

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Couples with Intimate Partner Violence Seeking Relationship Help: Associations and Implications for Self-Help and Online Interventions

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SUMMARY: Online relationship education programs are helpful at increasing relationship satisfaction; however, the effect of such programs on couples with intimate partner violence (IPV) is unknown. This study had 2,797 individuals complete a questionnaire regarding IPV and personal factors (e.g., anxiety, depression). In addition, 300 couples in distress were randomly assigned to the OurRelationship intervention program or a control group. Results revealed that certain factors were associated with IPV, and couples with low-intensity IPV were equally likely to benefit from the intervention program as couples without IPV.

KEY FINDINGS:

- A higher level of anxiety and depression symptoms and a lower level of relationship satisfaction were associated with low-intensity IPV and more severe IPV (i.e., IPV that results in injury or fear).
- Participants who experienced childhood sexual assault were more likely to experience severe IPV but not low-intensity IPV.
- Couples with or without low-intensity IPV were equally likely to benefit from the intervention program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Help Service members and military spouses identify appropriate resources if they experience IPV
- Attend training to understand the risk factors that may contribute to IPV in military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide relationship education workshops both online and in-person to accommodate the needs of military families
- Offer support groups for Service members and their spouses who experience IPV

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development of online relationship education programs, especially for military couples with IPV
- Recommend education of professionals working with military families on common factors (e.g., anxiety, childhood sexual assault) associated with IPV

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through online advertising, online social media, television, and newspapers; participants who completed the screening questionnaire were enrolled in Study One, and those who also had access to the intervention were enrolled in Study Two and were randomly assigned to the intervention group (151 couples) or control group (149 couples).
- All participants completed a questionnaire regarding intimate partner violence, childhood sexual assault, binge drinking, infidelity, anxiety, depression, and relationship satisfaction; couples in the intervention group also received a six-eight hours long intervention.
- Data were analyzed to examine factors that were associated with intimate partner violence and the effect of the online intervention on relationship satisfaction.

PARTICIPANTS

- In Study One, participants were 2,797 individuals (60% female); the average age of them was 34.9 years (SD = 10.0).
- In Study Two, participants were 300 heterosexual couples; the average age of them was 37.4 years (SD = 9.5).
- Most participants in Study One were White (65%), followed by Black (19%), Latino (13%), and other (3%); similarly, the majority of participants in Study Two were White (73%), followed by Black (15%), Latino (10%), and other (2%).

LIMITATIONS

- Only heterosexual couples were included in the intervention, so caution must be taken to generalize the results to same-sex couples.
- The study was based on self-report data; therefore, the results may be subject to social-desirability bias.
- IPV was not assessed after the intervention; therefore, the effect of the intervention on IPV was unknown.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit both heterosexual and same-sex couples so that the findings can be better generalized
- Replicate the study with other online relationship programs to examine the effectiveness of such programs on couples with low-intensity IPV
- Examine whether online relationship programs can be helpful for couples with severe IPV

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