

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Protective Mechanisms and Prevention of Violence and Aggression in Veterans

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SUMMARY: Many OIF/OEF Veterans report problematic aggression and violence; however, little research has examined risk or protective factors of Veteran violence. Associations between potential risk and protective factors for later violence were explored among OIF/OEF Veterans in a national longitudinal survey. Eight risk factors and eight protective mechanisms were found to impact Veteran violence, and protective mechanisms were especially beneficial among high-risk Veterans.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Protective mechanisms of basic needs being met, healthy sleep, and no reported pain were associated with less violence at follow-up among Veterans at both high and low risk for violence.
- Protective mechanisms of resilience, perceived life control, social support, self-care, and steady employment were associated with less violence at follow-up among only high-risk Veterans.
- Eight violence risk factors (i.e., younger age, family violence, arrest history, combat exposure, substance misuse, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and traumatic brain injury) were identified.
- Cumulatively, protective mechanisms decreased the odds of violence reported at follow-up more for high-risk Veterans (25%) than low-risk Veterans (11%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer Service members post-deployment workshops to help manage aggression and violence
- Provide military spouses and children support groups for those who have experienced or witnessed Service member violence
- Disseminate information regarding risk factors related to Service member violence and resources for Service members who are concerned that they may act violently

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for education and prevention of violence among Service members
- Recommend education for professionals who work with Service members and their families regarding potential protective mechanisms that may decrease risk of Service member violence
- Encourage the development of programs that address physical, psychosocial, and occupational needs of Service members and integrate these factors to reduce risk of violence

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METHODS

- The Veterans Affairs (VA) department's National Post-Deployment Adjustment Survey randomly recruited, via mail, all OIF/OEF Veterans who were no longer Active Duty in May 2009.
- Veterans self-reported adjustment back to civilian life, including risk and protective factors, at baseline (47% response rate, 56% completion rate) and one-year follow-up (79% retention rate).
- Associations between baseline risk and protective factors and violence at follow-up were examined; analyses were weighted to reflect the proportion of females in the military.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 1,090 Veterans (weighted n = 866) with a median age of 34 years
- The sample identified as primarily White (73%), Black (11%), or Latino (8%) and reported serving in the Army (55%), Air Force (20%), Navy (15%), Marines (10%), and Cost Guard ()

LIMITATIONS

- Veterans who responded to the initial and follow-up surveys may have differed from those who did not.
- Veterans may have under-reported violence in an effort to appear more socially acceptable.
- Veterans' risk for violence was arbitrarily split into high- and low-risk depending upon their amount of reported risk factors at baseline rather than viewing risk on a continuum.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine protective factors as they relate to violence in subgroups of Veterans known to be at increased risk for violence, such as Veterans diagnosed with PTSD or traumatic brain injury
- Test the effectiveness of a prevention program for Veteran violence that promotes building skills related to the identified protective mechanisms
- Explore the effects of post-deployment violence education on rates of Veteran violence

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