

Study: Extramarital sex and divorce more common among veterans

22 August 2011

Veterans were significantly more likely to have ever engaged in extramarital sex and ever gotten divorced than people who were never in the military, according to new research to be presented at the 106th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

The study, based on data from a 1992 [national survey](#), found that more than 32 percent of ever-married [veterans](#) reported extramarital sex, which is about twice the rate among ever-married non-veterans (16.8 percent).

"To the extent that the patterns observed in these data hold for our current veteran population, the results of this study provide evidence that the concerns about infidelity among spouses of persons who have served in the military are to a considerable degree valid," said Andrew S. London, chair of the sociology department and a sociology professor at Syracuse University. "However, even though the reported rates of infidelity were significantly higher for veterans than non-veterans, extramarital sex was only reported by one-third of ever-married veteran respondents."

Titled, "Veteran Status, Marital Infidelity, and Divorce," the study also found that among those who had ever married, veterans were almost 10 percent more likely to have gotten divorced (38.5 percent compared to 28.9 percent). There was also a strong association between extramarital sex and divorce both for veterans and non-veterans. Overall, even after taking into account veteran status and other factors that influence divorce, those who reported extramarital sex were 2.3 times more likely to have ever divorced than those who reported no extramarital sex.

While the study considered both men and women, London and his co-authors Elizabeth Allen, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Colorado-Denver, and Janet M. Wilmoth, a sociology professor at Syracuse University, said

their data set included too few female veterans to draw definitive conclusions about them as a separate group.

"The results of this study provide robust evidence that veteran status was strongly associated with an increased likelihood of extramarital sex and divorce—at least among men—and suggest that the odds of extramarital sex and divorce might also be elevated among female veterans," London said. "But, further research that uses larger, representative samples of [female veterans](#) is needed to confirm those female-specific associations."

The study relied on data from the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs), and focused on the 2,308 18-60-year-old respondents who comprised the ever-married subset of the sample. "Although it is now two decades old, the NHSLs is one of the few national data sets that includes questions about whether respondents have ever served in the military, extramarital sex, and marital and divorce history," London said.

As valuable as the NHSLs data are, London and his co-authors believe that their findings raise important new questions that can only be addressed with new data collection. "We do not know from these data whether the extramarital sex occurred prior to, during, or after the conclusion of the respondent's military service, and we do not know the military service status of spouses," London said. "New, relatively large-scale data collection initiatives that follow people over time, examine different stages of life, and collect state-of-the-science measurements of military service experiences, sexual behavior, and marriage and family outcomes from husbands and wives are desperately needed."

In terms of the study's policy implications, London said, "This research can increase our understanding of some of the problems faced by military and veteran families, and can inform the

development of interventions used to help them."

For ease of presentation, the authors used the term "veteran" to describe people who had previously served in the military or who were on active duty at the time of the survey. A very small number (26) of ever-married persons were on active-duty at the time of the survey. Although the authors do not have information about the specific time period of [military service](#), they note that the age distribution in the NHSLs suggests that respondents were born between 1932 and 1974, and therefore turned 18 between 1950 and 1992. Thus, veterans (primarily men) in the NHSLs would have been eligible to serve during the Korean War, the Cold War era, the Vietnam War, and the era of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF). It is likely that the majority served during relatively low-conflict eras; only some of the older veterans could have served during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and a few of the younger veterans could have served during the first Gulf War. Based on when respondents turned 18, the authors estimate that approximately 78 percent of the ever-married veterans in the NHSLs served prior to the era of the AVF, which began in 1973.

More information: The paper, "Veteran Status, Marital Infidelity, and Divorce," will be presented on Monday, Aug. 22, in Caesars Palace Las Vegas, at the American Sociological Association's 106th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

APA citation: Study: Extramarital sex and divorce more common among veterans (2011, August 22) retrieved 26 October 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-extramarital-sex-divorce-common-veterans.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.