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Depictions of United States Military Domestic Violence Found on the Internet

Erica Ann Pearson
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Erica Ann Pearson

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Depictions of United States Military Domestic Violence Found on the Internet

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MA, Walden University, 2021

MA, University of Oklahoma, 2018

BS, Hawaii Pacific University, 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

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Abstract

Military domestic violence (MDV) is an issue in the United States. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore how the mainstream media and published government content depicts MDV on the internet, and whether those narratives/video transcripts contained any agenda to generate influence. Ragas' agenda-setting theory was used as a framework for this study. Agenda-setting is a communication-specific phenomenon directed to influence individuals or organizations, based on what public relations practitioners present to the public. There are two research questions in this study. The first is: How do mainstream media narratives, and government documents depict survivors and support related to U.S. MDV? The second is: Does journalistic language or other jargon in documents/video transcripts involving U.S. MDV suggest any agenda? A group of 193 samples of extant data from online media and government sources were collected, uploaded to NVivo, and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings indicated that systemic, institutional, and cultural barriers to U.S. MDV victim-survivor support were present. In addition, media presenters and U.S. government representatives conveyed multiple conflicting agendas, including partisan marginalization of MDV victim-survivors, and agendas focused on individual influence and the need for organization-wide change in education, action, and awareness of MDV. This study contributes to social change and enhancing the social determinants of health at the individual, community, organizational, and societal levels by further defining the context within which U.S. MDV victim-survivors continue to live.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear daughter, Athena. May you always shoot for the moon, baby girl. Mama loves you. To my parents, my dad Eric, Norma, and Cindy. You have made me realize that paternal love is unconditional and does not have to be biological. To Nicole, Cody, and Merry, thank you for existing. You are some of the most incredible human beings the rest of the world will never have the fortunate opportunity to know. To John, thank you for our daughter, your support, love, and all that you have done for our little family.

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Trigger Warning. This dissertation contains descriptions and elements related to various forms of domestic violence, including psychological harassment, physical aggression, homicide, rape, and other sexual abuses. If you or a child are in immediate danger or you are thinking about hurting yourself, a child, or anyone else, immediately call 911 (if located within the United States of America). If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, need help because of prior abuse, or have questions, please get in touch with the National Domestic Violence Hotline for FREE services. The Hotline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days (all year). These services are 100% CONFIDENTIAL, and helping professionals can be reached in any way below:

Text START to 88788

Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Chat Online at [TheHotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Researchers have increased their efforts to bring human services issues related to domestic violence (DV) to the forefront of public awareness, knowledge, and applied understanding. Specifically, Basilio et al. (2021) evaluated 50 years of research on the topic. They found that 32,298 authors have produced 19,495 research-based documents on the general subject in 111 countries (Basilio et al., 2021). Of those scholarly publications, the researchers discovered that the United States of America led all other countries in publishing 48.14% of those journal articles, followed by the United Kingdom with 7.57% (Basilio et al., 2021). As a U.S.-based researcher without much knowledge about the topic, I was prompted to search the literature because a Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) news media outlet published a U.S. military-affiliated DV story online in 2021 (O'Donnell et al., 2021). In briefly looking into the issue further, I found that researchers like Stander et al. (2021) confirmed that the U.S. military environment created circumstances that have allowed instances of military domestic violence (MDV), and matters related to victim-survivor support to persist. Preliminarily, in alignment with peer-reviewed journal articles, media representatives outlined that institutional barriers and the military culture have allowed instances of DV to continue without consideration for survivor support (Brickell & Cuomo, 2020; Graaff, 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2021). After further review, a significant body of literature existed on DV as an overarching public health crisis; however, MDV had not been as widely researched.

With the aforementioned media-recognized social problem as a starting point, scholarly resources were used to locate research-based literature on MDV. Since my initial interest involved what I discovered was a series of online newscasts from 2021, I intended to locate current research exploring how mainstream media or other published documents from government sources, available within the public domain, depicted MDV victimization through other official broadcasts, any news bulletins, videos, or online posts accessible to the public, if at all (CBS Evening News, 2021a; CBS Evening News, 2021b; CBS Evening News, 2021c; CBS Evening News, 2021d; CBS Mornings, 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2021). Based on preliminary searches, I determined that exploring the media/government publications angle with a focus on victim-survivor support and instances of enduring MDV in the U.S. was a viable research angle for several reasons.

