

Study sheds light on alcohol misuse among never-deployed reservists

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UB research provides new information on the drinking patterns of U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers who have never been deployed. Credit: University at Buffalo

U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers who experience greater feelings of guilt and other negative emotions about never having been deployed are more likely to misuse alcohol, according to new research from the University at Buffalo.

In a study of 174 Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers who hadn't been deployed, researchers found that more negative non-deployment emotions were associated with a range of [alcohol use](#) outcomes.

"A greater degree of non-deployment emotions—such as guilt, less value, less camaraderie and less connectedness—was associated with greater frequency and amount of alcohol drinking among never-deployed Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers," said study lead author Rachel Hoopsick, a [community health](#) and health behavior PhD candidate in UB's School of Public Health and Health Professions (SPHHP).

The study was published Oct. 31 in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*. It's the first to examine the relationship between a novel measure of negative emotions related to never having been deployed—the Non-Deployment Emotions Questionnaire—and alcohol use outcomes among service members who have never been deployed.

Problem alcohol use was related to non-deployment emotions among male soldiers, the study showed. "Male, but not female soldiers, experienced a greater likelihood of alcohol problems when they had highly negative non-deployment emotions," Hoopsick said.

Data for the paper came from Operation: SAFETY (Soldiers and Families Excelling Through the Years), an ongoing study of the health and well-being of U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers and their partners.

The study is funded by an award (R01DA034072) from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to Hoopsick's mentor and study co-author Gregory G. Homish, PhD, associate professor and associate chair of the Department of Community Health and Health Behavior in SPHHP. In order to consider the longitudinal impact of non-deployment on health outcomes, the grant has been funded by NIDA for an additional five years to fully examine the complexities of [soldier](#) identity, emotions and behaviors.

It is also funded through an award (UL1TR001412) to UB from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences of the National Institutes of Health.

For this study, Hoopsick—who is also a graduate research assistant for Operation: SAFETY—and her colleagues wanted to examine the potential relationship between non-deployment emotions and a range of alcohol use outcomes.

Reserve service members, who number just over 1 million in the U.S., have been shown to be at [high risk](#) for problems with substance use and mental health.

But less is known about the drinking patterns of soldiers who have never been deployed, Hoopsick said, noting that previous research hasn't uncovered any significant differences between recently deployed and never-deployed soldiers in terms of alcohol use, but that never-deployed service members may be less likely to be considered for targeted screening and intervention efforts as their previously deployed counterparts.

"U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers are at high risk for alcohol misuse, and our prior work demonstrated that negative emotions related to having never been deployed are prevalent among those who have never been deployed," said Hoopsick.

"Non-deployment emotions are associated with alcohol problems among men and are thus important to consider in the overall [health](#) and well-being of never-deployed service members," Hoopsick said, adding that never-deployed service members should be included in alcohol screening and prevention efforts, especially those who experience negative non-deployment emotions.

Researchers say non-deployment may affect men more so than women because of what has previously been called the "Reserve soldier identity," of which deployment is a key component.

In the current study, 77 percent of male soldiers and 70 percent of [female soldiers](#) experienced some type of [negative emotions](#) over their non-deployment. Among never-deployed soldiers, 23 percent of men and 21 percent of women reported getting drunk at least once per month, while 12 percent of men and 8 percent of women had clinically significant [alcohol](#) problems.

"The importance of considering all soldiers and not just those who have deployed is essential for the prevention and intervention of problematic substance use and other issues," says Homish.

More information: Rachel A. Hoopsick et al. Alcohol Use Among Never-Deployed U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers: The Effects of Nondeployment Emotions and Sex, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.13901](#)

Provided by University at Buffalo

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