

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Agreement between Veteran and Partner Reports of Intimate Partner Aggression

LaMotte, A. D., Taft, C. T., Reardon, A. F., & Miller, M. W. (2014). Agreement between veteran and partner reports of intimate partner aggression. *Psychological Assessment, 26*(4), 1369-1374. doi:10.1037/pas0000018

**SUMMARY:** Intimate partner aggression (IPA) occurs in a significant number of couples. This study considered the reports of Veterans and their partners on their rates of IPA and examined possible factors that influenced the couples' report of IPA. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, relationship satisfaction, and relationship attributions (i.e., relationship events being explained as intentional vs. unintentional, personality traits vs. circumstances) all had an influence on the amount of IPA reported, and discrepancies between the Veteran and partner reports were significant.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Over six months, 24% of Veterans perpetrated physical IPA and 94% had perpetrated psychological IPA; 25% of partners perpetrated physical IPA and 94% had perpetrated psychological IPA.
- Only 30-34% of couples agreed on whether physical IPA had occurred and 79-82% of couples agreed on whether psychological IPA had occurred in their relationship in the last six months.
- Veterans were more likely than their partners to report both Veteran-perpetrated and partner-perpetrated IPA in the relationship, and partners were more likely to self-report perpetrating psychological IPA. Veterans with greater PTSD symptoms reported less IPA, while partners with PTSD symptoms reported more IPA.
- In couples with relationship satisfaction discrepancies, the person with the higher relationship satisfaction reported less IPA than the person who had lower relationship satisfaction. Further, making more positive than negative relationship attributions was related to reduced IPA.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military couples on the negative relationship between relationship satisfaction and perception of IPA
- Offer classes for Service members and their partners to improve relationship satisfaction
- Disseminate information regarding resources for Service members and their partners who may be experiencing IPA

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development and continuation of relationship-strengthening programs that may reduce IPA in military couples
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations which specialize in working with couples experiencing IPA
- Recommend training to improve the ability to address IPA among professionals who work with Service members and their families

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## METHODS

- Participating couples were recruited from the Veterans Affairs Boston and New Mexico healthcare systems. In order to qualify, the couples had to live together for at least 12 months, agree to the study, and the Veteran had to have been exposed to at least one traumatic event.
- The original sample was 298 couples, but 59 couples were excluded for various reasons, largely (N = 34) because both partners in the couple were Veterans or (N = 11) they did not complete the primary measure of interest.
- IPA and relationship quality were measured by questionnaire for both partners, PTSD symptoms were assessed by a clinician at separate interviews, and relationship attributions were assessed through videotaped 10-minute conflict discussions between partners that were later coded by a team of trained coders.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 239 couples where one partner was a Veteran (94% male) and the other was not (97% female), heterosexual except for 3% female same-sex couples, with an average age of 52 years old (SD = 11 years).
- Eighty-one percent of participants were White, 11% Black, 9% Native American, 2% Asian American, less than 1% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 7% unknown; 21% of participants also identified as Latino.
- Veterans were from the Korean War (1%), Vietnam War (58%), Operation Desert Storm (13%), OIF/OEF (16%) and other eras (13%). Rank and branch were not provided.

## LIMITATIONS

- There was no way to verify whether individuals are over- or underreporting IPA, which limits the validity of the study.
- Over 90% of the Veterans in the study were male and over 90% of the partners were female, making it unclear if gender is a factor along with Veteran or partner status.
- Due to the specific nature of the sample studied (generally male Veterans and female civilian partners), the results may not be generalizable to couples with sexual orientation and gender identities.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the study including assessment of memory due to possible impact from PTSD
- Replicate the study with a more diverse gender and sexuality sample, such as having greater numbers of female Veterans with male partners and same-sex couples of both genders
- Study the effects of both partners being Veterans compared to only one partner being a Veteran

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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