

Depression and binge-drinking more common among military partners

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New research from King's College London suggests that depression and binge-drinking are more common among the female partners of UK military personnel than among comparable women outside the military community.

Researchers from the King's Centre for Military Health Research at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) collected data from 405 women in [military families](#) with at least one child, representing around a third of the military [population](#).

The researchers used a screening tool for depression, rather than a diagnosis from a psychiatrist, and women reporting frequent symptoms were considered to have probable depression. Drinking behaviours were also recorded through a self-reported screening tool.

- 7% of military partners met criteria for probable depression, compared to 3% of women from the general population
- 9.7% of military partners reported episodes of weekly, daily or almost daily binge-drinking, compared to 8.9% from the general population

After controlling for other factors linked to poor alcohol behaviours, the researchers found military partners were twice as likely to binge-drink as women in the general population.

Overall, military partners reported consuming alcohol less frequently than women in the [general population](#) but reported binge-drinking more often. Binge-drinking was significantly higher when families were separated for more than 2 months due to deployment.

Military families experience various unique challenges, such as frequently moving location and the stress and separation caused by deployment. The researchers say binge-drinking may reflect

poor coping strategies used by military partners during the long absences of serving personnel from the [family home](#).

Lead researcher Dr. Rachael Gribble from the IoPPN says: 'While the majority of families cope well with the added pressures of military life, the additional challenges faced by military families may explain the additional mental [health](#) needs and higher rates of binge-drinking we found among military partners. More research is needed to help find out more about what contributes to depression and problematic drinking in this population.'

The researchers say that [binge-drinking](#) represents an important public health issue for the military community. They urge development of campaigns to reduce alcohol use in military families, suggesting that programmes which successfully tackle dangerous drinking among Service personnel could be extended to their partners.

Senior researcher Professor Nicola Fear from the IoPPN says: 'Our results indicate that healthcare professionals should be attuned to the impact military life can have on the mental health and wellbeing of [family](#) members. There are lots of support options available for military families out there, but these are not always easily accessible.'

This research was published in the *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Army Families Federation. It is the first UK-based study to look at the mental health and well-being of [women](#) in relationships with members of the UK Armed Forces.

A spokesperson for the Army Families Federation, the independent voice of Army families, said: 'Isolation, separation and mobility can all impact on Service families' mental health and emotional wellbeing. Research in these areas helps organisations working with Service families to

better understand how they can be supported. We welcome the conclusion of this research by King's College London that available support could be better signposted for military partners.'

More information: *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, DOI: [10.1080/20008198.2019.1654781](https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2019.1654781)

Provided by King's College London

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