PARENTS' REPORTED UTILIZATION, ACCESSIBILITY, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT RESOURCES FOR MILITARY ADOLESCENTS AT FORT HOOD MILITARY BASE

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Academic support resources are increasingly available to military-connected youth; however, the military community, in general, tends to under-utilize available resources. The research literature has not clearly identified accessibility to military academic support resources or perceived effectiveness of resources as explanations for under-utilization of adolescent support services. The current research study examines military parents’ perceptions of academic resource programs looking at how parents’ perception of resource accessibility and resource effectiveness were related to program utilization. Based on qualitative analysis of military parent interviews, utilization was related to both accessibility and effectiveness. This research adds to the literature by identifying the relationship to between accessibility and utilization and reported effectiveness and utilization of academic support resources.
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INTRODUCTION

Military families experience significant challenges when balancing family life and military service responsibilities. The military and civilian systems have addressed these challenges by creating support resources to reduce stress associated with frequent relocations, parental deployment, and fear for the health and safety of deployed parent (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007). Increases in military conflicts since the events on 9/11/02 have made this a particular area of concern (Lemmon & Chartrand, 2009). Military conflicts have increased the frequency of deployment and extended deployment cycles for families (Chandra et al., 2010). This has increased the need for family support services (Park, 2011). While a wide variety of military support resources are offered (Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010), the majority of military families do not always utilize these services (Clark, Jordan, & Clark, 2013; Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Lester et al., 2011b). According to Clark et al. (2013), 43% of military families identified the need for mental health resources; however, only 16% utilized these resources. If not used, support programs, no matter how strong or prevalent, cannot help military families with related needs.

Under-utilization has been reported across all types of resources inclusive of (a) family readiness groups, (b) reintegration information sessions, (c) online resources, (d) financial support, and (e) chaplain services (Clark et al., 2013). This under-utilization increases concern for many stakeholders as these resources function to assist military families through stressful transitional periods (Clark et al., 2013).
Understanding what influences under-utilization within the military community is an important initial step toward providing effective support. Identifying potential factors impacting utilization, which may include factors such as program effectiveness, parent perception of program supports, or accessibility and parents’ perception of barriers to accessibility, is an important first step in assuring the effectiveness of support programming. One factor believed to contribute to under-utilization of mental health resources, for instance, has been the perceived stigma associated with receiving these particular types of resources (De Pedro, Astor, Benbenishty, Estrada, Smith, & Esqueda, 2011). Military service members’ and their families’ perception of the military culture as a stoic system (Clark et al., 2013) may be structurally impeding military families’ help-seeking habits (Clark et al., 2013). Under-utilization has been related to lack awareness or accessibility to support resources (Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009; Park, 2011). This latter factor may play an important role in under-utilization for military personnel and their families who reside outside of a military base including the National Guard and the Reserves (De Pedro et al., 2011; Park, 2011).

Factors impacting utilization of academic support resources may be particularly important, given military-connected students likely to experience additional or cumulative stressors related to academic success due to frequent school transitions, parental separations during deployment and differences in academic curriculum from one school to another (Titus, 2007). For example in regard to risk, military-connected students move about six to nine times on average between kindergarten and 12th grade (Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010). Disruptions associated this mobility include a negative impact on identity development (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2011) and social
adjustments (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012). Military students can experience the loss of friendships and the stress of acclimating to new social groups (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Thus, the social emotional development is a concern for adolescents as is their ability to establish a sense of belongingness in these new environments (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Esqueda et al., 2012). With cognitive changes occurring through adolescence, military-connected adolescents often gain a clearer understanding of the dangers associated with military service and how these dangers may affect their lives and their parents (Huebner et al., 2007).

In addition to these challenges associated with cognitive and socioemotional development, school transitions often entail challenges based on changes in educational systems or policies (Titus, 2007), increasing the likelihood of gaps in children’s knowledge between their previous educational experiences and the curriculum at the new school (Bradshaw et al., 2010). The number of military-related moves has been found to be negatively correlated with adolescents’ academic success in mathematics, science, and writing (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2011). Further, frequency of parental deployments (Atuel, Esqueda, & Jacobson, 2011) and length deployment has a negative impact on military students’ academic performance (Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010). These risks can be particularly concerning for adolescents who are facing normative stressors during this developmental period.

