

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Navy

Intimate Partner Violence Between Male Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans and Their Female Partners Who Seek Couples Therapy

Tharp, A. T., Sherman, M. D., Bowling, U., & Townsend, B. J. (2014). Intimate partner violence between male Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their female partners who seek couples therapy. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*(6), 1095-1115. doi:10.1177/0886260514564067

SUMMARY: An examination of intimate partner violence and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among 100 Veteran couples that included both partners' reports was conducted. More specifically, the study investigated gender differences, and agreement in couples' reports of male-to-female and female-to-male intimate partner violence; the pattern of violence reported by the Veteran couples (e.g., one-sided, mutual) and the frequency; and whether frequency of violence or pattern of violence were associated with Veterans' diagnosis of PTSD.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Male participants reported perpetrating more frequent sexual coercion, and female participants reported perpetrating more frequent physical aggression.
- Three patterns of violence were identified by male and female participants: verbally aggressive (n = 45), one-sided physically aggressive (n = 27), and mutually physically aggressive (n = 26).
- Frequency and pattern of violence were not associated with Veterans' diagnosis of PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops for professionals working with Service members and their families to learn more about intimate partner violence and its effects on the individual as well as their family
- Engage Service members and their intimate partners in classes that aim to increase communication and decrease physical or verbal aggression
- Disseminate information regarding possible warning signs of intimate partner violence to professionals working with Service members and their families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of structured workshops for Service members and their partners on healthy relationships
- Encourage awareness among military professionals working with Service members and their partners on the importance of developing programming and support for couples education
- Recommend collaboration between Department of Defense programs and local community organizations to support treatment programs for Service member intimate partner violence offenders and their partners

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through the Family Mental Health Program, an outpatient family therapy clinic in a mid-Western Veterans Affairs Medical Center.
- Prior to the therapy session couples filled out several questionnaires which included the Conflict Tactics Scale and demographic information, as well as noting whether or not they had a PTSD diagnosis.
- Analysis used quantitative methods to determine if there were any differences in type of violence by gender.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 100 heterosexual couples seeking relationship therapy between August 2004 and June 2012 at the Family Mental Health Program.
- Male Veterans in the study had deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan and were in a committed relationship with a cohabiting female partner.
- Nine percent of Veterans and their partners were Black, 2% were Latino, 4% were Native American, and 3% of Veterans and 6% of partners indicated they were of other races.

LIMITATIONS

- The participant sample was drawn from one location in the United States; therefore, the findings may not be applicable to other regions or contexts.
- Participants in the study were only involved in two conflicts, other conflicts may have induced different patterns or types of violence.
- Only the male participants in the study had been involved in combat-related trauma, the results might differ for female Service members who had experienced trauma.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate how treatment programs for male and female Service members intimate partner violence offenders may differ in their approach
- Investigate what both the short and long term effects are on Service members' children who witness partner violence in their homes
- Explore the long-term health consequences of experiencing intimate partner violence, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and involvement in health risk behaviors like alcohol use

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