FAMILY INTACTNESS AND TEENAGE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: SOME COMPARISONS OF STUDENTS FROM MILITARY AND CIVILIAN COUNTIES IN THE SOUTHEAST

John P. Smith and Janice G. Williams, Clemson University

INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of large permanent armies in western nation states, there appeared military families. The close relatives of armed forces personnel required housing and social services close to military basses. Historically, armed forces were mustered upon need, served a fixed term and went home. There was a small cadre of professional military men and the needs of a family infrastructure support by the military were not as yet present. After World War II in the United States and despite the post-war shut down, many veterans chose to remain in the service (Litoff, Smith 1990). Off-post housing led to expensive housing allotments, thus creating housing for the military on bases (Goldman 1976). At present, we are witnessing a renewed effort to close military installations.

Only recently have social scientists focused on the military family, particularly after the Vietnamese War in the mid-1970s. For the better part of a decade, researchers concentrated upon the adjustment theme for the military family (Bowen 1987, 1989; Hertz, Charlton 1989). Concurrent with this research was the theme of military wives adaptation and satisfaction (Jans 1989; Klein 1989; Rosen, Ickovics, Moghadam 1990; Rosen, Moghadam 1989). Problems that occurred within the military family could loosely be attributed to the constant threat of forced migration and the inherent danger of budget cuts from the service (Marsh 1976). In brief, the military family was viewed as functional with few problems that could not be explained in the context of migration. Some sought to explain the benefits of military life in terms of wives' camaraderie, low cost goods and housing.

Other research thrusts emerged slowly. Fitch (1985) noted that since the United States was in a constant garrison state, the civilians were apt to ascribe lower status to career military families. Hence, the military family may feel the status deprivation and react with deviance or violence. Both Hertz and Charlton (1989) and Grifton and Morgan (1988) have noted stress emerge in one type of military family because of the shift work and juggled child care. Hunter (1978) had noted the abuse of alcohol among military wives, three times the civilian rate. Career aspirations for youth from military families back into the military were common; but for black youth this became more a career track and a permanent risk-filled career which tended to capture their children in a cycle of military self-containment (Mare, Winship, Kubitschek 1984; Mare, Winship 1984). Once one became military and trapped by the system, alcoholism developed rapidly as well as other consequences (Burt 1982). Finally, Shupe, Stacey and Hardwood (1987) noted the domestic violence within the military family as well as the military community.

In the 1990s the themes of fear and dysfunction have again been applied to military families, picking up on the implications of the garrison state. Wertsch (1991) was raised inside the "military fortress," with a father who was career army. She interviewed 80 "military brats" who were raised within the strict discipline of the military family and community within the fortress. She noted that children were on constant display, held accountable for their actions by the entire community. Any flaws, even public flaws, must be hidden from the official military. Wife abuse rates were high yet the abuse was contained within the family. The potential for spouse abuse and child abuse was greater as compared to nonmilitary families (Miner, Gold 1986), but the family remained silent. Faced with the authoritarian father figure, a powerless mother, and the amorphous peer group, Wertsch suggests that youth from military families turned to alcohol and drugs, to acts of deviance outside the military community.

We were curious about racial differences within the military. Stevenson (1990) noted that definitions of deviance by the military increased during times when the chain of command was being shaken. During the mid-1970s, the source of military recruitment shifted from the college educated to the underclass. After Vietnam, many members of the underclass desired a military career, seeking the exchange of the next 15 to 20 years of their lives for the security of the service. But as minority group members, they were likely to be pushed to the margins of organizational

status. We would suspect family disorganization among minority families in the services. But older research on southern black families suggested another scenario. McAdoo (1981) suggested family adaptability and altruism among southern blacks. Both McCubbin and McCubbin (1988) and Hampton (1987) have noted that black families were more cohesive.