To address both children’s and adolescents’ academic challenges, increased attention to assessment of the effectiveness of available military academic support resources has focused on both educational and socio-emotional areas (Lester et al., 2011b; Easterbrooks et al., 2013). School programs incorporating peers are found to
be effective because they foster socio-emotional connections for the transitioning military adolescents (Arcuri, 2015). According to Bradshaw et al. (2011), military adolescents favored the emotional support of their military peers. In tandem with finding research supported programs, the literature also highlighted the need to provide training and education for those who interact with military youth (Lester et al., 2011b; Park, 2011) with the focus of increasing the knowledge of school teachers and counselors regarding how to leverage military peer support to improve school based programs for adolescents (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013). In addition to addressing socioemotional concerns, programs focus on parents’ involvement in their student’s education. Parent involvement has been a significant indicator of children’s academic success (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Current Research

This research examines potential factors contributing to parents’ utilization of academic support programs for adolescents as they face the challenges of school transitions and parental deployments associated with military life. Working from current literature, this research examines utilization as related to parents’ perception of support resource accessibility and effectiveness.

Current Understanding of Utilization

In a review of program utilization on the Military Family Life data, Clark and colleagues (2013) found coercion within the military bureaucracy creates an environment where military families remain in a survival status that does not encourage adaptiveness. This may be evidenced in the stoic nature of the military culture, which permeates into the military family structure (Park, 2011). Some families have reported
that being fearful that future promotions would be negatively impacted if they were to seek mental health support services (Orthner & Bowen, 1990). Given the stoic nature of the military institution, resource providers have investigated ways to reduce stigma associated with using mental health resources for the military community including military youth (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). Online psychoeducational resources have become available to support adolescents’ socio-emotional wellbeing with respect to military deployments. One such program, Military Youth Deployment Support Video Program, was established to support military children at various stages of the deployment (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). Still another program called Operation: Military Kids is a support resource that connects military youth to community-based resources that promote emotional wellbeing, recreational and academic support (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). These community resources include, but were not limited to, the Boys and Girls Club, 4-H, Military Child and Youth Services (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011).

In regard to academic support resources, parents in the military have reported disappointment in the availability of academic school resources for their children, when compared to their non-military counterparts (Berkowitz et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010). Those military parents who acknowledged the need for academic support often tried to attend to their students’ needs, but some felt that they lacked the time or knowledge needed to effectively support their children’s academic performance (Bradshaw et al., 2010). This highlights reports of the importance of reaching out to the military community to gather pertinent information about their needs and to increase community engagement (Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson, 2003).
In addition to these barriers, still others specified that military families were often unaware of available services for which they qualify (Mmari et al., 2009). While the research literature has identified the need for more academic support resources, e.g. information about special education policies, in the local school district (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011), there has been very little attention to this area. To address these concerns in regard to academic related support resources, strategies have been established to support students with school transitions (Park, 2011). School transitions are often based on a permanent change of station (PCS), which is a relocation of a military family from one military base to another (Hall, 2011). Academic support resources for military youth and their families are available at the national (e.g. Blue Star Families, Student Online Achievement Resources (SOAR), Tutor.com) and local levels (e.g. Fort Hood Community in Schools, School Liaison Office “SLOs”, youth centers). Increasingly, many researchers have highlighted the need for research of military resources (Lester et al., 2011b). Evaluation of programs particularly as related to utilization has been limited (Park, 2011).

**Utilization as related to effectiveness.** There have been very few military resources for military adolescents that have been found to be effective; one resource that has evidence is the Families Over Coming Under Stress (FOCUS). FOCUS is an intervention program that promotes education and coping strategies of psychological wellbeing for military families and children (Lester, McBride, Bliese & Adler, 2011a). Both non-active and active duty families who participated in the FOCUS intervention program had reduced levels of stress and increased levels of family functioning when compared to the national stress levels (Lester et al.). Of the few resources tested for
effectiveness, the majority focus on the mental health or wellbeing of the military family and the adolescents (Murphy & Fairbanks, 2013).

