<i>M</i> Post	<i>M</i> Pre	<i>Difference</i>	<i>M</i> Post	<i>M</i> Pre	<i>Difference</i>
Tell others about reasons for pride in being from a military family	9.65	6.68	2.97***	9.51	7.62	1.89***
Tell parents when wanting them to be more involved in activities	8.66	7.20	1.46*	9.23	7.54	1.69***
Talk to parents about feelings related to deployment	8.24	6.62	1.68**	9.02	7.25	1.77***
Talk to a friend when I am worried about my military family member	7.68	6.00	1.68*	8.28	6.57	1.72***
Talk to an adult when worried about family member who is in the military	7.55	6.64	0.91	8.87	7.09	1.79***
Talk to friends about feelings related to deployment	7.48	5.64	1.85*	8.34	6.53	1.81***
Explain to community members what it means to be a military youth	7.26	5.23	2.03***	8.17	6.38	1.79***
Talk to teachers about being from a military family	7.11	5.79	1.32	8.04	6.60	1.45***
Tell friends about what I don't like about being from a military family	7.09	5.50	1.59*	8.09	7.00	1.09**
Talk with someone just met about what it's like to be a youth in a military family	6.94	5.44	1.50*	7.73	6.31	1.42***
Explain to community members feelings about deployment	6.11	4.97	1.14*	7.92	6.13	1.79***
Grand <i>M</i>			1.64			1.65
* <i>p</i> <.05 ** <i>p</i> <.01 *** <i>p</i> <.001						

Coping

Campers coping self-efficacy ranged from 4.94 to 7.31 for pre scores, with a range of 6.58 to 8.85 for post scores (Table 4). Parents rated their child's coping self-efficacy items from 5.58 to 7.60 at pre, increasing at post to 6.96 to 8.83. Both campers and parents indicated self-efficacy was highest for handling responsibilities and accepting that the deployed family member will miss important events. Handling responsibilities had the greatest increase. The differences between post and pre were significant for all items for parents and all but three items for campers. All ratings were at least a moderate level of self-efficacy; there were very few items with a mean below 7.00. Items with the lowest self-efficacy for campers were getting others to take an interest and according to parents was their child giving themselves a pep talk. Both also rated asking for help when stressed relatively low.

Table 4
Coping Self-Efficacy

	Campers			Parents		
	<i>M</i> Post	<i>M</i> Pre	<i>Differe</i> <i>n</i> <i>ce</i>	<i>M</i> Post	<i>M</i> Pre	<i>Differe</i> <i>n</i> <i>ce</i>
Handle added responsibilities such as chores at home when military family member is away from home	8.85	7.06	1.79**	8.60	6.56	2.04***
Accept that deployed family member will miss events that are important to me	8.49	7.31	1.17*	8.83	6.80	2.02***
Understand what cannot be controlled when it comes to being part of a military family	8.37	6.89	1.49**	7.68	6.23	1.45***
Control feelings when worried about military family member	8.24	6.79	1.46**	8.00	6.11	1.89***
Understand what can be controlled when it comes to being part of a military family	8.24	6.88	1.35**	7.75	6.13	1.63***
Control feelings when worried about military family member being deployed	8.38	7.03	1.34*	7.54	6.06	1.48***
Find a family member to help with a problem	8.34	7.13	1.22*	8.87	7.60	1.28***
Succeed in getting rid of unhappy or bad thoughts about family member being deployed	8.12	7.12	1.00*	7.19	5.98	1.21***
Succeed in not worrying about how things will change when family member returns from deployment	8.03	6.97	1.06*	7.40	6.31	1.08***
Succeed in becoming calm again when very scared	7.97	6.52	1.46**	7.38	6.13	1.25***
Succeed in not worrying about things that might happen because of deployment	7.82	6.53	1.29*	7.19	5.98	1.21***
Prevent self from becoming nervous	7.68	6.26	1.41**	7.10	6.04	1.06***
Succeed in not worrying about how things will change during a deployment	7.56	6.71	0.85	7.27	6.06	1.21***
Give self a pep talk when feeling low	7.44	6.66	0.78	6.96	5.77	1.19***
Find an adult to help with a problem	7.41	6.29	1.12*	8.36	6.89	1.47***
Ask for help when feeling stressed because of deployment	7.13	6.24	0.88	7.13	5.85	1.27***
Get people from community to take an interest in things involved in	6.58	4.94	1.64**	7.33	6.17	1.17***
Grand <i>M</i>			1.57			1.57
* <i>p</i> <.05 ** <i>p</i> <.01 *** <i>p</i> <.001						

