

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Air Force

Emotional Abuse and Its Unique Ecological Correlates Among Military Personnel and Spouses

Foran, H. M., Heyman, R. E., Smith Slep, A. M., & United States Air Force Family Advocacy Research Program (2014). Emotional abuse and its unique ecological correlates among military personnel and spouses. *Psychology of Violence, 4*(2), 128-142. doi:10.1037/a0034536

SUMMARY: All types of abuse, including emotional abuse, can be influenced by risk factors from multiple ecological levels (e.g., family, community, workplace). The correlates of clinically significant emotional abuse were examined among Active Duty Air Force personnel and their civilian spouses via an anonymous survey. Factors associated with increased risk for experiencing abuse differed between men and women at different ecological levels, but the strongest correlates of emotional abuse were relationship dissatisfaction, poor self-efficacy, financial stress, and alcohol problems.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The factors most strongly related to risk for experiencing emotional abuse were relationship dissatisfaction, poor self-efficacy, financial stress, and alcohol problems.
- At the community level, more support from neighbors and community cohesion were uniquely related to a reduced risk of experiencing clinically significant emotional abuse for Active Duty men.
- Among Active Duty women, working fewer hours was related to a reduced risk of experiencing clinically significant emotional abuse.
- Among female civilian spouses, more support from military leadership was related to a lower risk of experiencing clinically significant emotional abuse.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Tailor curricula to meet the needs of groups with high rates of emotional abuse, such as Active Duty women who work a large number of hours
- Offer workshops on healthy communication skills for military couples
- Educate Service members and spouses about the nature of emotional abuse and how to report abuse

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the implementation and evaluation of empirically-based programs designed to reduce abuse among military families
- Recommend integrating emotional abuse screenings into existing programs for military couples
- Encourage professional development courses for providers working with military families about how to recognize and address emotional abuse

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Active Duty Air Force members and civilian spouses were invited to complete the 2006 Community Assessment, an anonymous survey conducted at each Air Force base every two years.
- Participants completed an online survey assessing emotional health, emotional abuse, and demographic information, and only one member of a couple was included in analysis.
- Several individual, family, community, and workplace factors were examined in order to understand their relationship with emotional abuse risk.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 42,774 Active Duty U.S. Air Force personnel who were primarily male (81%) and either married (88%) or in a committed relationship (12%) and 17,226 civilian spouses who were primarily female (95%).
- The U.S. Air Force sample was weighted on marital status, ethnicity, religion, military rank, and job type to be representative of the Air Force and account for uneven sampling.
- On average, male participants were 38.4 years of age (SD = 9.9) and female participants were 33.1 years of age (SD = 7.7).
- The majority of the sample had at least one child living with them (76% men, 74% women).

LIMITATIONS

- Other unmeasured variables, such as previous emotional abuse or a history of child maltreatment, may be influencing results.
- It cannot be determined whether individual, family, community, or workplace factors caused emotional abuse due to the cross-sectional nature of the study.
- Results may not generalize to other Active Duty military branches or members of the National Guard or Reserves.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a longitudinal study of factors that potentially increase or decrease risk for emotional abuse among military couples
- Explore how potential risk factors from different ecological levels (e.g., community, family) may impact males and females differently
- Continue to examine gender differences in intimate partner violence research, particularly given that research is usually focused on female victims and male perpetrators

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>