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Understanding Barriers to Leaving Abusive Military Relationships

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UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO LEAVING ABUSIVE
MILITARY RELATIONSHIPS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors Undergraduate Thesis Program
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ABSTRACT

This research investigates intimate partner cyber abuse (IPCA), physical, sexual, and psychological intimate partner violence (IPV) in which the abuser is on active duty, reserve, or a veteran service member within the United States Armed Forces. Using an online survey, I gathered quantitative and qualitative data. I also presented a case study of a woman who experienced IPV within her relationship with a United States Armed Forces member.

Specifically, I (1) explored the barriers that this victim encountered when seeking help or leaving the abusive relationship that may be unique to the military context, and (2) examined the context of her experiences with the different barriers and how they affected her help-seeking behavior. I found that those in a previous relationship with a member of the United States Armed Forces are more likely to experience IPV than those in a current relationship. Also, in the case study, I found that the individual sought informal help rather than formal help and faced internal barriers over external barriers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	3
Intimate Partner Violence	3
<i>Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Types of Intimate Partner Violence</i>	<i>5</i>
Reporting, Help-Seeking Behavior, and Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship	7
Military Experience.....	8
<i>Intimate Partner Violence in the Military.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Barriers to Leaving and Help-Seeking Behavior in the Military</i>	<i>10</i>
METHODS.....	12
Measures	12
<i>Participant Characteristics</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Intimate Partner and Relationship Characteristics.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Intimate Partner Abuse.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Help-Seeking, and Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship</i>	<i>14</i>
Analytic Strategy	14
RESULTS	16
Participant Characteristics.....	16
Relationship Characteristics	16
<i>Current Intimate Partner Partnership</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Former Intimate Partner Partnership.....</i>	<i>18</i>
CTS2 Results	20
<i>Table 1. CTS2 Questionnaire.....</i>	<i>21</i>
IPCA-Q Results	22
<i>Table 2. IPCA-Q Results</i>	<i>23</i>
Case Study: Mia.....	25
<i>Table 3. Case Study: Physical, Psychological, and Sexual Abusive Behaviors.....</i>	<i>26</i>

<i>Table 4. Case Study: Cyber-Based Abusive Behaviors</i>	27
DISCUSSION.....	29
Case Study Findings.....	29
Limitations and Future Research.....	31
Concluding Statement.....	31
REFERENCES	33

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to understand the barriers victims of intimate partner abuse face when leaving or seeking help and how these barriers affect victims' help-seeking behavior in the military. Barriers are psychological, financial, and physical factors that prevent a person from seeking help or leaving an abusive relationship (Women's Aid, 2019). According to Spencer (2021), race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status may create other or more barriers to leaving or seeking help in an abusive relationship.

Wolf et al. (2003) reviewed the literature and found that 2%-52% of IPV victims reported IPV across different studies. Additionally, in a study by Cheng and Lo (2019), 24.1% of participants shared that they reported physical IPV to the police. Furthermore, Cheng and Lo (2019) found that the more severe the physical IPV was, the more likely the victims were to report the abuse to the police. These findings suggest that victims are not reporting to the police until the abuse is severe, which is dangerous for the victims because it could eventually cause health problems. According to Cho et al. (2017), IPV victims that experience more than one form of IPV are unfortunately more likely to suffer health consequences such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

As can be seen, IPV is a serious problem within the general population. Research also suggests that it is a problem within the military community. According to Sparrow et al. (2020) review of the literature, the prevalence of IPV victimization is higher among the military population than the general population. Moreover, there may be barriers to trying to leave or seek help that are unique to the military community.

The military has its own culture, which is very different from civilian life (Devries et al., 2011). For instance, military members face mandatory deployments and transfers and must

follow orders. Additionally, the military has "its own history, laws, values, traditions, language, and customs" that someone who is not part of the military will never get to experience (Meyer, 2015, p. 416). Therefore, victims in an abusive relationship with a member of the United States Armed Forces may face different barriers and help-seeking behavior than victims in abusive relationships with civilians. Knowing what barriers victims face in the military and how these victims are reaching out for help (e.g., friends, family, or law enforcement) will aid professionals in creating efficient and effective intervention programs. Also, understanding how barriers affect help-seeking behavior may help encourage victims to report abuse earlier in the relationship when the abuse is not as severe.

Overall, this study considers how those who experience IPV by a military member may experience unique barriers to leaving or seeking help. Also, it investigates the types of barriers that appear when victims are trying to leave or seek help in an abusive relationship in the military. Lastly, this study looks at how the barriers that the victims experience affects their help-seeking behavior. Specifically, I examined the type of help-seeking behavior victims engage in (i.e., informal or formal help-seeking behavior).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intimate Partner Violence

The definition of IPV has changed drastically over time. One of the first known definitions of IPV is the violence committed within the family household, specifically physical violence perpetrated by a spouse (Straus, 1979). There are two main problems with this early definition of IPV. First, this definition excludes other types of violence such as sexual, psychological, emotional, or cyber-based violence. The second problem with this definition is that it only considers IPV if the perpetrator is a spouse. In other words, any abuse perpetrated by a former or current intimate partner who does not live or is not married to the victim would not have been considered IPV.

As time passed, researchers recognized that physical abuse was not the only type that could occur between intimate partners and saw the need to expand the definition of IPV to include psychological, emotional, and sexual violence (Waltermaurer, 2005). Recent research suggests that as new technological advances emerge, the opportunity to perpetrate a different type of violence called intimate partner cyber abuse (IPCA) increases (Fissel et al., 2021). It is important to note that the definition of IPV is sometimes used interchangeably with domestic violence. Domestic violence (DV) is violence within the household (Moorer, 2021). In other words, the violence may be targeted at any person that lives in the home (i.e., partner, children, or parents). On the other hand, IPV only includes violence between current or former intimate partners, and it can occur even when the abuser and victim are not living together or in a partnership (Moorer, 2021).

