

# Intimate partner violence (IPV) in military and Veteran populations: A systematic review of population-based surveys and population screening studies



A recent review conducted by the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families and the Phoenix Australia Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (Cowlshaw et al., 2022) found:



**1 in 5 of all active  
duty personnel and  
Veterans may report  
recent exposure to IPV**



**1 in 8 may report  
recent use of IPV**



The most common form of violence reported across studies was **emotional or psychological IPV**, although physical IPV was still common.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to any behaviour in a current or former intimate relationship that causes physical, emotional or sexual harm. This can include physical and sexual violence, as well as psychological or emotional abuse, such as coercive control – a pattern of non-physical, manipulative behaviour that is used to gain and maintain control over a partner. Examples of coercive control may include threatening a partner with physical harm to intimidate or cause fear, deliberately isolating them from family and friends, monitoring their movements, or controlling access to where and when they can access money.

Military personnel and Veterans may be at high risk of using or being exposed to IPV. Experiences of military-related relocations and deployment, as well as post-traumatic mental health conditions, may increase the risk of using and/or being exposed to IPV.<sup>1</sup> Given this risk, the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families has collaborated with researchers at the Phoenix Australia Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health to review studies investigating how commonly IPV and related issues occur among military personnel and Veterans internationally. The review focused on studies best designed to answer questions about how common IPV and related issues are among military and Veteran populations. To identify these studies, the team conducted a comprehensive search of the published scientific literature. Studies with the most compelling research methodology and data were selected for analysis.

The review found 31 studies that used suitable methods and reported findings about how frequently military personnel and Veterans used and/or were exposed to IPV. These studies were mainly from the United States, but also included those from other countries including Canada and the United Kingdom. Most of the studies asked participants to report their experiences of psychological or physical IPV. Very few asked specific questions about coercive and controlling behaviours.

The review found that IPV was commonly reported across studies, including those completed in different countries. One in eight (13%) of all active duty personnel and Veterans reported recent use of IPV, and one in five (21%) reported having recently been exposed to IPV. The most common form of violence reported across studies was emotional or psychological IPV, although physical IPV was still common. The review also found that IPV use was most often reported in studies of Veterans (compared to active military personnel), and in studies that involved screening of patients attending health services (compared to surveys completed in non-healthcare settings). Overall, studies reported similar rates among women and men for both IPV use and exposure.

Inevitably, the results of this review have the same limitations as each of the reviewed studies. For example, of the studies reviewed, few asked about coercive and controlling behaviours. Further, few studies reported on the impacts and contexts of IPV. As such, it remains unclear how common IPV exposure, use and related behaviours are among military personnel and Veterans. Additionally, there were few studies published from outside the United States. This highlights major gaps in our understanding of the frequency and nature of IPV in other countries. Lastly, none of the reviewed studies considered IPV in the context of same-sex relationships. Each of these evidence gaps signals important topics and research questions for future studies.

Despite these limitations, the findings from this review provide up-to-date, evidence-based information about how commonly IPV is experienced and used among military personnel and Veterans across countries and in different contexts. The findings suggest a strong need for greater recognition of and responses to IPV in military and Veteran settings. Addressing this need may include:

- Developing and/or increasing availability of programs that can meet the needs of military personnel and Veterans who are exposed to IPV. Examples of such programs may include support services for clients that report exposure to IPV, as well as training for Veteran and Veteran Family health providers to effectively discuss and respond to clients' reports of exposure and/or use of IPV.
- Creating more services targeted at Veterans and Veteran Families that can help prevent and reduce the use of IPV.
- Implementing policies in health service organizations that promote awareness of IPV in services for Veterans and Veteran Families.
- Existing approaches to addressing IPV among military personnel and Veterans are the focus of a companion review, [\*\*available here\*\*](#).<sup>2</sup>

## Source

1. Cowlshaw, S., Freijah, I., Kartal, D., Sbisa, A., Mulligan, A., Notarianni, M., Couineau, A-L., Forbes, D., O'Donnell, M., Phelps, A., Iverson, K., Heber, A., O'Dwyer, C., Smith, P., & Hosseiny, F. (2022). Intimate partner violence (IPV) in military and Veteran populations: A systematic review of population-based surveys and population screening studies. ***International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*** (14), 8853.

## Reference

1. Klostermann, K., Mignone, T., Kelley, M. L., Musson, S., & Bohall, G. (2012). Intimate partner violence in the military: Treatment considerations. ***Aggression and Violent Behavior, 17*** (1), 53-58.
2. Cowlshaw, S., Sbisa, A., Freijah, I., Kartal, D., Mulligan, A., Notarianni, M., Iverson, K., Couineau, A-L., Forbes, D., O'Donnell, M., Phelps, A., Smith, P., & Hosseiny, F. (2022). Health service interventions for intimate partner violence among military personnel and Veterans: A framework and scoping review. ***International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19***, 3551,

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