

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## U.S. Reserve Soldiers' Combat Exposure and Intimate Partner Violence: Not More Common But It is More Violent

Heavey, S. C., Homish, D. L., Goodell, E. A., & Homish, G. G. (2017). U.S. Reserve soldiers' combat exposure and intimate partner violence: Not more common but it is more violent. *Stress and Health*, 1-7. doi:10.1002/smi.2748

**SUMMARY:** Little is known about the relationship between combat exposure and intimate partner violence (IPV) among couples where one partner has deployed with the National Guard or Reserves. The current study assessed the relationship between combat exposure and sexual aggression, physical aggression, and physical injury in a sample of U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers. Results indicate that combat exposure is related to IPV, particularly to higher rates of injury.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Among male Reserve Soldiers, after controlling for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), marital satisfaction, and age, combat exposure was not related to higher rates of physical aggression, but it was associated with higher rates of physical injury.
- Female Soldiers' combat exposure was not associated with increased odds of IPV perpetration.
- IPV perpetration was common in this sample: past-year prevalence ranged from 6-18% for male perpetration and from 9-24% for female perpetration.
- Male Soldiers' combat exposure was associated with higher odds of female partners' sexual aggression toward their husband.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops during reintegration to help military couples build positive communication skills and conflict resolution strategies
- Offer post-deployment support groups for Service members and their partners focused on increasing marital satisfaction
- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping behaviors and dealing with relationship conflicts following a deployment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for service providers around the possible effects of combat exposure on Service members' future IPV, particularly physical injury
- Continue to support programs for identification and prevention of domestic violence in military families
- Promote reintegration programs focused on positive relationship skills that include spouses of Service Members, since they may also be at increased risk for perpetrating IPV following a partner's combat deployment

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## METHODS

- Soldiers were recruited at National Guard and Reserve drill weekends in upstate New York.
- Couples were eligible to participate if they were married or living as married, if one was a current member of the National Guard or Reserves, if the Soldier was between 18-45 years old, and if both partners had at least one alcoholic drink in the last year.
- Couples completed measures of theirs and their partners' IPV in the past year, as well as measures of frequency of combat exposure, current PTSD symptoms, and marital satisfaction.
- The odds of IPV were then determined based on the Soldiers' level of combat exposure, controlling for PTSD symptoms, marital satisfaction, and age.

## PARTICIPANTS

- This study included 257 couples with combat exposure, selected from a larger longitudinal study of 418 couples.
- About three quarters of the couples were married (76-79%), while the remainder lived together.
- Participants were 33-34 years old on average. The majority of the sample was White (80% of males, 87% of females), while a portion were Black (5% of males, 1% of females), and Latino (10% of males, 6% of females).

## LIMITATIONS

- Data were cross-sectional, therefore the direction of effects cannot be determined.
- Very few female Soldiers with combat experience were included in the sample, so results may not generalize to this population.
- Rates of combat exposure were significantly less for female Soldiers compared to male Soldiers, which may have impacted the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data at multiple time points in order to determine if combat exposure leads to greater incidence of physical injury among National Guard and Reserve Soldiers
- Include a higher proportion of female Soldiers in order to ensure results better generalize to National Guard and Reserve Soldiers
- Conduct future studies including female Soldiers who have experienced higher levels of combat experience in order to determine if there is still no association between combat exposure and IPV

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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