Effective academic support programs can provide the crucial support that is needed for military youth (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Program effectiveness has been related to military parents’ and children’s perceptions of whether there were consistencies in educational policies from school to school that supported adolescent academic advancement (e.g. timely graduation) and in providing more academic support programs to keep adolescents on track in school (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Thus, parents’ perception of whether the program reduced stressors related to transitions affected parents’ perception of a program effectiveness (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Guzman, 2014). Factors identified as potentially increasing effectiveness of academic support programs for military adolescents include (a) increase teacher and school counselor training on military families (Garner, Arnold, & Nunnery, 2014), (b) developmentally appropriate (Astor, Gilreath, Esqued, & Benbenishty, 2013), (c) opportunity to connect military students to other students (Williams, 2013), (d) acknowledgement of diversity within military families (Garner et al., 2014), (e) incorporation of military adolescent strengths (De Pedro et al., 2014), (f) collaboration between military and civilian communities (Astor et al., 2013) and (g) parental involvement (Berkowitz, De Pedro, Couture, & Benbenishty, 2014) to name a few.

*Utilization as related to access.* Research addressing whether support resources are available to all members of the military community is sparse (Park, 2011; Guzman, 2014). Additional information is needed to understand how accessibility to military support resources impacts utilization of available services for this community
(Park, 2011) as non-active duty military families often live within civilian communities and do not have access to the same support resources as active-duty families (Lester et al., 2011a; Guzman, 2014). Thomas et al.’s (2010) study explored rates of mental health challenges, substance abuse and aggression for active- and non-active duty military soldiers returning from combat. The mental health rates for both soldier groups were assessed at two time points after they returned from deployment, i.e., 3 and 12-months (Thomas et al., 2010). The findings illustrate that National Guard and Reservist soldiers had higher rates of mental health, substance abuse, and aggression then did active duty soldiers. The research identified discrepancies in the continuum of care between the two groups. The length of time that National Guard and Reservist soldiers had access to free mental health resources was six months after returning from deployment when compared to 12 months for active-duty soldiers (Thomas et al., 2010). After six months, National Guard and Reservist soldiers had to pay for continued service or had the option of access a veterans’ hospital located on the military instillation. Another result found that with the increasing number of deployments a soldier had, continuum of care was not sufficient.

Another factor according to Williams (2004), posited that many military family resource providers have tried to address accessibility concerns with increased efforts to connect families via technology for instance hosting Family Readiness Group meetings using an online forum. Even this effort to increase accessibility has resulted in low participation (Williams, 2004). Murphy and Fairbanks (2013) have identified that multiple barriers to accessibility and utilization impact military families. Other barriers to accessibility, primarily mental health programs include: (a) lack of knowledge, (b) career
advancement restrictions, (c) financial burdens, and (d) availability of support resources e.g. Tricare or military health insurance.

Research Questions

To help to clarify what factors contribute to families’ and adolescents’ use of academic support resources, this research study examines parents’ perceptions of their students’ utilization of and access to academic support resources around the Fort Hood, Texas military base area. Military parents’ reported effectiveness was specifically considered with regard to utilization of academic support resources. The focus in this study was to examine how utilization was impacted by accessibility as related to families’ proximity to a military base (Park, 2011), as well as parents’ knowledge of available resources (Mmari et al., 2009). Also addressed was, parents’ perceived effectiveness, often identified as a factor affecting utilization (Park, 2011). At present, to the knowledge of the author, research addressing how parents’ perception of available support resources impact utilization is not captured within the literature research. Two research questions were addressed.

1. Fort Hood military parents’ perception of resource accessibility will be positively associated with their utilization of academic resources.

2. Fort Hood military parents’ perception of the effectiveness of academic resources in the Fort Hood area will be positively associated with their utilization of academic resources.

Themes

These questions will be examined using the following are apriori themes.
Academic support resources. Academic support resources include school or community-based organizations or programs that offer academic support to military adolescents. Due to the large number of diverse family types and in response to financial budget changes, the Department of Defense (DOD) has increasingly relied on community resources to support military families (Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007). Community-based programs, particularly the YMCA, have partnered with the DOD to provide services to promote healthy living, positive engagement and community involvement. These collaborations between the DOD and local service providers are structured to assure resources are not duplicated (Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007).