In the current study, IPV refers to the physical, psychological, and sexual violence committed by a current or former intimate partner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

2021). Additionally, in this study, IPCA will also be investigated. An intimate partner refers to a current or former boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, dating partner, sexual partner, and other romantic partners. Also, the two people in the romantic partnership do not have to live together.

Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence

The prevalence of IPV has varied across studies due to multiple factors. First, having different definitions to capture the different types of IPV can cause a discrepancy in the prevalence. For instance, physical violence can include various levels of physical and aggressive behaviors. Lysova and Dim (2020) studied mild (i.e., slapping or hitting), moderate (i.e., kicked or bit), and severe (i.e., choked or attack with a weapon) types of physical violence. Also, some studies look at physical violence in a year, while others look at physical violence that has happened in a lifetime (Breiding et al., 2014). As a result, the percentages do not seem to pair up perfectly because the definition of physical violence might mean slightly different in some studies than in others.

Despite the range of prevalence estimates, research shows that 25% of women and 8% of men are victims of IPV in the United States at least once in their lives (Cho et al., 2017). Another study showed that 22.1% of women and 7.4% of men had experienced IPV at least once in their lifetime (Pukay-Martin & Calhoun, 2011). Moreover, a national survey found that approximately one-third of women in the U.S. have experienced IPV (Garza et al., 2020). Smith et al. (2018) reported that according to a national survey, 36.4% and 33.6% of women and men, respectively, have experienced IPV at least once.

One thing that appears to be true across most studies is that women are more likely to experience IPV than men (Campbell et al., 2017). In addition to actual differences in behaviors, there are potentially other reasons that could explain the gendered nature of this crime. For

example, this could be because male victims feel embarrassed by what happened to them, or they might not consider it abuse (Lysova et al., 2020); therefore, they do not report it as much as women. It is essential to examine victims regardless of their race, gender, or ethnicity since IPV can happen to anyone at any given point in their lives.

Types of Intimate Partner Violence

Physical IPV occurs when the abuser slaps, punches, bites, kicks, shoves, restraints, grabs forcefully, or hits their intimate partner (Hattery & Smith, 2019; Cheng & Lo, 2019). Many people think about this type of abuse when thinking of IPV because it is the type of abuse that is observed easily through things like bruises and cuts. The prevalence of physical IPV varies across studies. For instance, some studies indicate that 33% of women and 28% of men have experienced physical IPV (Campbell et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2017). On the other hand, another study found that 22% of women in the U.S. have experienced physical IPV (Sherrill, 2016). Hattery and Smith (2019) found that 25% of women and 13.8% of men experience severe physical violence (i.e., being hit with an object or fist, slammed, or beaten) at least once.

Psychological IPV is the most common type of abuse (Juarros-Basterretxea, 2019; Pukay-Martin & Calhoun, 2011; Sparrow et al., 2020). It is the type of abuse that is difficult to notice since it does not leave any physical marks like physical abuse. Psychological IPV can include humiliation, controlling behavior (i.e., stalking partner or managing partner's daily life), insulting the victim (Kimerling et al., 2009), intimidation, threats to the victims or their loved ones, and insults (Arriaga & Schkeryantz, 2015). According to Smith et al. (2018), in a lifetime, 36.4% of women and 34.2% of men have experienced psychological abuse by an intimate partner.

The definition of **sexual IPV** varies between studies. For instance, according to The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), sexual IPV includes rape, forcing someone to have sex with another person, sexual coercion, and nonconsensual sexual contact (Smith et al., 2018). On the other hand, Bagwell-Gray et al. (2015) mention that in other studies, the term forced sex has been used to describe sexual IPV, but the problem with using the word sex is that it assumes that it was consensual. Also, sexual IPV in other studies can include threatening the victim or a victim's loved one for sexual favors (Bagwell-Gray et al., 2015).

Moreover, according to the NISVS, approximately 18.3% of women and 8.2% of men have been victims of contact sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (Smith et al., 2018). Smith et al. (2018) also reported that 37% of women and 17.9% of men were victims of unwanted sexual contact (i.e., groping, kissing, and touching sexually without consent). Another study on sexual contact reported that 25.5% of females and 7.9% of males said to have experienced nonconsensual sexual contact by physical force (Cantor et al. 2019). Regarding rape, Breiding et al. (2014) found that 8.8% of women and 0.5% of men have been victims of rape by an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime.

IPCA has surfaced as technology has increased over the years. IPCA is also referred to as cyber dating abuse (Caridade et al., 2019), cyber IPV (Fernet et al., 2019), technology-based abuse (Brown et al., 2018), and many other terms that may have some similarities and differences in their definitions (Fissel et al., 2021). IPCA needs to be researched more since technology is constantly increasing, generating more opportunities to perpetrate cyber-based abusive behaviors. IPCA is when a current or former intimate partner uses technological advances to manipulate or control victims, causing them intense feelings of fear (Fernet et al., 2019). For example, Caridade et al. (2019) mention that abusers often use social media to

monitor the victim's daily activities and embarrass them. IPCA is common in people under the age of 25 and is more common in women (Fernet et al., 2019). IPCA has a higher prevalence in younger people mainly because most people have grown up knowing how to use technology at this age range.

Reporting, Help-Seeking Behavior, and Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship

The two types of help investigated in this study are formal and informal support. Formal assistance includes reaching out to law enforcement agencies or organizations specializing in helping victims. Unfortunately, IPV is not reported to law enforcement as often as it seems (Wolf et al., 2003). Instead, victims are more likely to report their abuse to informal sources before they think about reporting to formal sources (Cheng et al., 2020). Victims who seek help from formal sources such as the police are most likely because they have experienced severe IPV, which can lead to serious injuries (Meyer, 2010; Cheng & Lo, 2019; Cho et al., 2017). Additionally, women are more likely to engage in help-seeking behavior than their male counterparts (Cho et al., 2017). Further, Cho et al. (2017) mentioned that African Americans were more likely to use informal support than White participants.

