

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Substance Abuse, and Other Behavioral Health Indicators among Active Duty Military Men and Women

Hourani, L. L., Williams, J., Bray, R. M., & Kandel, D. B. (2014). Posttraumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and other behavioral health indicators among active duty military men and women. *Journal of Traumatic Stress Disorders & Treatment*, 3(3), 7-Jan. doi:10.4172/2324-8947.1000124

**SUMMARY:** Rates of and associations with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and psychosocial factors among multiple branches of Active Duty Service members were examined in this study. Also, there was an examination of gender differences of the rates of PTSD. Men and women with depression and anxiety had the highest odds of meeting criteria for PTSD; men with combat exposure and women with a history of sexual abuse had the second highest odds. Further, gender differences in rates of PTSD were lower in the military than in rates from civilian studies.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Rates of PTSD were higher among women; however, when controlling for demographic, social, and mental health factors, men's rates were higher.
- Men and women with depression and generalized anxiety disorder were 15-23 times more likely to have PTSD compared to men and women without these symptoms.
- Women who were between the ages of 17 and 20 years had the highest rates of PTSD in this sample.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer programming that educates Service members about co-occurring mental health symptoms
- Provide trainings for professionals who work with military families about how to screen for PTSD and refer to appropriate services
- Develop support groups based on gender that can address the different mental health needs of men and women with PTSD

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration with community and military mental health practitioners to address rates of PTSD
- Increase awareness campaigns of the risk factors associated with PTSD in military populations
- Support programs that involve families in the treatment of Service members' mental health symptoms

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## METHODS

- Participants were randomly selected from the Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors among Active Duty Military Personnel (HRB survey).
- Service members completed measures of PTSD symptoms, depression, generalized anxiety disorder, problematic alcohol use, drug use, stress, history of physical and sexual abuse, illness in past 12 months, and combat exposure.
- Statistical analyses were used to examine associations between study variables and PTSD.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Active Duty military personnel (N = 24,690) participated in this study; 73% male, 27% female.
- Racial/ethnic composition was 64% White, 17% Black, 10% Latino, 9% other race/ethnicity.
- Age composition in the sample was 15% 17-20 years, 32% 21-25 years, 29% 26-34 years, 24% 35 years or older.

## LIMITATIONS

- There were not specific data on the service branch, rank, number of deployments, or other information that would have improved generalizability of the findings.
- Data on all mental health and substance abuse symptoms were self-report and, therefore, the responses may have been underreported illicit behaviors or undesired symptoms.
- The design of the study is cross-sectional and it is not possible to determine any casual relationships among the variables.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data on other outcomes such as occupational stress, to explore associations among other variables and PTSD
- Examine rates of co-occurring disorders among different branches of Service members
- Study the resiliency of Service members diagnosed with PTSD and how they thrive despite persistent mental health symptoms

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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