Utilization. A major factor associated with success of these support systems described as the absence of program utilization (Clark et al., 2013; Mmari et al., 2009). Many have speculated various reasons for the lack of utilization within the military communities (Clark, 2013; Mmari et al., 2009). Although scarce, the military research literature has highlighted accessibility to be associated with utilization (Murphy & Fairbanks, 2013). According to Murphy and Fairbanks (2013), accessibility is identified as a barrier to utilization of mental health support services.

Accessibility. Accessibility has primarily been identified as geographic proximity to military-supported resources within the military research literature but other aspects of accessibility have also been identified within the research. This is particularly true for non-active duty military families, National Guard and Reservist, who often live away from military instillations in civilian communities and receive military benefits when they are in preparation to and during deployment (Park, 2011). To this effect, accessibility to
military-focused resources has been directly associated with under-utilization for this subset of military families.

Effectiveness. There is an absence of empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of military adolescent resources despite tremendous efforts and distribution of resources (Park, 2011). Researchers have called for evidence-based evaluations of current programs’ effectiveness in supporting military-connected families (e.g., Park 2011; Lester et al., 2011a). Thus, research on the impact reported effectiveness has on utilization of academic support resources for military adolescents are still needed.
METHOD

Using a case study analysis, this research explored parents’ reported utilization of academic support resources as related to both their perception of the resource accessibility and effectiveness of academic support resources within the Fort Hood area. This qualitative method was selected because the phenomenon under consideration was largely unknown. Thus, this research begins to examine these aspects of parents’ perceptions as related to utilization providing information that can inform next steps in supporting military families and to increase resource (Chandra et al., 2010).

Participants

A self-selected sample of military parents at Fort Hood was employed for the this research study. In self-selected samples, participants volunteer their participation. Given the convenience of this sampling method, self-selecting participants bring bias because they often have strong opinions that may differ from the population (Rutherford, 2006). Interview participants received read through the informed consent form and signed prior to starting the sessions. All interviews sessions were recorded and later transcribed.

The study participants consisted of military parents assigned to the Fort Hood military base in Killeen, Texas. Military parents with adolescents 10 to 16 years of age were asked to provide information about their students’ academic performance, their families’ use of academic support resources to support their adolescent, and their perception of the effectiveness and accessibility of academic support resources within the Fort Hood area. Parents were invited to participate in a focus group.
Group and individual interviews. Parents interested in attending a group interview session were sent a link by email providing a link to a Sign Up Genius webpage (www.signupgenius.com). Initially four group interviews were planned with 6 to 9 families represented by either one or both parents at each group; however, group interviews ranged from 2 to 3 parents. The group interviews were structured to capture the perspective of diverse military parents living both on and off the military base. Four group interviews were completed with a total of ten military parents. All group interview participants were mothers, with two of the mothers serving as active duty military soldiers and two working with military youth at a military-funded youth program. Nine mothers were married. The two individual interviews were completed with active duty military fathers who were unable to attend a scheduled group interview. The majority of the participants did not live on the Fort Hood military base (90%). Group interview parents reported serving an average of 11.86 years in the military and completing an average of 2.7 military deployments.

Procedures

Two recruitment flyers were used to recruit study participants. Permission was obtained from all participating departments at Fort Hood to post both recruitment flyers at the youth centers, library, and chaplains' office at Fort Hood military base. The flyers were posted in the Fort Hood School Liaison Office's (SLOs) and the Fort Hood Family Readiness Groups’ Facebook webpage. The recruitment flyer was available for viewing from the end of June, 2015, to the end of August 2015.

On-site recruitment was completed at two events located on the Fort Hood military base and sponsored by the Fort Hood SLOs. Parents who inquired about the
study were informed about the general goal of the study. Parents who signed up for the interview sessions were directed to instructions on how to sign-up for an interview time.

The group interview questions were drawn from various sources including (a) Bradshaw and colleagues (2010), (b) the literature review e.g. Esqueda et al., 2012 and (c) created specifically for the population living in the Fort Hood area based on consultation with key stakeholders within the Fort Hood military community. To this effect, questions prepared for the group interview were different from the questions that were prepared for the online parent survey.

