

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Immigration, Domestic Violence, and the Military: The Case of "Military Brides"

Erez, E., & Bach, S. (2003). Immigration, domestic violence, and the military: The case of "military brides". *Violence Against Women*, 9(9), 1093-1117. doi:10.1177/1077801203255289

SUMMARY: In-depth interviews were conducted with immigrant women who had experienced abuse by their intimate partners (who were also Service members). Emerging themes considered the intersection of two statuses – that of immigrant and of military spouse/partner. This study provides valuable insight for understanding and responding to the special circumstances of abused military immigrant partners. Common themes that emerged included immigration status, husband's need for control and dominance, jealousy and possessiveness, as well as money issues and military service, influenced wives experiences of abuse.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Immigration status was used as a weapon against victims in all cases; few participants reported either comfort with the immigration process or knowledge of their rights (other than what they learned through their abusive partners).
- Military related stressors (e.g., deployments, frequent moves) were reported as a major cause of violence, as well as Service members' need to have control or because of jealousy and possessiveness issues.
- The women who worked with military service providers (such as social workers, military police, etc.) were generally less positive about their experiences compared to those discussing experiences with non-military service providers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups to immigrant military spouses coping with issues of domestic violence.
- Educate immigrant military spouses about their rights and the laws regarding immigration status.
- Disseminate information to military spouses regarding resources and services available to help with immigration questions or coping with other issues related to well-being (e.g., mental health, domestic violence).

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that identify and prevent intimate partner violence in military families
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs that work with military families experiencing intimate partner violence
- Recommend education for service providers regarding how to recognize and report incidents of intimate partner violence in military families

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METHODS

- The sample consisted of foreign-born immigrant women who had experience intimate partner violence and who were married to a Service member.
- Participants completed an initial 45 minute to 1.5-hour interview regarding their abuse experience, help-seeking behaviors, and the responses of social service and justice systems.
- A second interview was conducted a few months later that focused on participant's experiences with military social services and the military legal system.

PARTICIPANTS

- Ten immigrant women completed the interviews.
- Countries of origin included: Bahrain, Brazil, England, Germany, Japan, Vietnam, the former Yugoslavia, New Zealand, and Mexico. Participants had been in the United States between one to five years.
- Participants were between the ages of 19-48 years ($M = 30$); five did not have children and five had between two and five children.

LIMITATIONS

- Small sample size and lack of detailed information about the participants (e.g. whether they were receiving services, whether they were still with abusive partners, etc.) make the information gathered very difficult to contextualize and apply more broadly.
- It is not clear to what extent native languages other than English may have influenced the results or even the interview protocols.
- No information was given regarding the interview questions or qualitative data analysis making it difficult to replicate; therefore, results should be interpreted with caution.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Employ a mixed-methods design to explore the experiences and needs of abused immigrant women married to Service members
- Assess the prevalence of intimate partner violence among military families with immigrant and non-immigrant partners
- Explore barriers to help seeking for military families experiencing intimate partner violence

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