

THE MILLENNIUM COHORT PROGRAM

PROTECTING SERVICE MEMBER, VETERAN AND FAMILY HEALTH

A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE STUDY



MILLENNIUM COHORT STUDY

Millennium Cohort
Family Study

*We are committed to helping
protect service member, Veteran, and family health*

Dear Colleague,

Since the Millennium Cohort Study began 20 years ago and the Family Study 10 years ago, the study team has been incredibly productive with providing the DoD, VA and scientific community with relevant actionable knowledge products and publications.

In honor of our two landmark anniversaries, we are kicking off this new era with a Millennium Cohort Program quarterly newsletter. This newsletter is intended to highlight some of the exciting recent scientific publications. We hope you take pride in being an important partner in our research where we continue to make strides to inform and improve health and readiness of military service members, Veterans and their families.

Very sincerely,

Rudy Rull, PhD, MPH
Principal Investigator
Millennium Cohort Study

Valerie Stander, PhD
Principal Investigator
Millennium Cohort Family Study
Millennium Cohort Adolescent Study

*Combat Exposure and Suicide Attempts*¹

Among 57,841 active-duty service members who had deployed, high combat severity and certain specific combat experiences were associated with suicide attempts. However, these associations were mostly accounted for by mental disorders, especially PTSD. Findings suggest that service members who experienced high levels of combat or were exposed to certain types of combat experiences, involving unexpected events or those that challenge moral or ethical norms, may have an increased risk of a suicide attempt, either directly or indirectly through mental disorders.

*Sexual Health in Service Men*²

Among service men, numerous factors (e.g., older age, lower education, enlisted paygrade, disabling injury, BMI) were associated with sexual health problems. PTSD mediated the associations between stressors (combat deployment and sexual assault) and sexual health outcomes. These findings indicate that sexual health is negatively affected by military-related stressors and comprehensive treatment options are warranted.

*Impacts of Service Member and Spouse Alcohol Misuse*³

This study evaluated the influence of dyadic patterns of alcohol misuse on likelihood of separating from the military among 7,965 opposite sex married couples with one military and one civilian/veteran spouse. The prevalence of alcohol misuse among military couples was high, but alcohol misuse frequently was reported by only one member of a couple. Results indicated that service member alcohol misuse was more strongly related to military separation than spouse alcohol misuse. The study indicated that heavy weekly drinking was a stronger predictor of separation among female than male service members. Future research should replicate this finding and further evaluate the implications of this gender difference.

*Veterinary Health*⁴

To assess the health and wellbeing of certain occupations, we conducted a recent study of 101 Army veterinarians and 334 veterinary technicians compared with other Army medical professionals (856 physicians and dentists and 6,453 medics, respectively). We found that Army veterinarians are more likely to experience mental health problems, trouble sleeping and lack of social support than Army physicians and dentists, whereas no differences in risks were observed between veterinary technicians and medics. The higher observed vulnerability of Army veterinarians warrants the further examination of Army policies and organizational structures related to veterinarians and the development of programs designed to improve the long-term health and wellbeing of these professionals.

*Barriers to Mental Health Care among Spouses*⁵

The elucidation of barriers to mental healthcare among military spouses is critical to optimizing the health of the military family and ensuring military readiness. Utilizing data from the Millennium Cohort Family Study, the current study found that logistic factors, such as lack of time or cost of services (reported by 63%), and negative attitudes towards mental healthcare (reported by 52%) were the most frequently reported barriers to care. Other barriers included fear of negative consequences (reported by 35%) and internalized mental health stigma (reported by 32%). Spouses with prior or current military service themselves and individuals with probable psychiatric conditions were most likely to report barriers to mental healthcare. Prospective data are needed to understand the associations between perceived barriers to care and actual mental healthcare utilization.

Sources

¹ LeardMann CA, Matsuno RK, Boyko EJ, Powell TM, Reger MA, Hoge CW; Millennium Cohort Study. Association of Combat Experiences With Suicide Attempts Among Active-Duty US Service Members. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021 Feb 1;4(2)

² Kolaja CA, Roenfeldt K, Armenta RF, Schuyler AC, Orman JA, Stander VA, LeardMann CA. Sexual Health Problems among Service Men: The Influence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. *J Sex Res*. 2021 Jan 11:1-13. PMID: 33428452.

³ Porter B, Rodriguez LM, Woodall KA, Pflieger JC, Stander VA. Alcohol misuse and separation from military service: A dyadic perspective. *Addict Behav*. 2020 Nov;110

⁴ Rivera, AC; Geronimo-Hara, TR; LeardMann, CA; Penix, EA; Phillips, CJ; Faix, DJ; Rull, RP; Whitmer, DL; Adler, AB; for the Millennium Cohort Study Team. Behavioral health and sleep problems among US Army veterinarians and veterinary technicians participating in the Millennium Cohort Study. *JAVMA* 1 April 2021;258;767-775

⁵ Schvey NA, Burke D, Pearlman AT, Britt TW, Riggs DS, Carballo C, Stander V. Perceived barriers to mental healthcare among spouses of military service members. *Psychol Serv*. 2021 Apr 15. PMID: 33856847.