

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## ADHD Symptoms as Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration and Victimization

Wymbs, B. T., Dawson, A. E., Suhr, J. A., Bunford, N., & Gidycz, C. A. (2017). ADHD symptoms as risk factors for intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(5), 659-681.  
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**SUMMARY:** Intimate partner violence (IPV) has many risk factors, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of them. This study had 433 college students complete an online survey regarding their ADHD symptoms, alcohol abuse, drug use, childhood maltreatment, and IPV perpetration and victimization. Results revealed that students with ADHD symptoms were more likely to perpetrate and suffer from IPV.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- ADHD symptoms were positively associated with psychological and physical IPV perpetration as well as psychological IPV victimization.
- Students who abused alcohol and used drugs were more likely to experience IPV perpetration and victimization regardless if they had ADHD symptoms.
- Among students who did not abuse alcohol or use drugs, those with ADHD symptoms were more likely to experience IPV perpetration and victimization than students without ADHD symptoms.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Receive training about the associations between mental health disorders (e.g., ADHD) and IPV to enhance their ability to provide support to Service members and their spouses who experienced IPV
- Facilitate support groups for Service members and their spouses who suffered from ADHD

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer relationship education workshops for Service members and their spouses who have ADHD symptoms
- Disseminate information about where to seek help when someone suffers from IPV

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education of professionals working with Service members on the relationships between ADHD, substance abuse, and IPV
- Continue to support programs that aim to reduce IPV in military families

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a psychology research sample pool at a university; participants with ADHD symptoms were intentionally over-sampled.
- Each participant completed an online questionnaire regarding their ADHD symptoms, alcohol abuse, illicit drug use, childhood maltreatment, and IPV perpetration and victimization.
- Data were analyzed to examine the relationships between ADHD symptoms, alcohol abuse and drug use, and IPV perpetration and victimization.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 433 college students with an average age of 19.10 years (age range = 18-25 years, SD = 1.28).
- Most students were female (63%), heterosexual (88%), and White (87%); the race/ethnicity of the remaining 13% of students was not reported.
- Eleven percent of students were diagnosed with ADHD.

## LIMITATIONS

- Participants were all young college students, so caution must be taken to generalize the results to older adults and adults who do not attend college.
- The cross-sectional design of the study made it impossible to examine the causal relationship between ADHD symptoms and IPV.
- The study was based on self report, so it is possible that participants might under-report their IPV perpetration and victimization due to social-desirability.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit participants of different age groups and education levels so that the findings can be better generalized
- Conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the causal relationship between ADHD and IPV
- Use reliable external informant (e.g., hospital records) to determine participants' ADHD severity level

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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