



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Towards a Social Theory of Sexual Risk Behavior among Men in the Armed Services: Understanding the Military Occupational Habitus

Anastario, M. P., Hallum-Montes, R., Reyes, E., Manzanero, R., & Chun, H. (2013). *Culture, Medicine & Psychiatry*, 37, 737-755.



Qualitative and quantitative data collected from the Belize Defense Force were used to clarify how military occupation is implicated in sexual risk behaviors among personnel. Binge drinking and risky sexual behaviors were described as part of the military culture and used as coping mechanisms for occupational hazards, trauma exposure and, at times, PTSD.

Key Findings:

- Personnel recognize and describe occupational hazards, binge drinking, and the existence of readily available sex with casual partners as elements of their military culture.
- Trauma was described as an unpredictable, omnipresent, and stressful aspect of their military duties.
- Coping practices such as excessive alcohol consumption are built into the military culture for those with and without PTSD.
- 18% of the men screened positive for PTSD; the number of lifetime hazardous exposures was significantly higher among men with PTSD than without.
- Personnel with PTSD were twice as likely to report sex with a commercial sex worker in the previous 12 months and twice as likely to report sex while drunk or high during the 30 days preceding the interview.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could provide education about the dangers of risky sexual and drinking behaviors in the context of coping with mental health problems.
- Programs could continue to develop treatment programs with special emphasis on the concurrent treatment of PTSD, substance use disorders, and high risk sexual behaviors.

Implications for Policies:

- Support for research examining the relationship among these variables in the U.S military may be helpful.
- The culture of U.S. military branches regarding risky sexual and drinking behaviors during deployment and at home could be further explored.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could examine additional possible contributors to high risk sexual behavior.
- Similar research could explore these relationships in a U.S. military sample.

Background Information

Methodology:

- Participants for the qualitative interviews were recruited through snowball sampling and were male Belize Defense Force personnel willing to talk about their sexual health.
- Quantitative data were collected about HIV-related knowledge, stigma and attitudes, sexual risk behavior, sex with commercial sex workers, and screening tools for depression, PTSD, and alcohol problems.
- Qualitative data were analyzed using grounded theory tenets; open codes were used to develop axial codes and theoretical codes.
- Means and frequencies were calculated for the quantitative data; general linear model (GLM) adjusted for potential confounders and logistic regression was used to estimate odds ratios for outcomes.

Participants:

- 15 male Belize Defense Force personnel underwent interviews; no additional demographic data were reported.
- 304 male Belize Defense Force personnel completed quantitative measures; no additional demographic data were reported.

Limitations:

- This data only includes some of the elements that may influence sexual risk behavior.
- Very little descriptive data about the sample was reported, thus making generalizability difficult.
- There was little description of the relative importance of different elements of the qualitative data thus making it difficult to understand the most salient themes.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	★★★★
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★★