In this paper, we wish to focus upon the impact of the military presence in a locale (counties in South Carolina). Studies of the military family focus on its coping techniques and inherent flexibilities. Our research, however, focuses on deviant behavior using as indicators levels of alcohol use as well as family violence. Shupe et al (1987) argued that the military presence in a community elevates the level of family violence and risk to domestic violence. We examine first the level of family intactness and then the implications for acts of teenage deviance. In one sense, this research is prompted by questions articulated by Shupe et al on the effects of type of community on levels of domestic violence. But, in another sense, we are seeking an impact for military presence on family structure and the deviance behavior of teenagers. The county of residence and school district are the only measures available. Hence the measures are rough and limited to generalizations. Our framing question is this: In counties that host a military presence, will there be ties between decreased family functions, increased peer group prominence and drinking, as well as other forms of deviance? Also, will black youth behave like military peers or racial peers in the South?

METHOD

A survey was completed in fall 1989 covering all public high schools in South Carolina. Private academies and youth in detention by the state were excluded; thus, about 11 percent of the high school students were missed. Missing persons were principally upper middle class white teenagers and lower class black and white youth who were incarcerated. The survey yielded some 235,000 completed forms. We received a one percent sample from the South Carolina Commission of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, the state agency that conducted the survey.

The original intent of the state agency was to use the survey to publicize the extent and depth of drug and alcohol abuse among teenagers. This was part of a national effort to assess the effectiveness of drug and alcohol abatement programs. The results of the survey, principally frequency distributions, were used to justify existing programs. No in-depth analysis was attempted by state agencies.

The sample selected contained 1911 completed surveys from white and black students; about 200 surveys from these other minority groups were not regarded. Of these, 1231 (64%) were white teenagers and 680 (36%) were black teenagers. To assess the effect of military presence, the respondents were divided into two categories: schools in counties with military bases and schools in counties that did not have a military presence. There were eight counties with military bases. It was important to point out that the survey was completed almost one year *before* the Persian Gulf buildup, thus the stress of the buildup on the family was not a factor.

In the development of indicators, we were constrained by the fact that the survey had been developed for organizational purposes with a heavy reliance on bivariate data on reported behaviors. There were very few scaled, reliable attitudes and values scales. Family intactness was relatively simple to measure since the respondents were asked if they lived with a father, mother, or stepparent. Five combinations were available. In regard to assessing the influence of the families, we assembled five behaviors of family influence: 1) spending time with family, 2) letting parents know actions, 3) doing activities as a family, 4) feeling parents understand the teenager and 5) letting parents know friends. In regard to peer group influence, we defined five items: 1) friends help with solving problems, 2) friends think the teen takes risks, 3) friends like to do dangerous things, 4) teen likes to wear strange clothes and 5) teen goes along with what friends want to do. Finally, to determine deviance, we defined items that focused upon school truancy: alcohol intake, driving while intoxicated, suspension from school, and similar issues.

Prior research on this data set has provided some background (Smith, Williams 1992; Williams, Smith 1993). Rural schools showed a much lower alcohol frequency level than did schools in urbanizing counties and urbanized counties. The group that showed significantly higher levels of alcohol frequency of use and quantity was white males; this group was higher than black male, white female and black female high school students in the study. In each of the types of counties, the white male

Table 1: Family Types for Teenagers in Military and Nonmilitary Counties, 1989

Family Living Type	All	Military	Nonmilitary
	%	%	%
Both parents	64	58	65*
Single parent	25	29	24
Both stepparent & natural parent	11	14	11

*Statistically significant at 0.01 level.

Table 2: Report of Social Activities Done with Families by Teenagers, 1989

Activity	Military	Nonmilitary
	%	%
Do things with family (% "often" as activity)	43	49*
Spend time with family (% yes)	41	53*
Parents know where teen is going (% yes)	82	85
Parents understand teen (% yes)	68	73
Parents know friends (% yes)	83	92*

*Statistically significant at 0.01 level.

students were significantly higher. We could explain the lower levels of black consumption along family lines. Despite the problem of many single parent households, McAdoo and McAdoo (1985) noted the kin support network among blacks and the diverse types of altruistic socialization that place an emphasis on the family. Similarly, we could partially explain the higher levels of alcohol intake among white male teenagers in terms of the consequences of migration. Since the mid-1980s, lower class white families have migrated from the Rust Belt into the Carolinas and were unable to integrate into society at the levels that they obtained in the Northeast or Midwest. Stress and family decay followed. This urban dislocation was experienced by groups in Europe as well. Military families were included in this European study.