For one, researchers like McCombs (1972) studied the effects of public communication and found that public relations practitioners such as reporters or journalists influenced what individuals in society thought about. McCombs also confirmed that mass media entities like the Associated Press decided what got placed at the forefront of public discussion and interest. In a seminal study, McCombs and Shaw (1972) explained that when certain outlets chose the news and overtly reported on specific issues in their publications over other social issues, newsagents played a significant role in shaping public reality. More recently, Neuman et al. (2014) illustrated that the dynamics of public attention were complicated. However, their research using what they found to be a representative sample of *big data* found on the internet confirmed that traditional news media outlets (as opposed to social media or other online

publications) did set an agenda (Neuman et al., 2014). As a direct result of appraising McCombs and Shaw (1972) and Neuman et al. (2014) research findings, my initial research questions related to whether the media or the government, using a vast public platform such as the internet, were or were not providing awareness for what some researchers and media outlets claimed was an underresearched and hidden social problem of ongoing MDV in the U.S. (CBS Evening News, 2021a; O'Donnell et al., 2021; Sparrow et al., 2020).

Concerning MDV, researchers like Steele (2019) have addressed various support problems given the unique circumstances military service members work with and face at home. That is, every aspect of a military member's life is impacted or controlled by the U.S. government (also referred to as the Department of Defense [DoD]) until their contract ends, and individuals cannot opt out of their service obligation (Hogue & Miller, 2020). In a study addressing military member burnout, Archer and Alagaraja (2021) confirmed that an individual cannot abruptly quit the armed forces once under a military contract. Among other situations like training out of state, frequent or out-of-the-norm/short/no-notice personnel displacements known as deployments or "TDY" (temporary duty) also caused unique problems for what research showed is a stressed family dynamic (Adhikari, 2020).

As a result of work-related requirements within this specialized system that spilled over into home life, military-related DV has impacted individuals within this type of family construct differently (Wexler, 2020). Researchers have linked military-specific DV trauma to substantial health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

suicide, emotional or social problems, and other health concerns like depression or sexual dysfunction (Andresen et al., 2019; Becker & Bachman, 2020; Foster et al., 2020). Moreover, several researchers found that different levels of the military institution have ignored victim reports or have amplified the impact of MDV through phenomena known as betrayal trauma or institutional betrayal (Gómez & Freyd, 2019; Monteith et al., 2021; Warner & Armstrong, 2020). Ultimately, researchers like Gómez and Freyd (2019), Monteith et al. (2021), and Warner and Armstrong (2020) found that a myriad of specific survivor support problems existed surrounding the baseline problem of DV persisting in the U.S. military.

This chapter includes all facets of a focused research problem related to the media's/government's depiction of MDV and support issues based on a derived literature gap related to ongoing DV involving the U.S. military. This chapter contains background literature, definitions, an overview of the applied theoretical framework, scope, delimitations, limitations, significance, the research purpose for exploring how news stories/government publications portray those victimized with a possible underlying agenda, and aligned research questions. The chapter then concludes with a summary and an introduction to Chapter 2.

Background

Researchers have addressed the unique circumstances that actively serving U.S. military members and ex-service personnel (commonly known as veterans) encountered that may have impacted victim-survivor support (Schramm & Becker, 2020). In 42 evaluated studies on a macro level, Kwan et al. (2020) studied 9,208 military personnel

and veterans. Kwan et al. found that, despite a recognizable increase in DV reporting, multiple studies confirmed that military members are impacted by frequent displacements for training, mission requirements, standard movement tempos, planned, short-notice, or without warning deployments/TDYs that may have perpetuated the MDV problem. Kwan et al. also illustrated that a consistent, foundational family or even a military-based support system does not exist at all or for certain periods during these displacements. Specifically, military members may be away from their home station or immediate families for up to two years or more in some instances (van der Wal, 2021). Given the considerations for how members operate within the military environment, DV can now be explored.