Victims who decide not to seek help from formal or informal sources could have faced barriers that may have prevented them from getting the help they wanted. For instance, fear is a barrier that seems to stop victims from seeking help. Research has shown that many victims do not report their IPV cases because of fear of retaliation from their intimate partners (Cheng & Lo, 2019; Wolf et al., 2003; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016). Victims are also scared and ashamed of reporting their abuse because they do not want to be judged by their friends, family, and law enforcement professionals (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Hien & Ruglass, 2009). Overstreet and Quinn (2013) found that some victims experience or are afraid of experiencing victim-blaming

reactions. Victim-blaming is dangerous when talking about victims of abuse. Shifting the blame from the perpetrator to the victim can cause the victim to believe that they are not being abused, which results in them not seeking the help they need (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013).

Another possible barrier that can hinder the victim's willingness to leave or seek help from an abusive partner is economic barriers. Usually, financial barriers occur when the relationship is ongoing. According to Overstreet and Quinn (2013), an economic barrier a victim might face is having the intimate partner control their finances. In these cases, the victim would not leave the relationship to avoid becoming homeless. It is important to note that many other barriers affect victims' help-seeking behavior and might affect victims differently.

Military Experience

According to the United States Department of Defense (n.d.), there are seven military branches, the Army, Navy, Airforce, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, National Guard, and recently a new branch called Space Force. Even though all these military branches have a different focus and multiple subcultures, they still have numerous things in common. For instance, they all have the same commander in chief, follow a hierarchical system, focus on completing a mission, and have similar family dynamics (e.g., experiencing transfers to other states or facing deployment of intimate partner).

Ranks of the United States Armed Forces are separated into three sections, Enlisted Personnel (E1-E9), Warrant Officers (W1-W5), and Commissioned Officers (O1-O10) (United States Department of Defense, n.d.). It is important to note that there are different routes people take to become an enlisted soldier, warrant officer, or commissioned officer. For instance, Enlisted Personnel first takes the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test (ASVAB), undergo a physical examination, meet with a recruiter, enlist, and attend Basic Combat Training

Advanced Individual Training (ASVAB: Career Exploration Program, n.d.). On the other hand, a person becomes a Commissioned Officer if they attended an ROTC program, Officer Candidate School (OCS), a Military and Service Academy, or through Direct commission (ASVAB: Career Exploration Program, n.d.). Another distinct difference is that Commissioned officers must have a college degree meanwhile enlisted personnel do not.

One of the main parts of the military is that it follows a hierarchy. Following this hierarchy is very important in the military, and failure to do so has extreme consequences. Devries et al. (2011) mention that soldiers with higher ranks are expected not to socialize with soldiers of a lower rank because they do not want other soldiers to think it is favoritism. The primary purpose of this hierarchy is to avoid any conflicts that might occur on a mission. For instance, when deciding on the battlefield, there cannot be an argument on what to do. Instead, the higher-ranking soldier must choose, and everyone must oblige.

It is also important to note that the military culture is hypermasculine. Hattery and Smith (2019) describe a hypermasculine culture as

Hypermasculine culture is characterized as glorifying those traits we generally associate with men, including aggression, strength, power, competence, wealth, professional success, and sexual prowess, while simultaneously holding all the traits associated with women, including weakness, incompetence, lack of power, and being sexually discriminating, in disdain. (p. 64)

As a result, service members may take these beliefs and incorporate them into their romantic relationships. According to Kwan et al. (2020), some characteristics of the military, such as verbal aggression, can make their way into the home, making it more likely to perpetuate psychological IPV.

Intimate Partner Violence in the Military

In a literature review, Kwan et al. (2020) found that there seems to be a higher prevalence of IPV perpetration in the military population compared to the civilian population. Furthermore, this difference in prevalence between the civilian and military populations can be because of the unique experiences that soldiers face in the military. For instance, soldiers face combat, are separated from their families, watch the death of fellow soldiers, and endure long hours of training (Collins & Wadsworth, 2014). All these stressors that soldiers face can make them more likely to become violent and engage in IPV (Pukay-Martin & Calhoun, 2011; Kwan et al., 2020). For example, a soldier surrounded by that hypermasculine culture that I previously mentioned, while on deployment, when they get back home, they might engage in some aggressive or violent behavior towards intimate partner because it is what they have been experiencing for months.

Research also suggests that IPV is more prevalent in the Army when compared with the Air Force and the Navy (Pukay-Martin & Calhoun, 2011; Kwan et al., 2020). This difference can be due to the different types of training that these two branches go through. Additionally, IPV prevalence seems higher within the relationships where the perpetrator is enlisted personnel than their officer counterparts (Kwan et al., 2020). Lastly, Heavey et al. (2017) found that soldiers serving in the military reserve who have experienced combat are not necessarily more likely to commit physical IPV, but when they do, it will most likely cause physical injury to the victims.

Barriers to Leaving and Help-Seeking Behavior in the Military

As previously mentioned, victims of IPV face barriers such as fear (Cheng & Lo, 2019; Wolf et al., 2003; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016), shame (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Hien & Ruglass, 2009), victim-blaming, and financial instability (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013) when

trying to seek help or leave an abusive relationship. In the military, due to its hypermasculine view, seeking help is seen as a weakness more than the general population (Hall et al., 2018). Therefore, intimate partners of military service members might be more inclined not to seek help because they feel like they would be judged by people they know in the military. Additionally, Curry et al. (2014) mention that soldiers and family members refrain from seeking help in the military because of something called barriers to care. According to Curry et al. (2014), barriers to care include not knowing where to seek help, believing that personal problems are resolved alone, and stigma behind mental health. All these barriers can affect someone's willingness to seek help because they either do not know what services are at their disposal or do not want to be judged by others.

