

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

When War Comes Home: The Effect of Combat Service on Domestic Violence

Cesur, R., & Sabia, J. J. (2016). When war comes home: The effect of combat service on domestic violence. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 98(2), 209-225. doi:10.1162/REST_a_00541

SUMMARY: Deployment can include experiences that are highly stressful for Service members, which can influence Service members reintegration into their families. This study examined the relationship between combat exposure (i.e., being engaged in a firefight) during deployment and the perpetration of domestic violence after deployment. Findings indicate an association between combat exposure, domestic violence, and other aspects of relationship functioning.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Experiencing combat exposure was related to an increase in the risk of perpetrating domestic violence, including child maltreatment.
- Longer deployments and multiple deployments added to the increased risk of perpetrating domestic violence as did symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and anxiety, suicidal ideation, binge drinking, and drug use.
- Combat exposure was also related to decreased relationship quality and increased risk for relationship stress, relationship break-up, and engaging in heated arguments.
- These associations were stronger among Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors than they were among Airmen.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops during reintegration to help families and Service members adjust to the Service member's return, especially when the deployment has included combat exposure
- Engage Service members and their intimate partners in classes that aim to increase communication and conflict-resolution skills prior to and after deployment
- Disseminate information regarding possible symptoms of mental health problems Service members may face after deployment and where individuals and families can find help for those problems

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for identification, prevention, and intervention of domestic violence in military families
- Recommend education for service providers around the possible effects of deployment on Service members' families
- Promote reintegration programs that include attention to assisting the Service members' family in adjusting to the Service member's return

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METHODS

- Data for this study came from two sources. Some participants were initially recruited as part of a longitudinal study with surveys completed at four time points between 1995 and 2008. Data from the fourth time point (2007-2008) when participants were 24 to 24 years old were included in this study.
- The surveys for the fourth time point included questions about demographic information, military service, family information, health, education, cognitive ability, and risky behaviors including violence.
- Other participants were recruited through surveys, with questions about combat exposure and domestic abuse, distributed to Active Duty Service members on military bases.
- Researchers then analyzed whether combat exposure was associated with domestic violence and other aspects of relationship functioning.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 11,950 Active Duty male Service members who were deployed overseas, including 23% Soldiers, 29% Sailors, 22% Marines, and 26% Airmen, 50% of whom reported combat exposure.
- The sample had an average age of 32 years old.
- Of the Service members, 73% were White, 16% were Black, and 11% were other races. With regard to ethnicity, 13% of the sample indicated they were Latino.

LIMITATIONS

- All measures of domestic violence were self-report from the Service member which may influence the accuracy since Service members may underreport perpetrating violence.
- These data do not take into account relationships that may have ended upon the announcement that the Service member will be deploying, which could affect observed rates of domestic violence.
- This study cannot offer information regarding longer-term effects of combat exposure .

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize a longitudinal design to assess rates of domestic violence in the long-term after deployment
- Combine self-report and information from databases of confirmed cases of domestic violence to determine rates of domestic violence
- Examine relationships that may dissolve upon the announcement of deployment to establish the ways in which those relationships differ from relationships that remain intact during deployment

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