

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Substance Use by Soldiers Who Abuse Their Spouses

Martin, S. L., Gibbs, D. A., Johnson, R. E., Sullivan, K., Clinton-Sherrod, M., Walters, J. L. H., & Rentz, E. D. (2010). Substance use by soldiers who abuse their spouses. *Violence Against Women*, 16(11), 1295-1310. doi:10.1177/1077801210387038

**SUMMARY:** Spousal abuse incidents reported in the Army Central Registry were used to determine the prevalence of drug and alcohol use during violent incidents. Offender data were collected from Active Duty Army Soldiers who were found to be users and non-users of substance abuse at the time of the incident. Spousal abuse offenders were less likely to be officers and more likely to have a lower pay grade when compared to all Army Soldiers.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Offenders found to be using substances at the time of the abuse were more likely to be White and male, less likely to have been hurt during the incident, and were slightly older than non-substance using offenders.
- Offenders who reported using substances at the time of the abuse were more likely to only perpetrate physical abuse and less likely to only perpetrate emotional abuse; the groups of offenders were similarly likely to perpetrate sexual abuse.
- When compared to non-substance using offenders (12%), substance using offenders (51%) were four times more likely to receive services from the Army Substance Abuse Program.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education for Service members about the dangers of domestic violence and strategies to deescalate intense arguments, especially when they are using alcohol
- Offer evidence-based training for perpetrators of abuse to support the well-being of the entire family
- Disseminate information regarding resources available to Service members and their families who are coping with substance use or family violence issues

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend a systematic review of best practices in the evaluation and treatment of intimate partner violence in families, with special focus on the role of alcohol and drugs as contributing factors
- Recommend screenings for domestic violence in military families, especially among Service members with substance abuse issues
- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community based programs that work with military families coping with substance abuse and family violence issues

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## METHODS

- Data were obtained from the Army Central Registry, an electronic system with information about prevention, identification, and treatment of family violence among military families.
- The Drug and Alcohol Management System provided information about the prevention, identification, and treatment of alcohol abuse and illicit drugs by Army Soldiers.
- Substantiated incidents of spouse abuse from January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2004 were utilized for the study.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Of the 7,424 Active Duty Army Soldiers who were spousal abuse offenders, 1,873 were reported to be using substances and 5,551 were not using substances at the time of the abuse.
- Most substance using offenders were male (97%), White (51%), and a median age of 27.5 years.
- The majority of non-Substance using offenders were male (94%), White (40%), with an average age of 27.1 years.

## LIMITATIONS

- Spousal violence is often unreported; thus, the numbers used in the study may underestimate the actual scope of family violence.
- The use of large databases could leave the data open to administrative error reducing the validity of results.
- The sample only includes Soldiers; therefore, results may not generalize to Service members in other branches of the military.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the current study to include all intimate partner violence rather than just spousal abuse (49% of the Army Soldiers in this sample were not married)
- Evaluate the effects of coordinated treatment programs that address spousal abuse and substance abuse
- Include other branches to improve the understanding of spousal abuse and substance abuse across the military

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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