After all group interview sessions and interviews were completed, the audio recordings were sent to a professional transcription company. Following transcription, two trained coders individually reviewed and coded each transcript prior to meeting to discuss new and existing codes and memo notes. This constant comparative method focused on, creating and credibly positing a general phenomenon with multiple facets and explanations without provisionally testing, (Glaser, 1965). When transcriptions were completed, two trained coders worked through one transcribed group interview session together to identify initial themes. Coders independently conducted the remaining transcribed interview sessions and then met after to identify areas of disagreement. The coders arranged a time to meet on five different occasions (via skype, phone, or face to face) to discuss themes from each transcribed session. Adjustments were made to the original set of themes with each transcribed session per the constant comparative method. Initial themes were compared against new themes.

Twenty-seven codes were identified including one code that was arbitrarily identified as “99” indicating a parental response that related to military experience but
did not pertain to the research questions, e.g., receiving relocation moving services (Table A). After this initial analysis, a third coder input the codes into an electronic qualitative coding program (NVivo 11, QSR International, 2015). For coding across the three a priori themes of utilization, accessibility, and effectiveness, interrater agreement scores were $\kappa = .955$, $\kappa = .990$, and $\kappa = .994$, respectively, for codes and sub-codes.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Two strategies were employed to increase trustworthiness of the results in this study. First, the group interview facilitators frequently debriefed with community gatekeepers at Fort Hood military base to verify group and individual interview responses (Shenton, 2004). One school liaison officer provided feedback on recruitment of group interview members, e.g., suggesting the time that would be best to hold the meetings. Third, iterative questioning was used to confirm group and individual interviews (Shenton, 2004). Through this process, follow-up questions were asked to probe participants during each group and individual interview sessions, to gain a more understanding of their responses. Fourth, a field memo was used to capture (a) the cultural context of each of the groups and interview sessions, (b) probing questions from each session, and (c) to monitor my feelings and thoughts.
RESULTS

Twelve thematic categories were created from the final 27 qualitative codes identified from both the group and individual interviews (see Table A). To create the themes, the codes that were similar in their description were consolidated into a general theme. While the thematic categories that were identified from both the military parent group and individual interviews varied, each thematic category provided information regarding the a priori themes incorporated addressed in research questions one and two, i.e., utilization, effectiveness, and accessibility.

Research Question 1

Group and individual interview parents were asked to share their perception of accessibility to academic support resources at and around Fort Hood military base. Some military parents from the group interviews (90% of interview parents lived off post) reported academic support resources to be more accessible when on the military base (on-post). In response to the utilization item, related to academic resources, one mom responded that her daughter did not utilize any academic resources because she attended school off-post but continued to say:

I think there is a big difference being on post because the resources are right there compared to being off post. It’s like, okay, we have it [off-post resources], but it’s almost like they don’t really work.

This mother of four children was very frustrated with the access to resources off post and the quality of support from an off post school. She further shared that she reached out to her daughter’s school, off post, counselor to enroll her into after-school tutoring program; however, her daughter did not get the support she needed from this resource.
Fort Hood military base has: (a) seven elementary schools, (b) two middle schools, and (c) two high schools located on post. While all military families have access to the on-post military resources, the reality is that there is an extremely long waitlist for families who request to live on-post and thus, many families have to live off-post and thereby are not eligible to send their children to on-post schools. Three other group interview parents also shared their preference for on-post schools due to the accessibility to school resources. A comment from one on-post mom suggested that in addition to the advantage of access to academic resources on-post, on-post schools reduced bullying:

I think I like the on-post school better because there’s actually less bullying here than there was over in Kansas. They [her children] would come home telling me that their friends would talk about them, like during recess, and then they would come home…but over [Fort Hood] here it’s a little different I guess.

The relationship between military peers was a theme that emerged in other ways from the interviews. Many parents identified the climate of the on-post school as helpful in terms of acceptance of military children’s specific needs. Both fathers, who were individually interviewed, also expressed that more resources should be accessible to military students. One father in particular specified the need to improve accessibility to special education services and resources. This active duty, remarried father of three children explained that he was a resource liaison for one of the local independent school districts in the Fort Hood area. As a resource liaison, he was aware of available military resources; however, in his son’s school districts, resources were less frequently accessible. In regard to accessibility, this father further expressed:
So I’m part of all of these organizations, but I cannot seem to provide them for my child…. So it’s irritating that you are the person who has all of the resources for other people, but I can’t even get my son with ADHD to a 504 plan. There [also] needs to be diverse programs…. although he’s [son with ADHD] tough, Point me to a resource.

