

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Work Stressors, Depressive Symptoms, and Hazardous Drinking Among Navy Members Across Deployment

Kelley, M. L., Bravo, A. J., & Hollis, B. F. (2017). Work stressors, depressive symptoms, and hazardous drinking among Navy members across deployment. *Military Psychology, 29*(5). doi:10.1037/mil0000177

SUMMARY: Variables such as stress levels, mental health symptoms, and drinking behavior can change over time. Navy Sailors were surveyed over the course of a deployment cycle to examine the relationship between work stress, depressive symptoms, and hazardous drinking behaviors. Findings suggested that increased work stress may lead to increased depressive symptoms, which may lead to increased hazardous drinking behaviors.

KEY FINDINGS:

- High work stress levels predicted later increased depressive symptoms followed by increased hazardous drinking.
- At pre-deployment, higher work stressors were associated with more hazardous drinking for Sailors with higher levels of depression symptoms.
- Hazardous drinking appeared to be an attempt by Sailors to relieve depression symptoms and work stress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Enhance programs that address hazardous drinking behaviors to include information about the impact of work stress and depression
- Offer pre-deployment workshops to improve healthy coping skills in Service members regarding work stress and depressive symptoms
- Disseminate information regarding protective behavioral strategies, such as alternating alcoholic drinks with water and setting a specific number of drinks, to reduce hazardous alcohol use

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that promote resilience and healthy coping in Service members
- Encourage routine prevention and brief early interventions through screening at routine medical appointments for alcohol misuse
- Recommend routine screening of Service members who experience work stress, depressive symptoms, or hazardous alcohol use by professionals who work with military families

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METHODS

- Sailors were recruited through an e-mailed invitation, a briefing by their Captain, and posters on the ship.
- Data were gathered through surveys administered to the Sailors at three points in time: six weeks pre-deployment, six weeks post-deployment, and six months post-deployment.
- The data was analyzed by assessing whether work stressors influenced depressive symptoms and hazardous drinking, or whether depressive symptoms influenced work stressors and hazardous drinking.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 101 U.S. Navy Service members from a single ship assigned to an eight-month deployment.
- Seventy-one percent of participants were male, 64% were White, and average years of Naval service was 7.41 (SD = 6.06). No data were provided regarding the races/ethnicities of the 36% of the participants who were not White.
- The participants' mean age was 28.34 years old (SD = 5.99 years).
- There were twice as many female participants (29%) as there are in the larger Active Duty Navy population (15%).

LIMITATIONS

- Due to small sample size and a high dropout rate (39%), the authors' ability to generalize their results to all Navy Service members is limited. The reasons for the dropout rate were unable to be obtained.
- All participants were from a single ship, and there was a significantly larger percentage of women in the study's sample than in the Navy as a whole. However, because of the small sample size, the authors were unable to examine sex differences.
- The association between work stressors, depression, and hazardous alcohol use could have been confounded by factors that were not measured in this study, such as ship climate, relationship satisfaction, satisfaction with the military, and previous deployment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine work stressors, hazardous drinking, and depression with larger samples and in other branches of the military besides the Navy
- Incorporate additional measures for confounding factors such as satisfaction with ship climate, family/marital satisfaction, and overall military satisfaction
- Consider how gender differences may impact the relationship between work stressors, depression, and hazardous drinking for Service members

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