

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

A Comparison of Alcohol Use and Related Problems Among Women and Men in the Military

Brown, J. M., Bray, R. M., & Hartzell, M. C. (2010). A comparison of alcohol use and related problems among women and men in the military. *Military Medicine*, 175(2), 101-107. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-09-00080

SUMMARY: Given the increasing numbers and expanding roles for women in the military, the researchers sought to understand if there were behavioral differences with regard to the levels of drinking and alcohol related problems (dependence symptoms, driving after drinking, productivity loss, serious consequences) for enlisted and officer men and women. Data were collected using the Department of Defense (DoD) Survey of Health Related Behaviors among Military Personnel.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Among the entire sample, male Service members were more likely to be heavy or binge drinkers and to experience alcohol-related problems than were female Service members.
- Female Service members may be at risk for alcohol problems at lower levels of consumption than male Service members. Although male Service members had higher rates of alcohol use, female Service members were at least as likely as men to have symptoms of dependence and productivity loss.
- For both men and women, officers were more likely to use alcohol than enlisted personnel, although enlisted personnel were more likely to report heavy or binge drinking.
- The rate of driving after drinking any amount of alcohol among Active Duty Service members showed that men had higher rates than women (40% vs. 24%). This difference was true for officers (56% vs. 35%) and enlisted personnel (37% vs. 22%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Use information regarding gender differences in consumption and effects of alcohol to inform strategies for education
- Offer support groups for Service members that have experienced the effects of gender differences in the military
- Provide workshops that educate Service members on the effects of alcohol abuse and how to use other coping strategies

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development of programs that address binge drinking and the consequences of driving after drinking
- Encourage collaboration with community-based programs near military installations that provide support for individuals that struggle with alcohol abuse
- Promote education for professionals who work with Service members regarding gender differences in alcohol use and effects

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METHODS

- The 2002 DoD Survey of Health Related Behaviors among military personnel is a self-administered anonymous questionnaire. Eligible participants included all Active Duty personnel, but participation was voluntary. The response rate was 59%.
- Data were examined to determine the prevalence of alcohol use and alcohol-related outcomes.
- The prevalence of different outcomes was compared for male and female Service members.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 12,756 (3,250 women and 9,506 men) Active Duty personnel across all pay grades.
- Participants' races included White (67%), Black (21%), Latino/Latina (7%), and other races (5%).
- Of the sample, 85% were enlisted and 15% were officers.

LIMITATIONS

- The voluntary nature of participation may bias results. People who chose to participate may differ from those who did not in important but unmeasured ways.
- The measure for symptoms of alcohol dependence does not reflect diagnostic criteria, and it is unclear how the measure was developed.
- Questions regarding driving after drinking indicated whether a person drove after any amount of alcohol rather than driving while intoxicated.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include longitudinal data on drinking patterns and habits as well as other additional health and background variables that may influence alcohol use
- Explore the relationship between gender, military culture, and drinking patterns
- Examine the effectiveness of programs aim at reducing problem drinking in the military

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