This father’s concerns were evident in regard to effectiveness as well, in that he identified a need for diversity within currently available resources because in his opinion some families were not accommodated. When asked to explain, he discussed his struggle with his son’s school to communicate behavioral and educational challenges to both parents. He felt that access to academic resources in his son’s school district would help to mitigate some of the school challenges his son was experiencing. A mom, similarly shared challenges around gifted and talented testing for her son:

So the dilemma I have sometimes is that when you come to one post or another the records don’t follow. So like my son was State board tested at four. He’s a GT kid, gifted and talented. So he oftentimes had to retake the test. And this last time, I refused for him to retake the test again. And so that gets a little frustrating; but there’s a military liaison that’s within the school and so that helped him not to have to take the test. But they had put him out of his classes without even telling me. So that is hard for soldiers. If our kid was in this grade or doing this type of stuff and then you take ‘em out, especially without acknowledging us, that’s bad.

This parent shared that she did not provide her children any latitude with respect to maintaining good grades even with respect to deployments and transitions. She states
that she is a very involved parent and knows the importance of supporting her children academically as well as emotionally.

Some of the group interview parents expressed disappointment with the civilian school system resources. This was focused around perceptions of the schools inability to support student academic performance. Some parents felt that when they needed academic support for their child; one parent stated, “To me, the elementary schools here, I don't like 'em….They don't learn anything.” Another ineffective aspect of academic support resources was reported low staffing for available programs. One parent stated, “so one person [school liaison] will assist the school, but also, they have 50% military [students]…. Yeah, sometimes they have one, two. Sometimes they have one.”

This father, as a resource liaison himself, knew the challenges associated with working with civilian school districts where military-related students comprised a large proportion of the student body. These school liaisons oversee a host of military family challenges including: (a) school transitions, (b) anxious/fear about deployments, (c) children with disabilities, (d) discipline/school related problems, (e) poor academic performance, (f) lack of extra-curricular activities, (g) lack of social connections and (h) children with special needs (Aronson & Perkins, 2013).

Further discussion in the group interviews revealed a new aspect of accessibility (defined as geographically for this study). Financial or military rank accessibility was identified by a couple parents within the group interviews as impacting their utilization of academic support resources. One single-mom of two children, who was the active duty
parent for her household, explained that off-post academic support resources are starting to support military families. She stated:

They're [off-post resources are] awesome because by us being green suitors [uniformed class A officers], we don't have to pay a fee, and so they go. All their little trips are free. Of course, we give money to our kids to have, but we don't have to pay a fee.

This mom did, however, vocalize her concern for lower ranked military soldiers, i.e. enlisted soldiers, and their access to academic support resources for their children. According to this mom, some enlisted soldiers do not receive financial support needed to utilize Fort Hood academic resource. She continued to report:

YMCA is different, though. You do have to pay a fee. It used to be like you pay so much and they would give you so much back. But since they brought it over to the Army side, or to the government money, then that's like you gotta go through all this red paperwork just to get your just dues and that. That's not good for us 'cause, for example, like me being a staff sergeant, this is one reason why I'm gonna have the educational stuff on pulse for me is because they will put me in a higher tier, like a captain... [but] why should I be paying the same amount as a captain? The captain makes twice my paycheck, if not more. So I don't think the ratio of how much we should pay is good. So, unfortunately, a lot of soldiers, they go off-post. To bypass this financial barrier, most of the moms identified utilizing programs that were more accessible to them off-post and that were reported to have equal quality to on-post military resources, which tended to be
very costly. For my daughter to go to the program, it'll cost me like $120.00 a week. That's a lot.

This mom was discussing the financial frustration that she and other parents, for whom she interacts with through a military support service, experience there at Fort Hood. She purports that many families at the enlisted level pay a similar fee for child resources as higher military rank levels (e.g. officers). Financial or military ranked accessibility was identified by another parent as a barrier to utilizing military base resources.