Social

For social self-efficacy, campers ranged from pre scores of 4.76 to 7.88 and 6.53 to 9.54 for post values (Table 5). Parents rated social self-efficacy items before camp from 6.34 to 8.28, whereas the post camp scores ranged from 7.69 to 9.74. Both campers and parents indicated self-efficacy was highest for working well with others in their age group and for making friends with other military youth. These items also had the greatest increase from pre to post. Only one

item fell below a mean of 7.00. Campers indicated the lowest self-efficacy for talking to someone they don't know well.

Table 5
Social Self-Efficacy

	Campers			Parents		
	<i>M</i> Post	<i>M</i> Pre	<i>Differe</i> <i>n</i> <i>ce</i>	<i>M</i> Post	<i>M</i> Pre	<i>Differe</i> <i>n</i> <i>ce</i>
Work well in a group of people of own age	9.54	7.71	2.34***	9.74	8.06	1.68***
Make and keep friends of the same sex	--	--	--	9.49	8.28	1.21***
Make friends with other military youth	9.46	7.11	2.34***	9.30	6.64	2.66***
Succeed in staying friends with other military youth	9.11	6.71	2.40***	8.47	6.34	2.13***
Make and keep friends who are boys	8.88	7.18	1.71***	---	--	--
Talk with friends about being part of a military family	8.84	6.74	1.80***	9.13	7.02	2.10***
Make and keep friends who are girls	8.74	7.88	0.85	---	--	--
Make and keep friends of the opposite sex	--	--	--	8.47	7.53	1.21***
Find a friend to help when I am having problems with other friends	8.46	7.37	1.09**	8.44	7.04	1.37***
Find adults to help when having trouble with friends	7.89	6.31	1.57**	8.65	7.23	1.42***
Stay connected to other military youth	7.89	6.69	1.20*	8.21	6.55	1.66***
Succeed in preventing arguments with people of own age	7.15	6.44	0.71	8.24	7.53	1.21***
Talk to a person who don't know well	6.53	4.76	1.77**	7.69	6.75	0.094**
Grand <i>M</i>			1.25			1.41
* <i>p</i> <.05 ** <i>p</i> <.01 *** <i>p</i> <.001						

Greatest Benefits of Attending Camp

Open-ended responses overwhelmingly supported that making new friends and seeing friends from previous years were the greatest benefits of attending camp. Both campers and parents mentioned elements of connection, communication, and coping. Parents also noted more general benefits, such as independence, that come from attending a camp. One parent's comment touched on many of the aspects examined in this study.

They understand they are not alone, that there are resources and people that understand their situation and can help. They get to meet other kids just like them and share similar feelings. They are filled with pride and know how special their soldiers are to everyone. They learn how to communicate with others their feelings and fear.

Table 6 includes some representative quotes regarding camp benefits.

Table 6
Representative Responses Regarding Camp Benefits

Campers	
Connection	<i>The best thing about attending OMK is meeting the other kids who understand what it's like to have family in the military.</i>
Connection	<i>OMK has helped me feel more connected to other military youth, because where I live there are no teens who have family in the military. So this is great to be able to meet other people who also had family in the military.</i>
Communication	<i>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].</i>
Communication/ Coping	<i>I can talk to my parents about other things pertaining to deployment.</i>
Connection/ Social	<i>OMK camp helped me by helping me get to know someone I did not know for my whole life. It has helped me by working together with a person you don't even like, but by the end of the day, I have gotten to know the person more and started making new friends to be able to talk about being in a military family.</i>
Parents	
Connection	<i>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.</i>
Connection/ Coping/ Independence	<i>She made good friends and her separation anxiety has gotten much better. She was really nervous about going to camp, but the staff and her friends have made her really comfortable.</i>
Fun/Coping	<i>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.</i>
Contribution	<i>I've seen him grow up through several years of camp, from the first year when he was nervous about what it would be like, to now, when he would like to volunteer as a counselor when he's too old to attend [as a camper].</i>

