

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Factors Associated With Physical Aggression Among US Army Soldiers

Gallaway, M. S., Fink, D. S., Millikan, A. M., & Bell, M. R. (2012). Factors associated with physical aggression among US Army soldiers. *Aggressive Behavior*, 38(5), 357-367. doi:10.1002/ab.21436

**SUMMARY:** The stress that accompanies Service member deployment may influence Service members' personal relationships following deployment. The relationship between combat exposure and the perpetration of aggression was examined among 6,128 Service members in the U.S. Army. Soldiers who had previously deployed reported a higher number of minor and severe physically aggressive actions, especially Soldiers who had experienced high levels of combat intensity.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Soldiers who had been deployed were involved in a higher number of minor and severe physical aggressive actions than those who had not deployed.
- High levels of combat exposure, misuse of alcohol, and a history of intimate partner alteractions were associated with increased risk for more physical aggression.
- A substantial minority of participants reported perpetrating overt minor aggressive acts (15-36%) or severely aggressive acts (2-22%) in the past year.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Incorporate information in their classes for Service members and families on how to manage aggressive behavior in the family
- Provide a list of local referral resources for Service members who display aggressive behavior
- Offer support groups for children in families dealing with family violence

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that practitioners routinely screen Service members for perpetration of aggressive behavior
- Continue to support the provision of a range of services for Service members who engage in aggressive behavior
- Encourage the development of supportive programs and services for family members who may be affected by physical aggression by Service members

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## METHODS

- Soldiers from two units completed an anonymous paper survey six months after return from deployment with an 89% response rate.
- Surveys assessed aggressive behavior, alcohol and behavioral health issues, military factors, and combat experiences.
- Associations between behavioral issues, aggressive behavior, alcohol use, and combat exposure were examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 6,128 U.S. Army Soldiers (91% male).
- Soldiers were 66% White, 13% Latino, 11% Black, 4% Asian American, and 5% another race/ethnicity; they were primarily married (55%) or single (33%), although some were separated (5%) or divorced (6%).
- The sample was 91% enlisted, and 68% had been previously deployed.

## LIMITATIONS

- The data are cross-sectional, and causal conclusions are inappropriate.
- As only one Army sample was surveyed, the extent to which the results generalize to all Army Service members or other branches of the military is unknown.
- The data were all self-report and may be subject to bias; in particular, participants may have under-reported aggressive behavior due to social undesirability.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study among Service members from all military branches
- Utilize other measures to examine aggression among Service members who have been deployed (e.g., supervisors' evaluations, spouse or partner report)
- Explore the rates and associated risk and protective factors for other forms of aggression (e.g., sexual, emotional) among military families

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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