

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Examining Spouse/Partner Presence as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Mental Health Symptoms and Alcohol use in OEF/OIF Veterans

Klanecky, A. K., Cadigan, J. M., Martens, M. P., & Rogers, R. E. (2014). Examining spouse/partner presence as a moderator in the relationship between mental health symptoms and alcohol use in OEF/OIF veterans. *Military Psychology, 26*(6-May), 366-375. doi:10.1037/mil0000048

SUMMARY: There were 325 OEF/OIF Veterans who completed questionnaires designed to examine whether presence of a spouse or partner buffers the relationship between mental health symptoms and alcohol consumption. Results found that depression was positively associated with drinking for those without a partner, but not those with a partner. Presence of a partner did not buffer the association between PTSD symptoms and alcohol use.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Service members with partners drank less alcohol than those without partners, and PTSD did not significantly impact those associations.
- Greater depression symptoms were associated with increased alcohol consumption for Service members without partners, but not for those with partners.
- For Service members without partners and with fewer deployments, but not those with partners or with more deployments, greater depression symptoms were associated with increased alcohol consumption.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military families about signs of problematic drinking and how to find help for someone struggling with alcohol abuse
- Inform Service members about the associations between deployment, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and problematic alcohol use, and provide referral information to all Service members post-deployment
- Provide support groups specifically for Service members without spouses or partners to help them find social support post-deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend continued post-deployment screenings for depression, PTSD, and problematic drinking
- Continue to promote the development and provision of a range of evidence-based treatments for mental health problems for Service members
- Encourage professional development of providers working with military families about how to recognize symptoms of depression, alcohol abuse, and posttraumatic stress symptoms

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METHODS

- Data were drawn from a larger study examining a brief alcohol intervention among OEF/OIF Veterans recruited from a primary care clinic at a VA hospital (80% recruitment rate).
- Participants completed questionnaires regarding demographic information, drinking habits, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and depression symptoms.
- Associations between depression, PTSD, alcohol consumption, and partnership status were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 325 Veterans (93% male), with an average age of 32.20 years (SD = 8.18).
- Service members were 82% White, 9% Black, 5% Latino, 2% Native American, 1% Asian American, and 2% another race/ethnicity.
- On average, participants had 2.96 years of service (SD = 1.42) and 1.61 deployments (SD = 0.90); the majority were Active Duty (71%), followed by National Guard (19%) and Reserves (10%).

LIMITATIONS

- The data were cross-sectional and causal conclusions are not appropriate.
- The sample was a non-random sample and may be biased or unrepresentative; findings may not generalize to older Veteran cohorts or those in other geographic locations.
- Unmeasured variables, such as time since deployment, may have influenced findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the processes through which intimate relationships buffer Service members from problematic alcohol use
- Examine the associations between relationship adjustment following deployment, relationship distress or satisfaction, and spouse burden is related to alcohol use.
- Investigate whether social support and relationship interventions can prevent or reduce alcohol use problems among Service members

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