

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Prevalence of Domestic Violence in a Pregnant Military Population

Lutgendorf, M. A., Busch, J. M., Doherty, D. A., Conza, L. A., Moone, S. O., & Magann, E. F (2009). Prevalence of domestic violence in a pregnant military population. *The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists*, 113(4), 866-872. doi:10.1097/AOG.0b013e31819bdc93

SUMMARY: Women were asked to complete a confidential domestic abuse screener during a routine prenatal visit at a Naval medical center. Data were used to estimate the prevalence of domestic violence and the characteristics of pregnant women reporting domestic violence. Approximately 15% of women screened positive for past or current abuse, and relationship status and history of abuse influenced current reports of abuse during pregnancy.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Fifteen percent of female patients screened positive for either past or current abuse.
- Two percent reported experiencing abuse during pregnancy, most commonly slapping or pushing by a boyfriend.
- Married participants were at lower risk of physical or emotional abuse than single, separated, or divorced women.
- Family history of abuse also predicted increased risk of past-year abuse.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop support groups for couples during pregnancy
- Create classes for pregnant women on awareness of domestic violence and how to spot the signs and symptoms
- Participate in annual awareness events, such as Domestic Violence Awareness Month

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Create patient advocate positions to support families dealing with violence at each military medical center
- Recommend military providers screen for domestic abuse at least once per trimester during prenatal care
- Recommend military providers screen for family history of abuse during prenatal care

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited at initial prenatal care appointments at the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth between January 2007 and March 2008.
- The survey was administered in a private setting in the hospital.
- Partners completed a 5-item screener assessing physical, emotional, and sexual violence, as well as 19 items regarding risk factors and demographics.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants include female patients (N = 1,104) who were mostly dependent spouses of enlisted Navy personnel.
- Approximately 56% of participants were White, 25% were Black, 10% were Latino/Latina, and 8% selected Other.
- Average age: 24.5 years.

LIMITATIONS

- As 5% of women chose not to participate, selection bias could have affected results.
- Participants were only recruited from one Naval hospital, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings.
- All data were self-report which has inherent limitations, especially regarding sensitive topics such as domestic violence.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Screen women across the course of pregnancy for domestic violence
- Utilize multiple sites to increase generalizability of findings
- Assess help-seeking behaviors among abused women

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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