Collins and Wadsworth (2014) mentioned that spouses of military members report being unemployed because of the constant relocations, partner's deployment, and parental demands. These findings suggest that it is hard to keep a job as a spouse of a military service member due to all the demands previously mentioned. As a result, unemployed spouses or intimate partners of military service members might have a more challenging time leaving an abusive relationship because they financially depend on their partner. Overall, research must focus on investigating unique barriers to leaving abusive military relationships because these victims might be experiencing more or different barriers than the general population.

METHODS

To test the research questions identified above, I created an online survey hosted on Qualtrics. The survey was composed of multiple-choice, select-all that apply, and open-ended questions, providing quantitative and qualitative data. The study took approximately 30 minutes to complete and was composed of 98 questions. However, there was display and skip patterns, so each respondent did not answer all the 98 questions.

To be eligible to participate in the study, individuals had to be 18 years of age or older, living in the United States, and have a former or current intimate partner relationship with active duty, reserve, or veteran service members of the United States Armed Forces. Participants were recruited through social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) using a flyer containing information about the study and the link to the survey hosted on Qualtrics. Additionally, I sent emails to organizations that focus on helping intimate partners and members of the United States Armed Forces (e.g., Military Family Advisory Network, Military Families United, and Military Spouses Advocacy Network).

Measures

The survey was composed of multiple choice, select all that apply and open-ended questions. The first page contained the consent form. Once they agreed to participate in the study, they answered the demographic questions to determine if they were eligible to participate in the study. Once it was established that the participant met all the eligibility criteria, they proceeded with the survey. The survey was organized into different sections in which the respondents were asked questions about their intimate partner and relationship characteristics and experience with intimate partner abuse.

Participant Characteristics

In the first section of the survey, participants answered demographic questions such as age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. Also, in this section, participants were asked if they are currently or have been in an intimate partner relationship with a member or veteran of the United States Armed Forces. Those who answered that they had never been in a relationship with a United States Armed Forces member and/or were under 18 years of age were screened out of the survey because they did not meet the eligibility criteria to participate in this study. Lastly, participants answered if they were members of the United States Armed Forces; if so, I asked them what their rank and branch were.

Intimate Partner and Relationship Characteristics

After determining that the participant was eligible to participate in the study, participants continued to the second section of the survey, which asked about their current or former intimate partner and their related characteristics. In this section, participants reported the same demographic questions previously asked (e.g., age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity) but concerning their intimate partner. Additionally, participants were asked questions regarding the intimate partner's military status (e.g., branch, rank, previous deployments, have they been diagnosed with PTSD, and if they were wounded in action). Lastly, participants answered the relationship questions such as the type of relationship, length of the relationship, questions about children, and if they cohabited together. Participants who lived with their intimate partners were then asked who was in charge of the household chores and daily living costs. Finally, participants rated their happiness with their involvement in the relationship from extremely unhappy to extremely happy.

Intimate Partner Abuse

For this study, I used two questionnaires to capture the types of abuse the participants experienced throughout their relationship. The first was the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (CTS2), developed by Straus and Douglas (2004). This questionnaire comprises 20 physical, psychological, and sexually abusive behaviors (e.g., threatening you with a weapon, making you feel inadequate, physically hurting you during unwanted sexual activity, etc.). The second was the Intimate Partner Cyber Abuse Questionnaire (IPCA-Q) developed by Fissel et al. (2021). This questionnaire comprises 33 cyber-based abusive behaviors (e.g., keeping track of your finances, controlling your online spending, using your online funds, etc.). Participants, for both questionnaires, had to indicate if they experienced any of the statements within the context of the relationship with their current partner, former partner, or neither but with a different partner.

Help-Seeking, and Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship

The last sections of the survey focused on the barriers that victims might have experienced when seeking help or leaving an abusive military relationship. Also, this section focused on the types of service the victims utilized, if any. For all four types of help sources that I investigated in this study (i.e., law enforcement, other agencies apart from law enforcement, friends, and family), participants were asked if they ever reported unwanted contacts or behaviors experienced by the intimate partner to the respective sources. Then, they were prompted to explain the reason for or against contacting the respective sources.

Analytic Strategy

Using SPSS, I analyzed the quantitative data gathered in this study. Specifically, I used frequency statistics to determine the percentages of participants and the intimate partners' demographics (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). I also created frequency tables of the responses to the two abuse questionnaires. With these tables, I analyzed the physical,

psychological, sexual, and cyber-based violent behaviors the participants have experienced, if any.

Moreover, I conducted a case study on one of the participants. I explored the participant's and former intimate partners' demographics in this case study. Additionally, I investigated the types of abusive behaviors the participant endured during the relationship with their former intimate partner. Lastly, I interpreted the qualitative data gathered through the participant's written responses about their reasons for or against seeking help and how these could have been potential barriers to leaving or seeking help in the abusive relationship.

RESULTS

The results are organized by the different sections of the survey previously mentioned. First, the participant's demographics were reported. Then, the intimate partner's demographics, information about the respondents' relationship(s), and the results for both questionnaires were reported. Lastly, I examined one of the participant's experiences in-depth.

Participant Characteristics

In this study, 10 participants fully completed the online survey. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 85 years of age. Of these participants, five (50%) reported being in a current intimate partner relationship with a member/veteran of the United States Armed Forces. Meanwhile, seven (70%) reported being in a former intimate partner relationship with a United States Armed Forces member. It is important to note that two participants (20%) said they are currently and have been previously in an intimate partner relationship with an Armed Forces member.

