

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Multiple  
Branches

## Intimate Partner Violence Among Women Veterans By Sexual Orientation

Dardis, C. M., Shipherd, J. C., & Iverson, K. M. (2017). Intimate partner violence among women veterans by sexual orientation. *Women & Health, 57*(7), 775-791. doi:10.1080/03630242.2016.1202884

**SUMMARY:** Lesbian, bisexual, or questioning (LBQ)-identified women experience intimate partner violence (IPV) at similar or higher rates than heterosexual women. Female Veterans also have a high risk for IPV. Although LBQ women are disproportionately represented in the military relative to the general population, IPV experiences relative to sexual orientation have not been examined. This study examined lifetime and past-year IPV experiences and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms by sexual orientation. Results suggest that LBQ female Veterans were more likely to report IPV; however, sexual orientation was unrelated to IPV-related PTSD symptoms.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- When controlling for age, LBQ female Veterans experienced a lifetime fear of partners, sexual IPV, physical IPV, and partner stalking at significantly higher rates than heterosexual female Veterans.
- When controlling for age, LBQ female Veterans were more likely to have experienced past-year emotional mistreatment, sexual IPV, and physical IPV than heterosexual female Veterans.
- LBQ female Veterans were over four times as likely than heterosexual female Veterans to experience past-year sexual IPV.
- Sexual orientation was not associated with IPV-related PTSD symptoms, even after controlling for age, race, and number of types of IPV experienced.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to female LBQ Service members and their intimate partners regarding available resources for IPV and IPV-related PTSD symptoms
- Offer classes and support groups focused on increasing conflict-resolution skills to female LBQ couples who have a history of IPV in their relationship
- Enhance current IPV prevention programs to include training materials and outreach strategies that are inclusive of and sensitive to LBQ female Service members

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of programs specifically focused on IPV prevention among sexual minority Service members and their intimate partners
- Encourage the development of a collaboration between DoD programs and LGBT community organizations to develop resources specifically for LBQ female Service members and their intimate partners who experience IPV
- Recommend professional education that includes specific information on IPV experienced by LBQ female Service members

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## METHODS

- Data were gathered from the Women Veterans and IPV-related Care Survey, a 2014 national study examining women Veteran's health needs.
- Participants were recruited by a research firm (GfK) using KnowledgePanel, a probability-based survey panel of 55,000 U.S. adults.
- Sexual orientation was self-identified, IPV was assessed using the Humiliate/Afraid/Rape/Kick (HARK) tool, and PTSD symptoms were assessed using the PTSD Checklist-5 survey; all data were self-reported.
- Researchers examined IPV experiences and IPV-related PTSD symptoms by sexual orientation.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 411 female Veterans aged 18 years or older who resided in the U.S.
- Approximately 9.7% of the female Veterans identified as lesbian, bisexual, or questioning (LBQ) and 90.3% identified as heterosexual.
- The average age of the LBQ and heterosexual groups was 44.26 and 52.89 years, respectively. Both samples were approximately 69% White and 31% non-White.

## LIMITATIONS

- Researchers did not determine whether the perpetrators of IPV were male or female, and therefore assumptions regarding IPV in same-sex relationships or by gender cannot be made.
- Approximately 69% of the data were gathered from White women, thus reducing the generalizability to female Veterans of other races and ethnicities.
- The study relied upon retrospective, self-report data which are subject to recall and self-report bias.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a study that includes questions about the gender of the perpetrator and distinguishes between sexual orientation and sexual behaviors
- Include more racial and ethnic diversity to broaden generalizability among female Veterans
- Use a longitudinal design to better understand the timing of IPV to determine at which points the risk for PTSD may increase (e.g., prior to enlistment or after combat exposure)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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