

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Deployment-Related Military Sexual Trauma Predicts Heavy Drinking and Alcohol Problems Among Male Reserve and National Guard Soldiers

Fillo, J., Heavey, S. C., Homish, D. L., & Homish, G. G. (2017). Deployment-related military sexual trauma predicts heavy drinking and alcohol problems among male Reserve and National Guard Soldiers. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 42(1), 111-119. doi:10.1111/acer.13528

SUMMARY: Military sexual trauma is associated with negative physical, mental, and behavioral consequences. This study had 248 male Reserve and National Guard Soldiers complete questionnaires regarding their experiences of military sexual trauma and alcohol problems. Results revealed that the rate of military sexual trauma was high among the sample, and it was associated with frequent heavy drinking and alcohol problems.

KEY FINDINGS:

- About 17% of male Soldiers reported experiencing sexual trauma during their most recent deployment.
- Soldiers who experienced sexual trauma were more likely to have frequent heavy drinking (i.e., the reported frequency of getting drunk and the frequency of having five or more drinks in a single setting) than Soldiers who did not experience sexual trauma, even after controlling their posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and age.
- Compared to Soldiers without sexual trauma, Soldiers who experienced sexual trauma were more likely to have alcohol problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for Service members who experienced sexual trauma during deployment
- Provide outreach services that increase awareness of available support for Service members with sexual trauma
- Offer workshops to Service members on the policy of sexual misconduct

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage awareness campaigns on military bases regarding the importance of addressing sexual assault and harassment
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that support Service members who experienced military sexual trauma
- Recommend education of professionals who work with Service members on the associations between sexual trauma and alcohol problems

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METHODS

- Data were drawn from the study Operation: SAFETY (Soldiers And Families Excelling Through the Years); participants of the study were recruited from units across New York State from 2014 to 2015.
- Measures assessed military sexual trauma during the last deployment, frequent heavy drinking (e.g., frequency of getting drunk), and alcohol problems (e.g., be injured because of drinking).
- Data were analyzed to examine the rate of sexual trauma among male Reserve and National Guard Soldiers as well as the associations between sexual trauma and alcohol issues.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 248 male Reserve or National Guard Soldiers who had been deployed before.
- The average age of the Soldiers was 33.39 years (SD = 6.18); all of them were married (75%) or cohabitating (25%).
- The Soldiers were mostly White (81%), followed by Black (4%), Latino (10%), and other (5%).

LIMITATIONS

- Only male Soldiers were included in the sample, so the findings cannot be applied to female Soldiers and Service members in other military branches.
- The sample was limited to Reserve and National Guard Soldiers, so caution must be taken to generalize the results to Active Duty Service members.
- The study only examined military sexual trauma in the most recent deployment; therefore, Soldiers who experienced sexual trauma in other military contexts were missing from the analysis. Therefore, the prevalence of military sexual trauma might be underestimated.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Compare the prevalence of military sexual trauma between male and female Service members and examine the potential gender differences in the associations between sexual trauma and alcohol problems
- Recruit participants from all military branches so that the results can be better generalized
- Examine the influence of sexual trauma on other mental and behavioral health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, violence)

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