In this study, 90% ($n = 9$) of the participants identified as heterosexual women, and 10% ($n = 1$) identified as an asexual men. Fifty percent ($n = 5$) of participants were White or Caucasian, 20% ($n = 2$) were Black or African American, and 60% ($n = 6$) were Hispanic or Latino. One (10%) participant reported being a United States Armed Forces member who has served in the Army Active Duty, Marine Corps Reserve, and Coast Guard Active Duty.

Relationship Characteristics

In this section, I will discuss the different intimate partner characteristics and the relationship characteristics reported by the participants.

Current Intimate Partner Partnership

In this study, 50% ($n = 5$) of participants indicated being in a current intimate partner relationship with an Armed Forces member. All five (100%) of these individuals described their

relationship as a marriage, civil union, or domestic partnership and currently live together outside military housing. Forty percent ($n = 2$) reported that they had been intimately involved with their current intimate partner for over 20 years, 20% ($n = 1$) have been together 1-2 years, 20% ($n = 1$) have been together for 5-6 years, and 20% ($n = 1$) have been together for 11-15 years.

The respondents' intimate partner demographics are: 80% ($n = 4$) were Heterosexual men, and 20% ($n = 1$) indicated that the gender identity of their partner was not listed. Sixty percent ($n = 3$) were Hispanic or Latino, 40% ($n = 2$) were White or Caucasian, 20% ($n = 1$) were Black or African American, and 20% ($n = 1$) selected “other.”

Results also show that three (60%) of the intimate partners served in the Army Active Duty, one (20%) Army Reserve, two (40%) were Army Veteran, and one (20%) served in the Army National Guard. Twenty percent ($n = 1$) served in the Air Force Reserve, and 20% ($n = 1$) served in the Marine Corps Active Duty. The partner's current or highest-earning rank was reported as follows: 20% ($n = 1$) was E6, 60% ($n = 3$) were E7, and 20% ($n = 1$) reported being unsure of their intimate partner's rank.

All five (100%) of the current intimate partners have deployed at least once in their career in the United States Armed Forces. Within the context of the relationship, 40% ($n = 2$) had deployed once, 20% ($n = 1$) had deployed twice, 20% ($n = 1$) had deployed four or more times, and 20% ($n = 1$) had never deployed during their romantic relationship. While deployed, 60% ($n = 3$) were not wounded in action, 20% ($n = 1$) was wounded in action, and 20% ($n = 1$) were unsure. Additionally, three (60%) of the intimate partners have been diagnosed with PTSD, one (20%) was not diagnosed with PTSD, and one (20%) was unsure if their intimate partner had been diagnosed with PTSD.

Forty percent ($n = 2$) of participants had children under 18 with their current partner, 40% ($n = 2$) said that the intimate partner has children with a previous partner, 20% ($n = 1$) had a child but with a previous intimate partner, and 20% ($n = 1$) reported that neither of them had children. Of those who reported having children or stepchildren under 18 years of age, 40% ($n = 2$) stated that the children lived full-time, and 40% ($n = 2$) did not live with them.

Participants when asked who was mainly responsible for the household chores (e.g., laundry, dishes, cleaning, etc.). Forty percent ($n = 2$) reported that it is "Mostly me," 40% ($n = 2$) reported that it is "Evenly split," and 20% ($n = 1$) selected "Completely me." Participants were also asked to report who was responsible for the everyday living cost (e.g., rent or mortgage, food, cable, internet, etc.). Forty percent ($n = 2$) selected "Mostly my intimate partner," 20% ($n = 1$) chose "Completely my intimate partner," 20% ($n = 1$) reported that it was "Evenly split," and 20% ($n = 1$) selected "Mostly me." Lastly, participants were asked to state how happy they are with their involvement with their current intimate partner. Eighty percent ($n = 4$) of the participants reported that they were "Extremely happy," and 20% ($n = 1$) selected that they were "Somewhat happy" with the relationship.

Former Intimate Partner Partnership

In this research study, 70% ($n = 7$) of the participants reported being in a past intimate partner relationship with a member/veteran of the United States Armed Forces. Forty-three percent ($n = 3$) described their relationship as Casually dating or Hooking up, 43% ($n = 3$) described it as married, civil union, or domestic partnership, and 14% ($n = 1$) described it as an exclusive dating relationship. Twenty-nine percent ($n = 2$) reported that they were together for 3-4 years, 14% ($n = 1$) reported from 1 month to less than three months, 14% ($n = 1$) five months to less than nine months, 14% ($n = 1$) 3-4 years, 14% ($n = 1$) 11-15 years, and 14% ($n = 1$) were

together for more than 20 years. Eighty-six percent ($n = 6$) of the participants reported that their former intimate partner identified as heterosexual men, and one (14%) did not answer the question. Twenty-nine percent ($n = 2$) of the intimate partners were Hispanic or Latino, 71% ($n = 5$) were White or Caucasian, and 29% ($n = 2$) were Black or African American.

Twenty-nine percent ($n = 2$) of the former intimate partners served in the Army on Active Duty, and 14% ($n = 1$) is an Army Retiree. Additionally, 14% ($n = 1$) served as Air Force Active Duty, 14% ($n = 1$) in the Navy as Active Duty, and 14% ($n = 1$) as a Navy Veteran. One of the participants (14%) was unsure about their former intimate partner's branch. As for the rank, 29% ($n = 2$) reported that their former partner's rank was E5, 29% ($n = 2$) was E7, and 14% ($n = 1$) was E3. Additionally, one (14%) of the participants said they were unsure of their former intimate partner's rank.

