

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Spouse Abuse Recidivism in the U.S. Army by Gender and Military Status

McCarroll, J. E., Thayer, L. E., Liu, X., Newby, J. H., Norwood, A. E., Fullerton, C. S., & Ursano, R. J. (2000). Spouse abuse recidivism in the U.S. Army by gender and military status. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 68*(3), 521-525. doi:10.1037/0022-006x.3.521

SUMMARY: It is important to understand what factors contribute to recurrent spouse abuse. By analyzing data from the U.S. Army Central Registry, the study examined elements that were associated with spouse abuse recidivism in military families. Results revealed that gender and military status (Active Duty or military spouse) were the two most important factors that may contribute to spouse abuse recidivism.

KEY FINDINGS:

- In general, men were more likely than women to perpetrate spouse abuse repeatedly.
- Military spouses were more likely to perpetrate spouse abuse repeatedly than Active Duty Service members probably because different from the Service members, the spouses did not need to be afraid of adverse consequences (e.g., loss of benefits) of spouse abuse.
- For all participants, spouse abuse recidivism peaked at two months after the first incident and declined gradually until the end of the study period (70 months after the first incident).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Design workshops for Service members focusing on preventing spouse abuse and increasing marital satisfaction
- Offer support groups for Service members and military spouses who suffer from spouse abuse
- Work closely with Service members and military spouses who had a history of spouse abuse to prevent recidivism

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend trainings for all professionals working with military families about how to support military family members who are suffering from spouse abuse
- Continue to support military family education programs that aim to prevent spouse abuse
- Develop awareness campaigns around the importance of supporting military families' well-being

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METHODS

- Data were drawn from the records of offenders in the U.S. Army Central Registry between fiscal years 1989 and 1997.
- The time between the first and second incidents of spousal abuse was recorded and termed “the first recurrence of abuse.”
- Data were analyzed to examine how gender and military status influence spouse abuse recidivism.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 34,690 Active Duty Soldiers and 13,640 military spouses who were spouse abuse offenders.
- The average age of the participants was 27.04 years (SD = 5.52) and 71% of them were male.
- Most of the participants were Black (51%), followed by White (38%); the race/ethnicity of the rest of the sample was not indicated in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- A high number of spouse abuse incidents are not reported; therefore, the results of the study may underestimate the actual number of spouse abuse.
- Military spouses who were abused by Service members may be reluctant to report the abuse due to the possible adverse effects on the Service members (e.g., loss of benefit); therefore, the rate of spouse abuse recidivism by Service members might be underestimated.
- The participants were classified as White, non-White, Black, and non-Black, so it is unclear how people from other race/ethnicity groups performed.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine possible reasons that recurrence of spouse abuse peaks at two months after the initial incident
- Investigate other factors that may potentially influence the recidivism of spouse abuse
- Compare the risk factors for mild and severe spouse abuse

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