

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Drinking and Spouse Abuse Among U.S. Army Soldiers

Bell, N. S., Harford, T., McCarroll, J. E., & Senier, L. (2004). Drinking and spouse abuse among U.S. Army soldiers. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 28(12), 1890-1897. doi:10.1097/01.alc.0000148102.89841.9b

SUMMARY: Alcohol use likely plays a key role in domestic violence (DV), including among military families. The relationships between DV perpetration, alcohol use patterns, and demographic information were examined among married, male, Active Duty Army Service members who did or did not perpetrate spousal DV. In general, heavier drinking among Service members was associated with increased risk for DV perpetration.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members who reported the heaviest drinking patterns (i.e., 22 or more drinks per week) were 68% more likely to abuse their spouse than Service members who did not drink.
- Perpetrators were more likely than victims to have been drinking during the DV (24% vs. 14%).
- Both perpetrators and victims were more likely to have been drinking at the time of the DV event if the perpetrator had previously reported heavier drinking patterns.
- Perpetrators were more likely to be younger, lower rank, minority race/ethnicity (i.e., Black or Latino), less educated, and parents of large families (i.e., four or more children); however, those with lower rank and minority race/ethnicity were less likely to be drinking during the DV.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate Service members and their partners about the risks of heavy drinking, including DV
- Provide resources and mental health referrals for Service members or their family concerned about alcohol use and DV
- Offer separate support groups for perpetrators and victims of DV that provide social support, as well as education and skills to prevent future episodes of DV

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote programs that connect Service members reporting high levels of alcohol use on their screening with preventative services and resources for DV
- Recommend education for professionals working with military families about the association between heavy alcohol use and DV
- Encourage collaboration with community advocacy groups to plan an awareness campaign on military bases about the risks of alcohol abuse and DV for military families

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METHODS

- Data for the study were collected from the Total Army Injury and Health Outcomes database.
- Data regarding Army Service members' perpetration of DV, health and risk behaviors, including alcohol use, and demographic information from 1991-1998 was used.
- Relationships between Army Service members' DV perpetration, alcohol use, and demographic characteristics were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Data was included from 96,663 married, male, enlisted, Active Duty Soldiers from 1991-1998.
- Soldiers were 32,221 first-time perpetrators of substantiated DV events against their spouse; controls were 64,442 married, male, non-offending Soldiers matched on rank.
- The majority of Service members (56%) reported drinking alcohol at least weekly, and DV perpetrators averaged more drinks per week (M = 6.8) than non-offenders (M = 5.9).
- No other demographic information was provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Domestic violence is likely already under-reported, and this study only used substantiated cases of DV among spouses, so several cases of DV were probably not included in the data.
- Drinking during the DV event and alcohol abuse were likely under-reported by Service members since they are socially undesirable behaviors and reports were not confidential.
- Other factors (e.g., Service members' deployment, mental health and well-being, history of abuse victimization) that were not considered in the analyses may have influenced results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how stressors, such as deployment or mental health difficulties, interact with alcohol use and DV perpetration among Service members
- Explore whether reasons or risk factors for perpetrating DV among Service members are different for groups with varying demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, rank)
- Investigate whether programs that aim to reduce alcohol use among Service members can also decrease rates of DV among those individuals

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