Fifty-seven percent ($n = 4$) of the former intimate partners have deployed at least once in their career in the Armed Forces. Out of these times, 29% ($n = 2$) have deployed four or more times, 14% ($n = 1$) has deployed three times, and 14% ($n = 1$) has deployed once while in an intimate relationship with the participants. Twenty-nine percent ($n = 2$) of the participants reported that their former intimate partners had not been deployed, and fourteen percent ($n = 1$) participants were unsure whether their former partners had ever deployed.

When asked if intimate partners have ever been wounded in action, only one (14 %) reported that their intimate partner was injured while on duty. Meanwhile, 72% ($n = 5$) said that their former intimate partner had not been wounded in action, and 14% reported that they were unsure if their partner was injured in action. Additionally, forty-three percent ($n = 3$) of the participants said that their former intimate partner had not been diagnosed with PTSD, and 57% ($n = 4$) were unsure if their former partner had been diagnosed with PTSD.

During the participants' relationship, 29% ($n = 2$) had children under 18 with that intimate partner. Both these two participants had lived full-time with their children during the relationship. On the other hand, 71% ($n = 5$) mentioned that neither of them had kids. Forty-three percent ($n = 3$) have cohabited with their former intimate partner, and fifty-seven ($n = 4$) have not lived together with their former intimate partner.

When it comes to everyday living costs (e.g., rent or mortgage, food, cable, internet, etc.), 14% ($n = 1$) reported that it was "Evenly split," and 29% ($n = 2$) said that it was "Mostly my former intimate partner." On the other hand, 29% ($n = 2$) reported that the one responsible for the household chores (e.g., laundry, dishes, cleaning, etc.) is "Completely me," and 14% said that it was "Mostly me." Fifty-seven percent ($n = 4$) of the participants did not report who was responsible for everyday living costs or household chores. Lastly, 57% ($n = 4$) mentioned that they were "Somewhat unhappy" with their involvement with their former intimate partner. Fourteen percent ($n = 1$) reported that they were "Extremely unhappy," and 29% ($n = 2$) mentioned that they were "Somewhat happy."

CTS2 Results

Table 1 shows the CTS2 questionnaire. As can be seen in table 1, participants who reported being in a current relationship with a member of the United States Armed Forces ($n = 5$) did not experience as much abusive behavior as those in a former intimate partner relationship. Ten percent ($n = 1$) of participants said their current intimate partner "shouted, yelled, insulted, or swore." Also, 10% ($n = 1$) reported that their intimate partner had "thrown something at you that could have hurt you."

On the other hand, participants who reported having a relationship with a military service member said they experienced more abusive behavior. The main behavior that 40% ($n = 4$) of the

victims reported was "Tried to control you by always checking up on you, telling you who your friends could be, or telling you what to do and when." Additionally, 30% ($n = 3$) of participants reported that their former intimate partner "tried to provoke arguments with you," "made you feel inadequate," and "made you engage in sexual activities when you didn't want to because he/she threatened to end your relationship if you didn't or because you felt pressured by his/her constant begging." Furthermore, participants were also allowed to report if they had experienced these abusive behaviors with a different intimate partner. Twenty percent ($n = 2$) said to have experienced various abusive behaviors such as "shouted, yelled, insulted, or swore at you," "Hit, slapped, or physically hurt you on purpose," "followed you around and/or watched you," and many others that can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. CTS2 Questionnaire

Statements	Current Intimate Partner	Former Intimate Partner	Never experienced	No, but with a different Intimate Partner	Total
Tried to control you by always checking up on you, telling you who your friends could be, or telling you what to do and when.	0	4	4	1	9
Damaged something that was important to you.	0	1	6	2	9
Shouted, yelled, insulted, or swore at you.	1	2	4	2	9
Thrown something at you that could have hurt you.	1	1	6	1	9
Hit, slapped, or physically hurt you on purpose.	0	0	7	2	9
Threatened you with a weapon.	0	0	8	1	9
Tried to provoke arguments with you.	0	3	5	1	9
Called you names or put you down in front of others.	0	2	6	1	9
Made you feel inadequate.	0	3	5	1	9
Prevented you from working outside of the home.	0	0	7	2	9

Made you engage in sexual activities when you didn't want to because he/she threatened to end your relationship if you didn't or because you felt pressured by his/her constant begging.	0	3	5	1	9
Made you engage in sexual activities when you didn't want to because he/she threatened to use or did use physical force (e.g., twisting your arm, holding you down).	0	0	7	2	9
Made you engage in sexual activities when you didn't want to because you were drunk or using drugs.	0	1	7	1	9
Physically hurt you during unwanted sexual activity.	0	0	8	1	9
Followed you around and/or watched you.	0	1	6	2	9
Waited at your home, school, or work when you did not want them to.	0	1	6	2	9
Sneaked into your home, car, or any other place and did unwanted things to let you know they had been there.	0	0	8	1	9
Showed up, rode, or drove by places where you were when they had no business being there.	0	2	6	1	9
Left or sent unwanted cards, letters, presents, or other items.	0	2	6	1	9
Harassed or repeatedly asked your friends or family about your whereabouts.	0	0	7	2	9

IPCA-Q Results

Table 2 shows the results of IPCA-Q. As can be seen, participants in current intimate partner relationships experienced less abusive cyber-based behaviors than those in former intimate partner relationships. Only 10% ($n = 1$) of participants in a current intimate partner relationship reported that their partner has "intentionally ignored your attempts at communicating through technologies." Thirty percent ($n = 3$) reported that their former intimate partner

"persistently contacted or attempted to contact you" and "intentionally ignored your attempts at communicating through technologies." These were the two most common types of abusive behavior among former intimate partners. Twenty percent ($n = 2$) of participants mentioned that their former intimate partner "controlled your online spending," "deleted or threatened to delete your personal social media accounts," "followed or monitored you using computer software, cameras, listening devices, GPS, etc.," and "forced you to block or remove someone from communicating with you."