Discussion

This study explored the extent to which participation in OMK camps affected military youth's self-efficacy for communication, coping, and social skills. As the research on camps for military youth is relatively limited, the present study extended the literature by examining the outcomes of participation in a camp program designed to meet their unique needs. Because no known studies of military youth self-efficacy were found, an instrument was created to examine self-efficacy for issues related to deployment. Both youth and parent perspectives were studied, which addresses the need for multiple informants (Park, 2011).

Overall, military youth campers and their parents felt that attending a camp made a positive impact on campers' self-efficacy for communication, coping, and social skills as they related to deployment. Some items increased two or more points (on an 11-point scale). Campers and parents both perceived the highest mean increase to be in youth's self-efficacy for communication skills. An increase in communication skills is a finding that aligns with past research on military youth's camp participation (Chandra et al., 2012). Communication skills

enable children to communicate about their deployment experiences (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2013; Lester et al., 2011). Communication is critical when new roles and relationships are negotiated, which occurs during deployment and reintegration. The camp setting provides multiple opportunities to communicate with peers.

Another area of increase reported by both campers and parents was self-efficacy for making and keeping friends. Likewise, they thought that the overwhelming benefit of attending camp was the connections they built with others who understood them, a phenomenon referred to as "linked lives" (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). The majority of the camp participants were from National Guard or Reserve families, who have limited opportunities to interact with other military youth, and attending camp provided a means to meet others who share their military family experience. Maternal support has been shown to be a protective factor for adjustment for youth in military families (Morris & Age, 2009), and it is reasonable to assume that peers may also be a resource for support. Our results align with others who have noted the positive impact of the social connectedness youth feel with other military youth (Chandra et al., 2011; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Ferrari & Leonard, 2007; Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010). This sense of belonging also occurs in other camps with condition-specific audiences (Roberson, 2010). Connections are an important part of building resilience (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011), which is a goal when working with military youth.

As well, making new friends is a common theme found in camp research (American Camp Association, 2005; Arnold et al., 2005; Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007; Garst & Bruce, 2003; Garst et al., 2011). This is important because studies have shown that friendships have the potential to serve as protection against difficulties that result from negative experiences (Adams, Santo, & Bukowski, 2011). Youth benefit from talking with those who can relate to the challenges they are experiencing (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Houston et al., 2009; Wilson, Wilkum, Chernichky, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Broniarczyk, 2011). When they have developed connections with others who share a similar situation such as deployment, they achieve a common bond and social support. Friends can promote resilience by sharing resources and modeling positive coping strategies (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Exposure to "similar others" is a camp feature that normalizes one's experience (Gillard & Watts, 2013, p. 895). As Gillard et al. (2011) have noted, the unstructured and informal interactions that are built into the camp setting provide an ideal environment for developing positive relationships.

Parents perceived significant increases in self-efficacy for their campers. This finding is consistent with positive changes documented in other studies of camps for military youth (Chandra et al., 2012), 4-H camps (Garst & Bruce, 2003); and camps in general (Henderson et al., 2007). Likewise, parents also described qualitatively some changes they saw in campers.

