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# The Impact of Pre-Service Violent Behavior on Violence Perpetration Among Service Members.

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## INTRODUCTION

The military is a “social organization for the achievement of political aims through the threatened and actual use of armed force” (Wachtler, 1988, p.268). In recent years, there has been an increased interest in domestic violence cases in the military and cases of sexual violence toward women in the military (Valente & Wight, 2007). This study attempts to report finding related to this issue.

### Current Study

The present analysis tries to identify some of the factors that may explain variation in violence perpetration (physical assault) among service men. We are particularly interested in observing the lasting effect of pre-service severe violent behavior on more recent violence perpetration. The potential for violence-detering effect of an adult institution of informal social control such as marriage will be examined as well.

### Theoretical background

Bandura’s (1978) social learning theory of aggression. Bandura argued that violence originates in the family. Children exposed during the socialization process to violence and to inadequate role models would reproduce the learned aggressive tactics during social interactions.

Age-graded theory of informal social control (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Claims weak social bonds and past delinquent behavior are good indicators of future crime. However, despite one’s antisocial/delinquent background, strong social bonds to adult institutions of informal social control, such as the family, work, or the military service would have a crime-deterrent effect.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- H1: Exposure to domestic violence will predict violence perpetration in early adulthood.
- H2: Individuals who grew up in a criminogenic family environment will be more likely to acknowledge assaultive behavior in adulthood.
- H3: Childhood antisocial behavior (e.g., sexual violence; cruelty toward animals; physical violence) will predict violent behavior in adulthood.
- H4: Social bonds to adult institutions of informal social control, such as marriage, would have a violence-deterrent effect in early adulthood.
- H5: Negative emotions, such as anger and verbal violence will be positively associated with assaultive behavior.
- H6: Violence perpetration is expected to decrease with age and to vary among individuals by ethnicity/race.

## METHODS

The study is based on data collected from military STARRS data set about Army members risk and resilience, Sample size of 32,911 (N). Male respondents\*.

\*The sample does not include female respondents because they have not been asked questions regarding pre-service violent behavior.

### Dependent measure

- Dichotomous measure of violence in the military: “How often do you hit other people so hard that they got bruises or had to see a doctor?”

### Independent measures

- Pre-service family circumstances
    - Exposure to domestic violence in the family of origin: Ordinal-level variable (1 = never to 5 = very often).
    - Criminogenic family environment: Dichotomous variable (1 = at least one of the respondent's parents has been incarcerated while the respondent was growing up, 0 = if not).
  - Pre-service behavior
    - Sexual offending and violence perpetration: Composite measure from 5 questions.
  - Negative emotion/aggression: Composite measures of 4 questions
- The measure (a factor constructed via Principle Component Analysis (PCA)) is reliable ( $\alpha = .82$ ) and unidimensional (Eigenvalue = 3.068; variance explained = 61.35%; factor loadings vary from .733 to .850).
- The measure (factor constructed via Principle component analysis PCA) is reliable ( $\alpha = .67$ ) and unidimensional (Eigenvalue = 2.027; variance explained = 50.66%; factor loadings vary from .641 to .777). Higher values indicate a higher level of aggression.
- Control variables
    - Marital status: Married (1 = yes, 0 = no).
    - Race: Two dichotomous variables (White = 1; Black = 1; Reference category = other race/ethnicity).
    - Age: Respondent’s age in years.

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## ANALYSIS

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics  
(N = 32,911)

Variables	Mean/Freq	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Violent behavior in the military	5.65%		0	1
Exposure to domestic violence	1.26	.76	1	5
Criminogenic family environment	10%	.30	0	1
Pre-service sexual & physical violence	0	1	-.22	12.20
Negative emotions/ Aggression	.01	1.00	-1.13	1.97
Marital status (married)	12%	.32	0	1
Race (White)	72.11%	.45	0	1
Race (Black)	19.88%	.40	0	1
Age	20.48	2.66	18	29

Table 2  
Logit estimates for service members’ violent behavior  
(N = 32,911)

Variable	B	SE	Exp(B)	p
Exposure to domestic violence	.021	.018	1.021	.252
Criminogenic family environment	-.131	.045	.877	.004
Pre-service sexual & physical violence	.063	.016	1.065	.000
Negative emotions/Aggression	.543	.014	1.721	.000
Marital status (married)	-.063	.043	.939	.140
Race (White)	-.094	.042	.910	.024
Race (Black)	-.455	.048	.635	.000
Age	-.012	.005	.989	.027
Constant	.245	.116	.034	1.278
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> (Nagelkerke)	.091			

## RESULTS

- Results showed that pre-service sexual assault, physical violence, and other severe deviant behaviors predicted physical violence perpetration while in service.
- Although the direction of the effect was positive, childhood exposure to domestic violence did not have a significant effect on violence perpetration later in life.
- Compared to service men whose parents did not spend time in prison, respondents who had incarcerated parents were significantly less likely to acknowledge violent behavior while in the military.
- As hypothesized, a significant and positive relationship was found between aggressive tendencies and physical violence perpetration.
- While married respondents tend to be less violent than respondents who were single, divorced, separated, etc., one’s marital status does not affect significantly variations in violent behavior, when controlling for the other variables in the model.
- Race and age influence service men’s involvement in violence significantly. There is a decrease in violence with an increase in age. Additionally, white and black service men acknowledged violence perpetration significantly less often than non-black racial/ethnic minorities.

## DISCUSSION

### Conclusion

The study found that past behavior predicts future behavior and that the age-graded desistance for less crime lies in the age of the offender, as the older one gets, the less crime they commit. Marriage was not found to have a significant impact on the distance of perpetration. This leaves the question of: what does? It is pertinent to follow this question to discover what would have a strong deterring effect on perpetration.

### Limitations

The data we had analyzed was secondary data. As we did not collect it ourselves, we used measures that were not as complete as we would have liked. For the variables selected for this study, women were not included in the sample. We can hypothesize that the reason why women were not included was either that the questions we selected were not asked to women or that women decided not to answer.

### Policy Implications

As past behavior predicts future behavior, a focus on juveniles experiencing criminogenic family environments and on those who are exhibiting anti-social behavior is wise. Creating juvenile-specific programs to understand the commission of anti-social acts may have a deterring effect and may help decrease or stop future violent behavior.