Participants were also able on this questionnaire to report if they experienced abusive behaviors with a different intimate partner. Results show that 20% ($n = 2$) of other intimate partners "checked your private messages," "kept tabs on your physical whereabouts using social media posts," "controlled what you posted, liked, or who you followed on social media," "used your children or family members to relay messages via communication technologies," and "did not allow you to communicate with your children or family members."

Table 2. IPCA-Q Results

Statements	Current Intimate Partner	Former Intimate Partner	Never experienced	No, but with a different Intimate Partner	Total
Kept track of your finances.	0	1	7	1	9
Controlled your access to online banking or billing accounts.	0	1	7	1	9
Controlled your online spending.	0	2	6	1	9
Took out credit cards or loans in your name.	0	0	8	1	9
Used your online funds.	0	0	8	1	9
Posted, threatened to post, or shared sexual/naked photographs or videos of you.	0	0	8	1	9
Posted, threatened to post, or shared inappropriate, unwanted, or personal information about	0	0	8	1	9

you.					
Deleted or threatened to delete your personal social media accounts.	0	2	6	1	9
Persistently contacted or attempted to contact you.	0	3	4	1	8
Tracked your internet activity.	0	1	6	1	8
Checked your private messages.	0	0	6	2	8
Logged in to or attempted to log into your online accounts.	0	1	6	1	8
Followed or monitored you using computer software, cameras, listening devices, GPS, etc.	0	2	5	1	8
Kept tabs on your physical whereabouts using social media posts.	0	0	6	2	8
Controlled what you posted, liked, or who you followed on social media.	0	0	6	2	8
Used your children or family members to relay messages via communication technologies.	0	0	6	2	8
Coerced or forced you into opening financial accounts.	0	0	7	1	8
Used technology to sabotage your employment or education.	0	0	7	1	8
Sent you threatening messages or images displaying weapons.	0	0	7	1	8
Sent you messages or images threatening to harm you.	0	0	8	0	8
Sent you messages or images threatening to harm family members, friends, or pets.	0	0	7	1	8
Made false reports to emergency services about you.	0	0	8	0	8
Stole or destroyed your phone, computer, or other technological communication device.	0	0	7	1	8
Intentionally ignored your attempts at communicating through technologies.	1	3	4	1	9
Shared, posted, or sent insulting, humiliating, or hurtful comments about you.	0	0	7	1	8
Forced you to reveal your online	0	0	7	1	8

passwords so they could access your private accounts.					
Forced you to block or remove someone from communicating with you.	0	2	5	1	8
Did not allow you to communicate with your children or family members.	0	0	6	2	8
Gave gifts to your children or family members that were used to monitor you.	0	0	8	0	8
Sent you unwanted sexual or naked photographs or videos.	0	1	7	0	8
Pressed you to send sexual or naked photographs or videos of yourself.	0	1	6	1	8
Made you feel stupid and incapable of understanding or learning to use technology.	0	1	6	1	8
Mobilized third parties to attack you via communication technologies.	0	1	6	1	8

Case Study: Mia

For this study, I will refer to the participant of this case study as Mia. Mia is a twenty-eight-year-old African American heterosexual woman that has previously been in an intimate partner relationship with a United States Armed Forces service member. She described the relationship with her former intimate partner as "casually dating or hooking up" and reported that they were together for 3-4 years. Mia's highest level of education is a graduate degree (e.g., Master's or Ph.D.).

Mia's former intimate partner, whom I will refer to as John in this study, was an African American heterosexual man. According to her, he served in the Navy on Active Duty and was a Navy Veteran. John's highest rank in the Navy during the partnership was an E5. Mia also reported that John was deployed three times while in a relationship with her, and she never went

with him on his deployments. When asked if John was ever wounded in action, she said no, but was unsure if he was diagnosed with PTSD. Neither Mia nor John had children under 18 years old. Also, according to Mia, she never cohabited with him. Mia reported being "somewhat unhappy" with her involvement with John.

As can be seen, Table 3 shows the physical, psychological, and sexually abusive behaviors that Mia reported to have experienced within the context of her relationship with John and with a different intimate partner. Then, Table 4 indicates the cyber-based abusive behaviors that Mia experienced during her relationship with John and another intimate partner.

Table 3. Case Study: Physical, Psychological, and Sexual Abusive Behaviors

Former Intimate Partner	Different Intimate Partner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tried to control you by always checking up on you, telling you who your friends could be, or telling you what to do and when. • Tried to provoke arguments with you. • Made you feel inadequate. • Made you engage in sexual activities when you didn't want to because he/she threatened to end your relationship if you didn't or because you felt pressured by his/her constant begging. • Made you engage in sexual activities when you didn't want to because you were drunk or using drugs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damaged something that was important to you. • Shouted, yelled, insulted, or swore at you. • Hit, slapped, or physically hurt you on purpose. • Prevented you from working outside of the home. • Made you engage in sexual activities when you didn't want to because he/she threatened to use or did use physical force (e.g., twisting your arm, holding you down). • Harassed or repeatedly asked your friends or family about your whereabouts.

