

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Hazardous Drinking and Family Functioning in National Guard Veterans and Spouses Postdeployment

Blow, A. J., Gorman, L., Ganoczy, D., Kees, M., Kashy, D. A., Valenstein, M., ... Chermack, S. (2013). Hazardous drinking and family functioning in National Guard veterans and spouses postdeployment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27(2), 303-313. doi:10.1037/a0031881

SUMMARY: Survey data were used to examine the rates of alcohol misuse among National Guard members and their relationship partners, congruence of drinking behaviors within couples, and the effects of alcohol misuse, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on relationship satisfaction, parenting stress, and household chaos. Results indicated that although there was no association with combat exposure and alcohol use, problem drinking was associated with poorer relationship satisfaction, and higher levels of parenting stress, depression, and PTSD.

KEY FINDINGS:

- No significant association emerged between combat exposure and later alcohol use in Guard members.
- Problem drinking in Guard members was significantly associated with poorer relationship satisfaction, parenting stress, PTSD, and depression, but was unrelated to family chaos.
- Guard members who engaged in more problem drinkers tended to be male, age 30 or below, not married, less educated, have lower rank (E1-E4), and lower income (less than \$30,000), while partners who engaged in more problem drinking tended to be younger, not married, and childless.
- Twenty-nine percent of Guard members and 11% of partners were labeled as problem drinkers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue to use evidence-based parenting programs to help military couples parent more effectively and reduce parenting stress and household chaos
- Provide professional development for practitioners working with military families regarding the identification and assessment of depression, PTSD, and alcohol misuse
- Provide evidence-based programs for military couples, particularly those couples in which both partners are problem drinkers

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend screenings for PTSD, depression, and alcohol misuse in military settings
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that promote resilience in military families to reduce the risk of problem drinking
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to support Service members and spouses coping with problem drinking

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants included Guard members and their committed romantic relationship partners who attended a mandatory two-day reintegration programs between October 2007 and December 2009.
- The reintegration program took place 45-90 days after Guard members returned from a 12-month deployment.
- Participants were recruited via an announcement made during the reintegration program and volunteered to take the 30-45 minute on-site survey.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,143 Guard members and 674 partners (n = 1,817).
- The majority of Guard members were male (89.0%) and partners were female (96%). Eighty-four percent of the sample were White.
- Most participants were White (84%) and between the ages of 31-50 years (47% Service members, 49% spouses) or 22-30 years (38% Service members, 33% spouses).

LIMITATIONS

- This study focused on Guard members and may not be generalizable to other branches of the military.
- Participants may differ from non-participants in a way that was not measured, but affected the outcome variables (e.g., participants may be functioning differently than non-participants).
- Data were cross sectional, so causal conclusions cannot be drawn.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Continue to examine problem drinking and its effects on military family functioning and psychological well-being with a more diverse military sample
- Explore alcohol use across time (pre- and post-deployment) to explore the impact of drinking on family outcomes
- Investigate the effectiveness of military programs aimed at helping Service members cope and their spouses with problem drinking

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