Based on previous research, we focus on the following issues:

1. Military families are less likely to be intact that nonmilitary families.
2. Military families are less likely to have age integrated social activities than the nonmilitary families.
3. Youth from military households are more inclined to risky peer group activities than youth from nonmilitary households.
4. Youth from military households are more likely to commit deviant acts than nonmilitary youth.
5. White military household youth would have higher alcohol intake than Black youth.

Table 3: Differences Between Military and Nonmilitary Teens in Peer Activities, 1989

Activity	Military	Nonmilitary
	%	%
Attend school related activities with friends (% "often")	28	33*
Drive around in car with friends (% "often")	33	36
Take risks with friends (% yes)	34	33
Wear strange clothes (% yes)	9	10
Friends help with problems (% yes)	80	83
Like to do dangerous things to impress friends (% yes)	21	21
Go along with what friends want to do	51	30*

*Statistically significant at 0.01 level.

RESULTS

The first issue deals with intactness, the frequency with which children in the two categories of schools are located in intact or fragmented families. Table 1 shows the distribution for all teenagers and for those located in military and nonmilitary counties. Military county families are less likely to be intact, with more households with a single parent or blended parent status.

We next wanted to assess the difference between the two groups in terms of social connections to their families. In short, what types of social activities and ties did teenagers report about their families and what effects living in a military community may present. The results are shown in Table 2. Military families were significantly less likely to have shared activities with youth, have youth spend time with the family, and feel that parents know youths' friends. The two other activities (knowing where teen is going and parent understanding teen) show the expected difference, but not at significant levels.

Next, we were concerned with the influence of the peer group. During the teenage years, individuals drift away from the norms of

Table 4: Differences Between Military and Nonmilitary Teenage Groups for Reported Types of Deviance

Fields of Deviance	Military %	Nonmilitary %
A. Automobile related (last 12 months)		
1. Had car accident	7	8
2. Received traffic ticket	5	7
3. Drove car after drinking	7	9
4. Drove car after using drugs	4	4
5. Rode in car with a drunk driver	37	37
B. School related (last 12 months)		
1. Suspended from school activities for bad grades	3	3
2. Suspended from school	15	12
3. Attended school while drunk	9	8
4. Skipped/cut class	25	20*
5. Been in trouble with police	13	9
C. Drinking behavior (during last 30 days)		
1. Abstinence (no drinks)	51	57*
2. Social drinker	35	30
3. Heavy drinker and drugs	15	13
D. Specific beverage (used in last 12 months)		
1. Beer	28	23
2. Wine	23	17*
3. Hard liquor	17	17
4. Other alcoholic beverage (i.e. wine cooler)	65	51*

*Statistically significant at 0.01 level.

the family and accept the influence of the peer group. If the military family were unstable, one might expect that the peer group would have greater influence than that of the family in defining social activities. Conversely, if the individual student was socially isolated from the peer group by military status or constant movement about the country, he/she would have little grounding in a peer group as well as little influence from a family. This latter problem of social isolation cannot be addressed by this data set. In Table 3, the results for the two groups on peer group influence measures are presented. Contrary to our initial expectation, both groups are surprisingly similar. Students from military counties were less likely to report attending school related activities with friends. Only on one item (go along with what friends want to do) were youth from military households more likely to join at a significant level. Youth from military counties seem more willing to follow friends into unspecified activities than into specified, school-based activities.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance of Quantity & Frequency of Alcohol Intake Among South Carolina High School Students for Race & Type of Household

	Quantity and Frequency of Alcohol Intake			
	Military		Nonmilitary	
	X	SD	X	SD
Race				
Black	1.674	1.136	1.609	1.142
White	2.466	1.564	2.147	1.547*
Family Composition				
Intact	2.100	1.437	1.992	1.454
Other	2.027	1.445	2.065	1.460

*Statistically significant at 0.0001 level.

Next, we deal with the self-reports of deviance. There are three areas that need to be addressed: automobile behavior, school behavior, and reported alcohol intake (Table 4). Surprising in this regard is the similarity between the two groups. The only significant differences are skipping or cutting class, the choice of abstinence, and in consumption of wine and cheaper wine-based beverages.

