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## **USU, Federal Mental Health Experts Earn Prestigious Military Family Research Institute Award**

**Bethesda, Md.** – In recognition of their outstanding research that has brought visibility to issues impacting the Armed Forces and their families, several behavioral health professionals from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) were the recipients of the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University (MFRI)'s 2022 Barbara Thompson Excellence in Research on Military and Veteran Families Award. The award is based on their scientific publication, "The role of posttraumatic stress symptoms and negative affect in predicting substantiated intimate partner violence incidents among military personnel," published in the journal *Military Behavioral Health* in August 2021.

Dr. Stephen Cozza, a psychiatrist in USU's Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS) Dr. Eddie McCarroll, a CSTS scientist and social worker, and Dr. David Riggs, chair of USU's Department of Psychology, were among the participating scientists in a multi-institutional research project led by Dr. Valerie Stander at the Naval Research Center in San Diego, who received the award.

The researchers looked at symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among active-duty service members, seeking to determine whether any particular symptoms might be associated with an increased risk for intimate partner violence. They studied the extent to which PTSD symptoms – particularly hyperarousal and persistent negative emotions, like fear, anger, or shame – might be unique risk factors, compared to symptoms associated with other comorbid conditions (e.g. depression, anxiety, insomnia, alcohol dependence, or binge drinking). Ultimately, they found that general symptoms of negative affect (e.g. anger/irritability and sleep disruption), which are common in PTSD, and comorbid alcohol dependence, were the strongest predictors of intimate partner violence.

The publication was selected for the prestigious award through a rigorous and highly selective process, through which applications and nominations are not accepted. According to the institute, a large panel of accomplished scholars examines every relevant research article published during the eligible year. The final decision is made after multiple rounds of review involving standardized quantitative assessments. About 500 articles were considered.

The MFRI established the Barbara Thompson Award in 2015, in partnership with Military REACH at Auburn University, to bring visibility to issues of military and veteran families, and to outstanding new research. The award aims to increase the impact of rigorous research on programs, policies, and practices that impact military members and their families, while strengthening connections between researchers and practitioners interested in military and veteran families.

"Uniformed Services University faculty members are highly sought out, not only for their expertise, but also for their willingness to contribute to mission-relevant team efforts. It is not surprising that members

of different specialties and, indeed, from different departments at USU, were able to make significant contributions to this effort,” said Dr. David Benedek, chair of USU’s Department of Psychiatry and associate director of USU’s CSTS.

The award recipients presented their research in detail and discussed the implications for future research during a virtual award ceremony on Dec. 9.

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**About the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences:** The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, founded by an act of Congress in 1972, is the nation’s federal health sciences university and the academic heart of the Military Health System. USU students are primarily active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who receive specialized education in tropical and infectious diseases, TBI and PTSD, disaster response and humanitarian assistance, global health, and acute trauma care. USU also has graduate programs in oral biology, biomedical sciences and public health committed to excellence in research. The University’s research program covers a wide range of areas important to both the military and public health. For more information about USU and its programs, visit [www.usuhs.edu](http://www.usuhs.edu).