Regarding MDV, research showed that study participants are less inclined to participate or divulge complete specifics about DV when actively affiliated with the military (Kwan et al., 2020). Similar meta-analysis findings showed that military-affiliated settings contributed to an increase in the reluctance to report MDV as opposed to increased reporting that does occur among those who formerly served and who were located at a veteran (post-service) counterpart healthcare location (Kwan et al., 2020). In 2021, however, an independent review cited that specific subsets of DV, like sexual assault (SA), are an epidemic in the military with an underestimation that some 20,000 individuals each year within the military legal system have been unable to obtain justice for crimes committed against them (Cox, 2021). In addition to inconsistencies in reporting and unknown perpetrator accountability in these matters, researchers like

Cancio (2020) found that the military environment places individuals in a high-risk category for experiencing DV.

Different outcomes existed relative to insufficient institutional MDV support, including or leading to extreme situations like intimate partner homicide (Valente & Graber, 2021). Whether real, perceived, or implied, when comprehensive victim support is minimal or nonexistent, Andresen et al. (2019) concluded that some of the primary outcomes involving MDV survivors included PTSD, depression, and suicide.

Additionally, a phenomenon known as *institutional betrayal* may also occur (Andreson et al., 2019). Monteith et al. (2022) defined institutional betrayal as actual harm done by an institution like that of the military. The researchers explained that the relationship between an institution such as the military and the victim-survivor is somehow fragmented—mainly regarding trust and dependence. Paralleling institutional betrayal, Gómez and Freyd (2019) expanded on the fact that associated military inaction may lead to overarching *betrayal trauma* at every level of the human experience. Briefly, betrayal trauma is considered the violation of innate trust that breaks the bonds of relationships that the spouse or partner, the military institution, a supervisor, culture, system, or community were supposed to provide (Gómez & Freyd, 2019). In their study, Gómez and Freyd outlined that 37 suicide risk factors existed for female veterans experiencing betrayal trauma. Of those, 20 risk factors overlapped in those individuals who have also experienced intimate partner violence ([IPV], a subset of DV; Gómez & Freyd, 2019). Ultimately, survivor relationships, suicide, PTSD, and a breakdown of trust between the

individual and the military institution are not the only support barriers this distinctive survivor population faces (David & Jaffe, 2021).

The barriers MDV victim-survivors have encountered that limit support are abundant but poorly understood (Sadler, 2021). Specifically, one involved automatically designated high-risk female veterans who kept weapons nearby; this action was a significant indicator of a problematic readjustment condition that studies have shown goes unnoticed as a significant public health concern (Sadler, 2021). Sadler (2021) confirmed that healthcare professionals must recognize and address safety concerns sometimes attributable to DV outcomes like carrying or keeping weapons. These gestures are often affiliated with riskier/other concerning behaviors like suicide among victim-survivor populations (Sadler, 2021). Overall, suicide is a major global health crisis (Lai et al., 2023). However, research supported that suicide is among the top 10 causes of death in the U.S. each year for the general population, and, for various reasons attributable to serving in the armed forces, suicide rates were higher within the military population (Lai et al., 2023). On a different scale, other barriers may include internal military politics like perpetrator seniority (real or perceived immunity for offenders at higher levels within the ranks), a mismatch or inconsistent blending of a civil-military response, capacity issues related to what the military system can handle, conflicts with the organization's mission, and other occurrences like the inability to adjust to, quickly change, or adapt to evolving public health matters like DV (Gibson-Fall, 2021).

Regardless, agencies, governance, interventions, and individuals within the armed forces system exist to support MDV victim-survivors (Turner et al., 2020). Htun and

Jensenius (2020) explained through their research that one intervention included implementing bystander training for the military and employed members of the Veterans Affairs (VA) Administration (the healthcare agency supporting the inactive/retired/released/specific dependent portion of the military community). The program intended to change a familiar military mantra from "see something, say something" to a "see something, do something" intervention initiative (Htun & Jensenius, 2020). The initiative may have already led to decreased SAs; however, it is unknown whether or not this training is applicable within the private homes of military members, where DV commonly occurs (Htun & Jensenius, 2020). It is important to note that spouses of military members, other intimate partners of servicemembers, and service-attached family members do not receive this training and may not have access to resources typically located on military installations (Relyea et al., 2020). Bystander intervention training is one example of how U.S. military leaders have taken preventative measures to combat harassment and public types of abuse that may present in specific but more overt situations (Hodges et al., 2022).