The last issue addressed was the difference between youth from military and nonmilitary areas in alcohol intake among those who were not abstainers. A quantity-frequency scale of alcohol consumption was constructed, ranging from no drinks (0), to drinking less than once a month but at least once a year, to drinking more than four drinks per occasion more than three times per month (5). Table 5 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for race and family background for the teenagers from military and civilian high schools in terms of their rates and quantity of alcohol intake.

There was a statistically significant difference between black and white teenagers on alcohol intake. White students consumed more than black students in both military and nonmilitary contexts. But white students from military contexts have higher alcohol intake than the other three categories of teenagers. While race has an effect on alcohol intake, there are no difference for types of family composition. While alcohol consumption for intact family military area youth was

higher than the average for youth from civilian area intact family, the difference was not significant.

SUMMARY

The review of the literature in recent years on the military family suggested two lines of thinking. First, that military families, while stressed, were functional. Despite internal management problems and the constant threat of being uprooted, these families were able to socialize their children into the teenage years and provide a high quality environment for child development. A second, less evident body of research, however, addressed the dysfunctional aspects of the military family. This research noted higher rates of alcoholism and wife-battering in military families. Shupe et al (1987), as well as Wertsch (1991), suggested major problems with military families that were secluded in the "khaki ghetto" or the fortress. Our research sought the differences between families living in military and civilian areas based upon a statewide survey of high school youth done in South Carolina in 1989.

In terms of family intactness, there were differences between military and civilian areas. Almost two-third of the students from the nonmilitary civilian counties were from intact families. A greater proportion of teenagers from the military counties emanated from single parent households and from blending remarriage households. There were indications on three of five dimensions that children from military areas less frequently did things with their families. This pattern indicated lower levels of family socialization for military children. Next, we reasoned that if children from military areas and from nonintact families were less active and less well socialized by their families, there would be a greater reliance on peer groups for interaction and mutual support. Peer group influence was evident only in two areas: lack of attendance at school related activities and going along with what friends wanted to do. Youth from military counties lacked a rooting in the peer group. Thus, we surmised the military teens were in a void; with fewer ties to family and little peer group support to turn to, they would have higher rates of deviance. This we refer to as a socialization gap.

We examined three areas of deviance: misuse of automobiles, school related acts of deviance, and alcohol intake. Our thesis of the socialization void or gap is not confirmed except in alcohol use. First, in regard to acts of deviance committed within cars, there were no significant differences although these acts were reported with less frequency by youth from military counties. This latter fact may reflect a lack of wealth and not social integration. In only one area of school deviance (cutting classes) was there a significant difference. Military county youth reported cutting more classes. On other indicators, this group was only slightly higher. But the differences failed to reach significance.

The greatest evident difference in deviant behavior showed in respect to drinking. As reported in Table 4, fewer youth from military counties were abstainers, more were social drinkers and about the same percentages for each group were heavy drinkers and users of drugs. Also, higher percentages of the military youth used wine and other alcoholic beverages (home brew, wine coolers) than youth from nonmilitary counties. Our initial impulse was to interpret this as lower class drinking since wine products are less expensive than beer and hard liquor. Two additional controls were analyzed. Family composition (intact, single parent, stepparent) showed no significant differences in alcohol intake; youth from military counties were higher for types of alcohol consumed and recorded lower rates of abstinence. But racial background was a major factor, white youth from military counties had significantly higher rates of alcohol intake. This result was consistent with prior research on the data that indicated white males had the highest alcohol intake and variety of intakes when compared to black males, white females and black females.

CONCLUSIONS

Further, more sophisticated analysis is difficult to complete. Data are grouped in counties and the bivariate variable, military/nonmilitary, is ecologic and lacks specificity. We based much of our study on Shupe et al (1987) and Wertsch (1991) who reported that military base areas have higher frequencies of battering and domestic violence, and hence low levels of family intactness. We surmised that military families reproduce the conditions of military dominance while sequestered from civilian society. But we cannot definitively show how nonintact, fragmented families in military communities fail to socialize the child, force the child to socialize in a peer group that

might change from base to base and especially how family intactness influences alcohol consumption. Neither our data nor previous research fully explores the linkages among these variables.

