

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Alcohol Use in Nonmutual and Mutual Domestic Violence in the U.S. Army: 1998–2004

McCarroll, J. E., Fan, Z., & Bell, N. S. (2009). Alcohol use in nonmutual and mutual domestic violence in the U.S. Army: 1998-2004. *Violence and Victims*, 24(3), 364–379. doi:10.1891/0886-6708.24.3.364

SUMMARY: There is sometimes a distinction made between nonmutual domestic violence, in which one partner is the perpetrator and the other partner is the victim, and mutual domestic violence, in which both partners are (at times) perpetrator and victim. In this study, researchers explored associations between alcohol use and substantiated incidents of nonmutual and mutual domestic violence between enlisted Soldiers and their spouses from 1998 to 2004 (n = 25,526 victims). Alcohol was present in 23% of the nonmutual and 21% of the mutual abuse incidents.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Alcohol use was present in slightly over one-fifth of substantiated incidents, specifically, in 23% of nonmutual abuse incidents and 21% of mutual abuse incidents.
- Offender drinking was associated with more severe violence in both mutual and nonmutual abuse incidents.
- In nonmutual incidents, 12% involved offender-only drinking compared to 3% victim-only drinking. In mutual abuse incidents, the percentages were about equal: 6% for both offender-only drinking and victim-only drinking.
- Males were more likely to be drinking during an incident than females regardless of type of abuse or status (victim or offender).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education for Service members and their families about possible associations between alcohol use and domestic violence
- Offer resources for military families during high-stress times to help them manage the cumulative effect of multiple stressors in order to mitigate the risk for domestic violence
- Develop workshops for Service members and their spouses regarding coping and communication strategies that can be used to create a more resilient relationship

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development and evaluation of domestic violence prevention and treatment efforts among Service members and their families
- Encourage training for professionals who work with military families regarding the interplay of alcohol use and domestic violence and strategies to enhance the coping abilities of individuals and families
- Promote the investigation of factors that increase or mitigate the risk for domestic violence in military families

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METHODS

- Substantiated domestic violence incidents (physical and emotional abuse) were drawn from the Army Central Registry (ACR) of enlisted victims and offenders.
- Researchers compared the frequency, rate, and severity of mutual and nonmutual domestic violence incidents.
- Data were analyzed to assess the association between alcohol use and type of abuse event (nonmutual or mutual abuse).

PARTICIPANTS

- There were 25,526 victims of domestic violence in the Army Central Registry from 1998 to 2004.
- The victims were 63% women, 37% men; 44% Black, 41% White, 11% Latino, 3% Asian-American, and 1% Native American. They had a mean age of 26.24 years old (SD = 5.87).
- Of the events, 38% were classified as mutual abuse and 62% were classified as nonmutual abuse.

LIMITATIONS

- This study focused on Active Duty Army personnel and their spouses. Hence, the findings may not generalize to Service members in other branches of the military.
- The data only included reported and substantiated incidents of domestic violence; findings may be different for incidents that are not reported or substantiated.
- These data do not allow for conclusions regarding causation; the direction of the associations described is unclear.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore alcohol use in nonmutual and mutual domestic violence among Service members in other branches of the military
- Investigate the mechanisms of the relationship between alcohol use and domestic violence
- Examine other factors that increase or mitigate the risk for domestic violence

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