Table 4. Case Study: Cyber-Based Abusive Behaviors

Former Intimate Partner	Different Intimate Partner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deleted or threatened to delete your personal social media accounts. • Persistently contacted or attempted to contact you. • Tracked your internet activity. • Logged in to or attempted to log into your online accounts. • Followed or monitored you using computer software, cameras, listening devices, GPS, etc. • Intentionally ignored your attempts at communicating through technologies. • Forced you to block or remove someone from communicating with you. • Sent you unwanted sexual or naked photographs or videos. • Pressed you to send sexual or naked photographs or videos of yourself. • Mobilized third parties to attack you via communication technologies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checked your private messages. • Kept tabs on your physical whereabouts using social media posts. • Controlled what you posted, liked, or who you followed on social media • Used your children or family members to relay messages via communication technologies • Did not allow you to communicate with your children or family members

After she answered the two abuse questionnaires, Mia reported that she believes she has experienced IPV by a former intimate partner. Also, she mentioned that she did not contact law enforcement to report unwanted contacts or behaviors that she had experienced in her relationship with John. She also said that the reason for not contacting law enforcement was because it was "too minor, not serious enough," "private, not a police matter," "not clear it was a crime or that harm was intended," "did not find out until too late," "did not know how to report," and "not enough evidence or proof." Then, she was asked to explain why she did not contact law enforcement and said, "*I felt like i was being emotions* [sic]." Mia did not seek help from any office or agency other than law enforcement; no explanation was given. Mia reported having

only disclosed the unwanted contacts or behaviors to a friend because she wanted *"to understand if i was being emotional or not [sic]."*

DISCUSSION

This research study looks at the type of abusive behaviors of 10 participants who are currently or have been formerly in an intimate partner relationship with a member of the United States Armed Forces. Results show that participants in a current intimate partner relationship experienced fewer abusive behaviors than those formerly in a military partnership. These findings can be because victims currently in an abusive intimate partner relationship might not be able to participate in this study due to hypervigilance of the abuser, or they are afraid that the abuser might find out. Also, this finding could be because individuals that have experienced IPV have left the abusive relationship, which causes more people to report abuse in former relationships than in current.

Additionally, those in a current intimate partner relationship with a member of the United States Armed Forces reported being happier than those in a former intimate partner relationship. This can be due to the fact those in a current relationship did not experience as many abusive behaviors, which can cause the difference in happiness ratings. Also, it is essential to note that most participants in a current relationship have been together for over 20 years. Meanwhile, most of the participants in a former relationship have only been together for 3-4. This means that those in a current relationship could have a different perspective and definition of being happy in a relationship.

Case Study Findings

In this case study, I explored the experience with IPV of one of the participants, which I referred to as Mia. Mia is a heterosexual, African American woman that has experienced physical, psychological, sexual, and cyber-based abuse (see Tables 3-4). Her abuser served in the Navy on Active Duty and is a Navy Veteran. Kwan et al. (2020) found that enlisted personnel is

more likely to perpetrate IPV than officers. This finding reflects Mia's case since her abuser was enlisted in the Navy. Additionally, Mia reported more cyber-based abusive behavior. This finding can be due to the IPCA-Q having more items than the CTS2. Also, The IPCA-Q focuses on cyber-based abuse; meanwhile, the CTS2 has three types of IPV.

The results also show that Mia did not seek either of the two types of formal help because, as she mentioned, "*I feel like i was being emotions* [sic]." In other words, Mia refrained from seeking help from law enforcement because she thought she was exaggerating. Also, Mia mentioned that she did not seek formal help because she did not believe it was severe enough, and it was unclear if what he was doing was a crime or if he intended to hurt her. As Overstreet and Quinn (2013) found, many victims refrain from seeking help, just like Mia, because they do not believe they are being abused or start blaming themselves for what is happening.

Mia also said she did not report unwanted contact or behaviors to family members. Not reaching out to a family member, as has been found in research studies, is because victims feel scared that they will be judged by family members (McClaery-Sill et al., 2016; Hien & Ruglass, 2009). She did, however, report the unwanted contacts or behaviors she experienced to a friend, which is a type of informal help. Research on help-seeking has shown that African American victims are more likely to use informal services than their White counterparts (Cho et al., 2017). Mia's reason for reporting to friends was "*to understand if i was being emotional or not* [sic]."

Overall, Mia only used one of the four resources of help investigated in this study. Mia reported that she did not utilize the other resources because she thought she was too emotional, which is a barrier in the general population. In Mia's case, no unique military barriers were found; however, it is still important to keep investigating barriers unique to the military context to help victims in abusive military relationships.

Limitations and Future Research

This study had certain limitations, which I encourage future research on barriers unique to the military to consider when researching this topic. First, the sample size was a limitation of this study. A sample of 10 participants hinders the ability to generalize the findings of this study. Also, of those 10 participants, only one participant's barriers and help-seeking behavior were investigated. Second, the case study itself has its limitations. I decided to do a case study because I wanted to explore in more depth this victim's barriers to seeking help or leaving the abusive relationship that may be unique to the military context. Even though I did not find any barriers unique to the military, I encourage future research to conduct interviews or focus groups with larger sample size. Using these other measures and increasing the sample size could help investigate the barriers unique to the military.

As for the survey, I suggest that in the future, researchers offer an incentive for completing the study and make the survey shorter to encourage more people to complete the survey. For future research, I suggest that, just like this study investigates four types of help sources, other studies should be specific about what barriers they want to research. For instance, further studies can ask barrier questions particular to the military, such as whether did rank of your intimate partner influenced your decision to seek or not seek help. In other words, I would ask about specific potential military barriers.

Concluding Statement

Despite these limitations, this study helps raise awareness of potential barriers to leaving abusive relationships in the military. It is essential to understand the experiences that victims, just like Mia, endure when trying to seek help. Knowing what barriers victims face in the military and how these victims are reaching out for help (e.g., friends, family, or law

enforcement and other agencies) will aid professionals in creating efficient and effective intervention programs. For instance, Mia felt that she was being "too emotional," and others victims of IPV in the military could think the same way. Additionally, these resources need to be made public because, as seen in this study, Mia was not sure how to report, which was one of her barriers to not reporting to the police. This means that apart from intervention programs, the public needs to be educated on what resources are already out there that they can utilize if they want help.

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