Research Question 2

Group and individual interview parents’ who reported effectiveness of academic support resources also was found as a theme. Given the financial and geographic barriers to accessing academic support resources, some military families felt they did not have a choice but to seek whatever help they could. Most of the parents who were able to afford academic support resources, found these resources to be effective. One mom of two stated:

I've heard [name], my son, because I felt in elementary they weren't helping him. So I put him in Sylvan Learning Center. I paid that money. It costs me a lot just to get him on the reading level that they were [on], 'cause I don't think they really worked on it. I think they just throw things at the kids, and they tell you, "Here. Here, this is what you do." And then I didn't know that Fort Hood had those services where you can do the online tutoring. The only thing I wanted to do was make sure my son was at the reading level he had to be at. So I paid for it, but they ended up they do everything. So I paid for it, but it worked. It helped him.
While this similar service was available at Fort Hood, this mom was unaware. The academic Fort Hood resource was available only online, although the Sylvan Learning Center was off-post, it provided one-on-one interaction with a professional support personnel and proved to be effective for her son.

Another parent, mother of five children, was unable to afford the cost of academic support resources (e.g., Sylvan Learning Center) so she found a creative way to support her son academically:

Even for middle school, my kids, they didn't – my sixth grader, when he first started, he came home with a 33[%] in math. And I'm like, "Christian," and he's like, "I don't understand it, mom. I don't understand it." And it seemed like to me I had to put him in the AP classes in order for him to get that one on one for him to be able to – and when I changed him to the AP when he started taking the pre-AP classes, that's when his grade went from a 30 on his first report card, to a 98.

This mothers' use of academic support resources was driven by her knowledge of the school resources and her ability to access these resources for her son.

One father was an active duty soldier who had been in the army for around 19 years. This father, who had two children (one biological and one step) who had learning challenges, expressed that, his biological child’s school was ineffective at communicating learning and behavioral challenges to him and his ex-wife. This father identified that diversity within military families is ignored by schools:

Be mindful of that, we’re military parents. When all of that stuff happened with my son, we didn’t say like look, we want to put him in this type of program. Look into the behavior where is it coming from? Look at the military child that is
military parents, that is parents that have been absent, parents that are separated. Diversity’s the main thing.

This father’s experience is unique because he also serves as a military resource liaison. He identified that the generalized perception of military families is a frequently occurring experience in his line of work.
DISCUSSION

This study explored military parents’ perspectives on utilization of academic support resources as related to accessibility and effectiveness of the resources available in the Fort Hood area. Similar to the research literature (Bradshaw et al., 2010), most military parents participating in this study reported living in the civilian community but preferred resources located on the military post. Accessibility was discussed in relation to utilization to academic support resources. For the interview participants, accessibility appeared to be related to utilization, with two additional descriptions of accessibility highlighted from their comments: (a) financial or military rank accessibility and (b) accessibility to special education services. While these types of accessibility were identified specifically for utilization of academic support resources, one barrier, financial accessibility, was similarly identified by military families with respect to mental health resource utilization (Murphy & Fairbanks, 2013).

Some interviewed parents reported effectiveness of utilized academic support resources. Many parents discussed perceived effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) often in tandem with accessibility. Two parents for instance expressed utilizing an academic support resource, even after identifying the resource to be effective although there was a financial barrier (i.e. accessibility). Both parents reported using this particular community-based resource that was located outside of the military base to help their adolescents who were not performing well in a few subjects. Many researchers including Huebner, Mancini, Bowen and Orthner (2009) and Garner et al. (2014) have identified the need to provide multi-level academic support to military adolescents. The
military cannot exclusively support all of the diverse needs of the family and thus relies on the civilian community for support (Berkowitz et al., 2014).

Additionally, effectiveness was also discussed in relation to reported utilization of academic support resources with respect to diversity. Diversity has been highlighted in the research primarily comparing access to mental health resources for active duty soldier and their families and National Guard and Reservist soldiers and their families (Park, 2011). Despite the relevancy of access to resources between the two groups, military families vary greatly in multiple ways.

