

Stress and Mental Disorders in Female Military Personnel: Comparisons Between the Sexes in a Male Dominated Profession

Mota, N. P., Medved, M., Wang, J., Asmundson, G. G., Whitney, D., & Sareen, J. (2012). *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 46(2), 159-167. <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-psychiatric-research/>



INTL Military



This study examines differences between men and women in lifetime exposure to 28 traumatic events, mental disorders (depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social phobia, PTSD), alcohol dependence, and work stress in a representative sample of regular and reserve Canadian Forces personnel. Data from a representative sample of 5,155 regular force personnel and 3,286 reservists were collected by trained lay interviewers using face-to-face, computer-assisted interviews.

Key Findings:

- Both regular and reserve females were more likely than males to have experienced sexual trauma, partner abuse, and to have been stalked, but were less likely to have reported lifetime exposure to deployment related traumas.
- Women, versus men, in the regular force reported higher levels of job demand and stress around social support.
- Women in regular personnel were more likely than men to have symptoms of PTSD, while female reserve personnel were more likely than males to have symptoms of depression, panic disorder, and any mood or anxiety disorder.
- Both women in regular and reserve service reported lower rates of alcohol dependence than males.

Implications for Programs:

- Clinicians should be aware that the likelihood of experiencing certain events varies with sex, and also with regular versus reserve status.
- Clinicians working with military personnel, particularly female personnel, should assess and monitor exposure to traumatic events, types of work stress, and mental health disorders that are prevalent in this population (e.g., PTSD, mood and anxiety disorders, sexual trauma, partner abuse).
- Workplace programs may consider integrating components that specifically target coping with stress and managing challenges.

Implications for Policies:

- Emphasis should be placed on creating and supporting safe work environments, particularly for women in nontraditional gendered workplaces such as the military.
- Mental health treatment should be easily accessible to all military personnel, particularly those who experience trauma as a result of military service.
- Treatment support and behavioral health programs for military personnel should continue to be a priority.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research should examine mental disorders and trauma in women in nontraditional gendered workplaces like the military in relation to other, more gender-balanced occupations.
- Future research should include longitudinal designs with baseline as well as post trauma/military service assessments of mental illness.
- This research should be replicated with personnel who served and/or have experienced conflict in Afghanistan.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit <http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu>

Background Information

Methodology:

- Multistage sampling with stratification for regular versus reserve personnel, rank, and sex was used to obtain a representative sample; face-to-face, computer-assisted interviews were administered by trained lay interviewers.
- Logistic regression was used to test for sex differences across sociodemographic and military status variables; multiple regression was used to assess sex differences in exposure to 28 lifetime traumatic events; and multiple logistic regression was used to assess sex differences across mental disorders.
- This study included regular and reserve Canadian Forces personnel only.

Participants:

- Participants were Canadian Forces personnel, regular (n = 5,155) and reserve (n = 3,286); 69.3% male; ages 16-54.

Limitations:

- Without a pretest or control group the direction of effects cannot be established.
- Mental disorders were assessed by trained lay interviewers rather than qualified clinicians.
- Study was conducted prior to the Afghanistan conflict, thus limiting the generalizability of the results.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	★★★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	★★★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	★★★
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★★★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	★★★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
				<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications	
Overall Quality Rating					★★★

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