

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Air Force

## Hazardous Drinking and Military Community Functioning: Identifying Mediating Risk Factors

Foran, H.M., Heyman, R.E., & Slep, A.M.S. (2011). Hazardous drinking and military community functioning: Identifying mediating risk factors. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 79*(4), 521-532. doi:10.1037/a0024110

**SUMMARY:** Efforts to decrease hazardous drinking in the military have had limited success, despite it being a known and pervasive issue. Community-based prevention programs may be one way to reduce hazardous drinking among military populations. This study used a representative sample of U.S. Air Force Active Duty Service members to examine the effects of proximal risk factors (e.g., financial stress) on the relationship between community functioning and hazardous drinking. Results suggest that community-based prevention research and programs may result in the reduction of hazardous drinking.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Proximal risk factors (e.g., financial stress, relationship stress, and mental health symptoms) helped explain the relationship between community functioning and hazardous drinking.
- For both men and women, an increase in community functioning predicted a decreased risk for depression, more satisfaction with the Air Force, and lower financial stress; all of which then predicted a decreased risk for hazardous drinking.
- For men only, lower relationship satisfaction was a predictor of increased hazardous drinking.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to Service members and their families regarding ways to increase social support with other Active Duty Service members, their families, and their communities.
- Provide programs for Service members and their spouses that focus on managing financial stress, especially during times of transition.
- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping behaviors and dealing with depressive symptoms for military families.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support prevention programs focused on decreasing hazardous drinking among Service members and their families.
- Encourage the development of programs focused on increasing community cohesion for Service members and their families.
- Recommend professional education on possible ways to indirectly focus on hazardous drinking (e.g., disseminate information regarding helpful resources for substance abuse), as some Service members may be reluctant to seek help due to fear of consequences or stigmatization.

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## METHODS

- Participants were invited to complete the Community Assessment survey in 2006 which is an anonymous, web-based survey conducted every other year at 82 U.S. Air Force bases worldwide.
- The Community Assessment survey used brief measures to assess individual, family, organizational, and community functioning. In addition, The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test was used to assess hazardous drinking.
- Statistical analyses were used to analyze the effects other factors have on the relationship between community functioning and hazardous drinking.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The participants were 52,780 Active Duty Service members from 82 U.S. Air Force bases worldwide.
- The sample included 41,841 (79.3%) men and 10,939 women (20.7%).
- The sample was predominately 72.9% White, 14% Black, and 7.5% Latino. The remainder of the sample did not specify race (5.6%). Also, most of the participants reported being married (67.9%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The data are cross-sectional, therefore the direction of effects cannot be determined.
- There are other untested variables that may be influencing the results, such as personality (e.g., impulsivity) and childhood (e.g., parental alcohol abuse) factors, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn from this study.
- The U.S. Air Force has lower rates of hazardous drinking among Service members than other branches of the U.S. military. Therefore, results may not be generalizable to other branches of the military.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a longitudinal or prevention study to better assess causality between community functioning and hazardous drinking
- Assess other factors known to affect hazardous drinking, including personality traits, childhood risk factors, and other known predictors of hazardous drinking (e.g., drinking history)
- Include Active Duty Service members from other branches of the military and compare results to increase the extent to which the results can be generalized to other military branches.

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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