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Letters

Conclusions from Navy survey?

As described in "Navy Recruits Report Abusive Legacy" (SN: 8/23/97, p. 116), the research methods do not support the commission's findings. The two surveys indeed indicate a high incidence of abuse, but there was no control group. The comparison with rates among other groups does not address the lack of uniformity of experimental methods between studies.

It is entirely possible, for example, that the survey designs of the Navy studies created an atmosphere that was more conducive to admitting embarrassing facts. It is also possible that the perceived threshold of what constitutes abusive behavior varied widely among studies.

There are just too many confounding factors to draw conclusions from an uncontrolled study.

Vernon Chi
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Given the existing research on the correlation between substance abuse and violence, it should not surprise Navy researchers that two-thirds of the female and three-quarters of the male recruits report problems with alcohol abuse. According to "Gender difference in drug addiction treatment: Implications for social work intervention with substance abusing women" (SOCIAL WORK, January 1995), a history of sexual and physical abuse is prevalent in close to 75 percent of women in treatment for chemical dependency. Other research puts the figure even higher.

The SOCIAL WORK article also notes that women who may have repressed memories of their assaults experience a significant increase in chemical use when memories and flashbacks emerge. This may have occurred after women in the Navy were exposed to the mandatory education program on sexual harassment.

Given that early sexual abuse can lead to further victimization, I was not surprised by the Navy's findings. The real question for the Navy

is how to provide appropriate education, intervention, and treatment to their enlistees.

Rosalie Migas
Madison, Wis.

As a matter of policy, we should worry about one aspect of the past histories of our military recruits: Studies show that the people who have preexisting problems—including histories of sexual abuse—are the very people who are most prone to developing service-related post-traumatic stress disorder.

Are we somehow selecting our most vulnerable citizens to be exposed to illness-inducing situations?

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