

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Comparing Intimately Violent to Non-Violent Veterans in Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Gerlock, A. A., Szarka, J. G., Cox, K., & Harel, O. (2016). Comparing intimately violent to non-violent veterans in treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Family Violence, 31*(6), 667-678. doi:10.1007/s10896-016-9814-2

**SUMMARY:** Differences between Veterans in treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who are violent and those who are non-violent towards their partners were examined. More specifically, the relationship between PTSD severity and Veterans' perpetrating intimate partner violence (IPV) and those who were not, childhood witnessing of parental IPV, substance use or abuse, mutuality (the degree to which couples are mutually engaged in the relationship), and demographic variables was examined. Overall, among the variables identified, only the level of relationship mutuality significantly differentiated the intimately violent from non-violent.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Among the Veteran offenders, higher levels of abuse were correlated with lower levels of relationship mutuality.
- Veterans' and their partners' reports about military or war zone trauma was correlated with higher relationship mutuality.
- Besides binge drinking, there were no significant findings between the other variables and whether or not Veterans were IPV offenders.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue providing training opportunities for professionals working with Service members and their families to learn more about IPV and its effects on the individual as well as their family
- Engage Service members and their intimate partners in classes that aim to increase communication and decrease physical and psychological abuse
- Disseminate information regarding possible warning signs of IPV to professionals working with Service members and their families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of workshops for Service members and their partners on healthy relationships
- Encourage awareness among professionals working with Service members and their partners on the importance of developing programming and support for couples therapy
- Recommend collaboration between Department of Defense programs and local community organizations to support treatment programs for Service member IPV offenders and their partners

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from Veterans in treatment for PTSD at Veteran Affairs medical centers and one Veteran Center in the Pacific Northwest.
- Male Veterans in treatment for PTSD were selected by selecting every tenth male Veteran currently enrolled in treatment from a list of all enrolled Veterans.
- Each Veteran and their partner were interviewed separately and completed questionnaires.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 441 couples and within the Veteran sample, 43% were determined to be intimately violent towards their partner and 57% were not.
- Eligibility criteria included Veterans having been in an intimate heterosexual relationship for at least one year at the time of the study as well as their partner's participation.
- The majority of Veterans identified as either Black (16%) or White (67%) and their partners identified as mostly White (71%) or Black (9%).
- Veterans represented all different branches of the military, with 66% from the Army, 14% Marines, 12% Navy, 5% Air Force, 1% Coast Guard, and 3% from more than one branch.

## LIMITATIONS

- This study only included Veterans in treatment for PTSD and living within a specific geographic location and was limited to heterosexual couples; therefore generalizability is limited.
- While the study compared Veteran's reports of abuse and violence to those of their wife or partner, they were self-report narratives and measures and may not have been accurate.
- Only male Veterans were included in the study; therefore, the results might differ for female Veterans.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate how treatment programs for male and female Service member IPV offenders may differ in their approach
- Investigate whether a couples' intervention that incorporated teaching aspects of mutuality for Service members post-deployment, help to prevent or reduce the frequency of IPV
- Examine effective ways to detect violence and abuse between Service members and their partners

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>