Increased risk of intimate partner violence among military personal requires effective prevention programming

Rachel Jewkes
South African Medical Research Council, Private Bag X385, Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Research has shown that members of the armed forces are at increased risk of experiencing and perpetrating intimate partner violence (IPV) and the risk is greater for those with active service experience. In this respect, it forms part of an enduring legacy of service and combat. Despite a lack of previous epidemiological research conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) on intimate partner violence in the military, the Ministry of Defence has recognised that IPV affects service populations, and has taken the first steps towards addressing this with the adoption of the ‘No Defence for Abuse’ Domestic Abuse Strategy. Understanding the scale and the nature of the problem is critical for an appropriate intervention, and in this Issue of The Lancet Regional Health – Europe MacManus et al. present the findings of a large cohort study conducted in the UK military that sought to generate data on the prevalence and risk factors for experiencing and perpetrating IPV and to understand whether IPV prevalence was greater in military personnel compared to the general population. The latter was done through comparison with data from participants in the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey cohort study that were matched for age and sex with the military sample, with the samples compared using adjusted logistic regression models.

The prevalence of IPV experience and perpetration in this study was about three-fold higher than in the general population cohort, which was expected based on research in other countries. Although the two cohorts had some differences in measures of IPV and childhood adversity, the research points to particular risks in the military population, which were higher among those with combat experience and, in particular, those who had experienced trauma. These findings further confirm the vulnerability of current and former members of the armed services to mental health problems and harmful alcohol use, which are central to explaining the elevated risk of partner violence.

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E-mail address: rjewkes@mrc.ac.za

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communication and mistrust in relationships, which often lead to difficulties with anger management.\textsuperscript{8}

A key challenge for the Ministry of Defence is to identify at-risk groups within the armed services and to ensure that health and other services are easily accessible. There is a growing body of evidence on how to effectively prevent IPV and deliver interventions in the general population.\textsuperscript{9,10} The armed services are generally highly patriarchal institutions, with cultural emphasis on honor and toughness, and this climate filters into the home and intimate relationships, as well as into the culture around alcohol consumption. Efforts to effectively address IPV in the military will need to use gender transformative strategies if they are to have lasting effect and to include relationship strengthening elements.\textsuperscript{10}

The Ministry of Defence may benefit from knowledge developed in civilian populations on IPV prevention and thus will greatly strengthen its efforts to address the major problem of domestic abuse.

Declaration of interests
There are no conflicts of interest.

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