



Veterans, Service Members, Mental Health, and Domestic Violence

After service: PTSD, moral injury, and violence in military and veteran households

Domestic violence in veteran households is often driven by treatable, service-connected conditions — combat trauma, traumatic brain injury, PTSD, substance use, and moral injury (lasting distress after acts that violate one's own moral code). Yet civilian responders often do not know a veteran is involved, and VA systems often do not know violence is occurring at home. This study builds the evidence for a response that reaches both sides.

PARTNER WITH US

Purple Cactus is seeking foundation, corporate, and individual partners to fund this study. Contact grants@purplecactus.org to request the full prospectus and budget.

THE PROBLEM

33% vs 13.5%

past-year partner violence among veterans with PTSD versus those without, in a national survey of Vietnam-era veterans (mid-1980s)
VA National Center for PTSD, citing the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study

13% / 21%

of service members and veterans reported recent partner-violence perpetration / victimization (systematic review of population studies)
Cowlshaw et al., 2022, Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health

8.4%

of U.S. veterans reported lifetime physical partner-violence perpetration in a nationally representative 2025 sample
Kachadourian et al., National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study, J. Affective Disorders (2025)

Civilian and military systems each see part of the picture. Little published research follows veteran households across both systems, and the role of moral injury in partner violence has barely been studied.

WHAT WE WANT TO LEARN

- How often is military or veteran status identified when police respond to domestic violence, and what happens when it is missed?
- What is the relationship between PTSD, traumatic brain injury, moral injury, substance use, and the severity of abuse in veteran households?
- Does engagement with VA or community mental health treatment reduce repeat violence, and what prevents families from reaching that treatment?

APPROACH

- **Dual-system cohort.** Enroll veteran-involved households through both law enforcement and VA or Vet Center partners in three to five communities with high veteran populations; follow for 18 months under IRB oversight.
- **Family perspective.** Interviews with veterans, partners, and military caregivers on how service-connected conditions and violence interact in daily life, including validated moral injury measures.
- **Practice review.** Audit how police, courts, and advocates currently identify and route veteran households, and where referrals break down.

WHAT THE STUDY WILL PRODUCE

- A veteran-status identification and referral protocol for law enforcement and advocates
- Evidence on whether PTSD, TBI, and moral injury treatment engagement is associated with reduced violence at home
- A model for information sharing between civilian domestic violence systems and VA and Vet Center services

WHY PURPLE CACTUS

Purple Cactus exists to unite the criminal and social justice systems by directing philanthropic resources toward evidence-based programs that keep survivors safe, hold abusers accountable, and build stronger communities. Every dollar given will be traceable to a real outcome: each campaign will publish its goal and funds raised, granted, and available, and every grantee will report outcomes through our portal.

FUNDING REQUEST **\$1.6M – \$2.4M** · 30 months

Bottom-up estimate: staff and fringe, 3–5 sites, 250–400 households, incentives, IRB, VA/DoD data-use agreements, secure record linkage, family interviews, dissemination, 15% indirect.

Upper range adds an active-duty installation partnership and a National Guard or Reserve cohort.

Need help now? National DV Hotline: 800.799.7233 or text START to 88788. Veterans Crisis Line: dial 988, press 1.