All scores for self-efficacy were in the moderate to high range at post-camp. The areas of lower self-efficacy were those that involved campers dealing with people whom were not directly part of the camp experience or were unfamiliar to them, such as teachers and community members. These areas were not emphasized in the camp program because the focus was on making connections with other youth. Other researchers have noted that military youth are often more comfortable sharing with other military youth (Knobloch et al., 2015; Mmari et al., 2009). The findings of enhanced self-efficacy demonstrate that despite the challenges of deployment, positive outcomes may result. Others have also identified positive changes and opportunities from a deployment. Both youth and adults reported strengthened relationships and family cohesion (Knobloch et al., 2015; Knobloch & Theiss, 2012) and increased independence and

autonomy (Castenada et al., 2008; Knobloch et al., 2015; Knobloch & Theiss, 2012; Mmari et al., 2009) as a result of deployment. Because self-efficacy influences whether individuals undertake and persist in challenging tasks, promoting self-efficacy can be an asset for overcoming the challenges associated with deployment.

Limitations

With any study, it is important to note limitations. The low response rate limits the generalizability of these findings. Rather than surveying participants at the conclusion of the camp experience, we wanted to allow time for observing sustained effects of camp participation. However, the three-month gap between the end of camp and the survey period likely contributed to this lower response rate. Also, it is possible that those who did not experience changes did not complete the survey. Those who did respond could have done so in a socially desirable manner. Another limitation was using a new instrument. We developed a new instrument because there was no existing instrument to study the area of interest. We followed Bandura's (2006) recommendations for creating self-efficacy instruments to ensure that it was theoretically sound. Our 11-point response scale (Muris, 2001) captured more variation than those with a smaller number of responses, which in the past has been thought to contribute to a ceiling effect (Henderson et al., 2007). However, the number of responses was not sufficient to allow us to conduct factor analysis or to explore demographic comparisons. Therefore, the results of this study should be considered exploratory.

Recommendations

We recommend that future research address the following considerations.

1. Take steps to increase the number of respondents such as direct contact with participants and offering incentives for participation.
2. Continue to be informed by multiple perspectives and use a mixed-methods approach.
3. Analyze data for potential differences based on camper demographics.
4. Follow up with participants after camp by conducting focus groups or interviews to obtain rich descriptions of outcomes.
5. Explore the program features and aspects of the camp experience that lead to the identified outcomes.

Authors have noted the importance of incorporating research about military families into support programs as they are developed and implemented (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2013). Taking into account the results of this study and recommendations shared by Pajares (2006), we suggest that camp directors strive to create an environment conducive to enhancing self-efficacy development, which we have summarized in Table 7. These recommendations are also very much in tune with what has been suggested to enhance resilience.

Table 7
**Creating a Camp Environment Conducive to Enhancing Self-Efficacy:
 Connecting Recommendations to Theory**

Sources of Self-Efficacy	Ways of Accomplishing
Mastery Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide activities that are novel (activities they may not otherwise try) and challenging. • Start out small and build up to more challenging activities or tasks. A task should be “hard enough that it energizes, not so hard that it paralyzes” (Pajares, 2006, p. 344). • Provide multiple opportunities where campers develop independence and responsibility. • Emphasize skill development (improving) rather than self-enhancement (proving).
Vicarious Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together youth who are experiencing similar situations who can learn from each other. • Capitalize on the power of role models. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recruit military youth as camp counselors, especially those who have aged out of attending camp as a camper, as they can relate to situations faced by military youth. ○ Involve service members as role models who can cultivate pride in military service.
Verbal or Social Persuasion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide encouragement from peers and adults to persist in overcoming challenges. • Provide counselors and staff with talking points they can use to talk to campers during teachable moments (e.g., emphasizing persistence and effort).
Individual’s Reactions (Physiological & Psychological State)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe environment where campers are comfortable interacting with new people. • Create a welcoming environment that facilitates belonging and connectedness. • Promote an optimistic, can-do attitude. • Leverage fun and enjoyment to foster engagement and positive emotions (Morgan, Sibthorp, & Wells, 2014).

Conclusion

Camps are one way to provide programming that is consistent with recommendations calling for programs to enhance the well-being of military families (Ames et al., 2011; Ferrari, 2005; The White House, 2011). We are encouraged that participation in these camps produced positive results. These findings offer support for continued use of camps to address the needs of military youth. They may also be useful to those working with other special populations in the camp setting.

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