Limitations

The current research study presented some limitations. While efforts were made through social media and through email to engage military parents, there were two face to face recruiting events which was profitable in terms of speaking directly to the military parents and getting interest from military parents. Exercise caution when considering the results, the nature of the participants may not be representative of all military families with children. In this case, given the areas of recruitment, it may be that more parents involved in accessing resources, and perhaps particular academic support resources, may have participated in this study.

Future Research

It is highly recommended in future research efforts to access parents through the school districts, inclusive of the on base schools, as a mechanism of a broader sample of military families and children. While limitations were present, researchers should further explore the reported utility, accessibility and effectiveness of these military academic support resources across various military branches and various systems i.e.
military parents, adolescents, teachers, and community support providers. Alternative operational definition for accessibility should be expanded to include other aspects of accessibility including financial or military rank accessibility and the accessibility of special education service. Moreover, barriers to accessibility pertaining to mental health care utilization should also be tested for military adolescents where applicable. It may also be beneficial to explore resource utilization with a comparison group of civilian families or officers’ families as educational challenges and lack of resources also impacts this population as well. Resources geared towards helping military students need to ensure that parents’ voices are considered within the research and evaluation process. By incorporating the parents’ perspective, value could be added not only to measure program utility and effectiveness but can also help programs best appropriate competitive funding to those programs that are actually utilized by military families.
Table 1

*Categorical Themes for Qualitative Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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| Military families’ response to deployments and transitions | - Spouse affective response to deployment  
- Children associate transitions with parental deployment/parental separation  
- Affective response to parental deployment/separation  
- Response different depending on the child’s age  
- Transitions from elementary to middle school (not deployment)  
- Concerns/Feelings about transitions  
- Deployment/separation or transition causes confusion or challenges within the family  
- PCS/deployments are a constant part of life  
- Military-related transitions (not elementary to middle)  
- Longer time between transitions  
- Families prepare children for transitions by focusing on the positive  
- Military families maintain contact across transition |
| Military parents support | - Parents perceive their children to be resilient  
- Parents encourage(expect academic success in children  
- Academic concerns (Parents or child identify a need for academic support  
- Difference in how children within the family respond  
- Diversity within military families  
- Parent-child relationship or interaction (within context: family, deployment, school |
| Academic support | - Not Reliable/ineffective resources  
- Schools/Resources present every day challenges  
- Resources/programs are NOT responsive to military students in transition  
- Resources/programs NOT available/accessible  
- Resources/programs are NOT utilized (Do not use resources) |
| Resources and school systems pose challenges to utilization | |
| On-post military | - Preference for on-post schools  
- Physical proximity of schools/resources on-post |
| Parent-child interactions to support academic performance | Recognize difference in how children within the family respond to 
| Parent-child relationship or interaction (within the context: family, deployment, school, etc.) | 
| Raise academic concerns (Parents or child identify a need for academic support) | 
| Parents encourage/expect academic success in children | 
| Parents perceive their children to be resilient | 
| Homeschooling or alternative education | 
| Students balance school, academic support (i.e. resources/programs) and/or extra-curricular activities | 
| Military families utilize academic support resources | Resources/programs are utilized (family use) | 
| Parents identification or description of a specific program/resource | 
| Military families believed to have accessibility to most academic support resources | Resources/programs are accessible (i.e. geographic and financial/military rank) | 
| Reciprocated reliability between military parents and resources and school systems | Resources/programs are responsive to military students in transition | 
| | Resources/programs are more reliable/effective on-post | 
| Student | Gender differences | 
| Developmental changes |
characteristics

impacting

military-related transitions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support (or lack thereof) for military families</th>
<th>Support with this base compared to another military base</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference for military community support on-post vs. family support off-post</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Children on-post support each other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of support from military peers, siblings, or cousins (age-related support to the child)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military interacts with community to bridge the gap</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military family support</td>
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<td>Support from military peers, siblings, or cousins (age-related)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making/losing friends</td>
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<td>Military student support</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military culture</th>
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<td>Diversity within military families</td>
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| Miscellaneous | Relevant but unrelated to the research questions |
REFERENCES


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QSR International Pty Ltd. (2015). NVivo qualitative data analysis (Version 11) [software].