But we may examine the social dimension of coming of age on a military base in the Southeast. White male teenagers in military communities are more deviant in terms of alcohol intake. We suspect that migration has isolated them from their intact family and from a viable community-based peer group found off base. In material terms, they are poor, lacking transportation and spending money. The white youth, we suspect, are able to afford very cheap wines ("Mad Dog") and wine coolers, as well as beer. These wines are cheaper than beer, hence the beverage of choice among the poor. But white youth in the military community know the "system". While their rates of delinquency are higher than for civilian youth, they know that they can enlist and acquire a sense of security within the military, as their parents did.

Shupe et al (1987) constructed the "khaki ghetto". Other research indicated selective adaptations by wives and, we think, families themselves, to life in the danger zone. Children who move constantly, whose peer group status may be tied informally to parental rank, and whose linkages to schools are fleeting are the children with higher probabilities for deviance and alcoholism.

Data on military families are either difficult to acquire or are anecdotal or both (Wertsch 1991). A major problem with these data was the "ecological fallacy". However, to the extent that our data were biased, the bias should have been in the direction of minimizing differences between the group, so that the obtained results can be considered a conservative estimate. Also, there was likely a "compaction" effect. That is, public institutions like schools frequently service the children and grandchildren of retired military personnel who remain in the area of a base community to use the medical and health services. We are satisfied about the validity of our data, despite the problems inherent in using county-wide data as a basis for research.

REFERENCES

Bowen GL 1987 Wives' employment status and marital adjustment in military families *Psychological Rep* 61 467-74

_____ 1989 Satisfaction with family life in the military *Armed Forces Society* 15 571-92

Burt MR 1982 Prevalence and consequences of alcohol use among US military personnel *J Studies Alcohol* 43 1097-1107

Fitch JS 1985 The garrison state in America *J Peace Res* 22 31-45

Goldman NL 1976 Trends in family patterns of US military personnel during the 20th century. In Goldman and Segal eds *The Social Psychology of Military Service* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Griffin WA, AR Morgan 1988 Conflict in maritally distressed military couples *Amer J Family Therapy* 16 14-22

Hampton RL 1987 ed *Violence in the Black Family* Lexington, MA: DC Heath & Co

Hertz R, J Charlton 1989 Making family under a shiftwork schedule *Social Problems* 36 491

Hunter E 1978 *Families Under the Flag* NY: Praeger Press

Jans NA 1989 The career of the military wife *Human Relations* 42 337

Klein HA 1989 Correlates of life satisfaction among military wives *J Psychology* 123 465-75

Litoff JB, D Smith 1990 Since you went away: the World War II letters of Barbara Wooddall Taylor *Women's Studies* 17 249

Mare RD, C Winship 1984 The paradox of lessening racial inequality and joblessness among Black youth *Amer Sociological Rev* 49 39-55

Mare RD, C Winship, WN Kubitschek 1984 The transition from youth to adult *Amer J Sociol* 90 326-58

Marsh RM 1976 Mobility in the military. In McMubben et al eds *Families in the Military System* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

McAdoo HP 1981 Stress absorbing systems in Black families *Family Relations* 31 479-88

McAdoo HP, JL McAdoo 1985 eds *Black Children: Social Educational and Parental Environments* Newbury Park, CA: Sage

McCubbin HL, MA McCubbin 1988 Typology of resilient families *Family Relations* 37 247-54

Miner JS, RG Gold 1986 Screening spouse abusers for child abuse potential *J Clinical Psychology* 42 169-72

Rosen LN, JR Ickovics, LZ Moghadam 1990 Employment and role satisfaction *Psychology Women Qrtly* 14 371-85

Rosen LN, LZ Moghadam 1989 Impact of military organization on social support patterns of army wives *Human Organization* 48 189-95

Shupe A, W Stacey, L Hardwood 1987 *Violent Men, Violent Couples: The Dynamics of Domestic Violence* Lexington, MA: DC Heath Co

Smith JP, JG Williams 1992 From abusive household to dating violence *J Family Violence* 7 153-165

Stevenson RJ 1990 The officer-enlisted distinction and patterns of organizational reaction to social deviance in the US military *Social Forces* 68 1191-1209

Wertsch ME 1991 *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress* NY: Harmony Books Inc

Williams JG, JP Smith 1993 Alcohol and other drug use among adolescents *J Substance Abuse* 5 289-294