Equivalent prevention initiatives, training, and response support are different within each military branch and for individuals who formerly served or are considered military dependents (spouses and children; Moore et al., 2021). For example, the United States Department of the Air Force has a program called SAPR (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response) available on Air Force bases (Ellis & Brown, 2020). In contrast, the United States Department of the Army has a program known as SHARP (Sexual Harassment/Sexual Assault Response & Prevention) on Army bases (Skopp,

2020). Given that service deviations exist, initiatives may vary by locality and cannot be evaluated entirely for effectiveness within the DoD or VA (Georgia Salivar et al., 2020). According to Georgia Salivar et al., the inability to properly evaluate these programs is a direct result of an MDV victim-survivor's adopted behaviors. As a distinct, vulnerable population, individuals are less likely to report MDV crimes—mainly while actively serving in or presently affiliated with the armed forces (Guttieri, 2021; Richard & Milloy, 2020). In short, the above researchers provided a practical foundation for further research applicable to this study.

Problem Statement

Researchers found that the DV incident rate for individuals associated with the military is double that or higher than in the civilian realm (Becker & Bachman, 2020). Moreso, according to a researcher who evaluated both civil and military populations simultaneously, victims and perpetrators alike are more accepting of instances of DV as a direct result of varying degrees of gender-based stereotypes that exist in certain societal spheres like that of the military (Kalinina, 2022). Furthermore, it is still unclear what may or may not constitute DV as a crime committed within the boundaries of the military family/partner dynamic (Kalinina, 2022). For instance, as is defined in the definitions section of this study, SA is considered a subset of DV; however, some military proponents treat SA and DV as entirely separate forms of abuse (Bonnes & Palmer, 2020). It is important to note that SA and DV are not mutually exclusive (Muldoon et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in a literature review of 56 studies, Iovine-Wong et al. (2019) discovered that a lack of victim support associated with MDV led to increased

socio-demographic and mental health risks. Finally, Sparrow et al. (2020) found even more limited support for actively serving military survivors of DV compared to post-service veterans.

Moreover, Iverson et al. (2020) confirmed that inadequate survivor support directly resulted from institutional barriers related to systemic limitations and military culture. Researchers substantiated that military processes, investigators, mandatory reporters, or other personnel were not adequately responding to requests for MDV victim-survivor help at various stages of incident awareness (Warner & Armstrong, 2020). For instance, Kwan et al. (2020) highlighted specific studies where researchers illustrated that the uncommon circumstances partners, spouses, service members, and veterans encounter because of military life hinder victim assistance or organization action, awareness, and perpetrator accountability in these matters. Overall, prior research confirmed that a baseline problem existed with supporting survivors, and MDV in the U.S. is an ongoing social problem at the very least.

As such, a research-based consideration of victim portrayal and the potential lack of awareness of MDV in the media and other publicly accessible government avenues was deemed necessary for this study (Marsh & Melville, 2019). For instance, within the context of crime and the media, Marsh and Melville (2019) explained that understanding the portrayal and resulting perceptions of victims thrust into the public spotlight via media reporting was paramount to understanding the roots of what appeared to be a larger issue. As one of their findings, Marsh and Melville concluded that media depictions sought to amplify social disparities or other inequalities of victims. Bouchard et al.

(2020) explained that highlighting these social gaps evoked sympathy for the victim; however, they noted that the media overreported some instances of crime and ignored other characteristics or points related to victimization (i.e., marginalized victims are underrepresented in media narratives). In turn, MDV victim-survivors are a vulnerable population and could also be experiencing relegation in the context of media reporting or government publicity.

At this juncture of conducting foundational research for this study, there were a lot of unknowns; hence, I determined that deep-seated matters may be explorable through the coding of published media narratives/broadcasts or government documents/videos. Koretskaya's (2021) research supported former research outlined herein where Koretskaya explained the importance of independent newsagents providing the most accurate public depictions of victims because that same social body of people, the viewers/readers of news reports, are personally impacted by news reporting. The general audience member is influenced informationally but more so by corresponding instances of DV in their own homes where they internalize public narratives that do impact one's identity (Koretskaya, 2021). Koretskaya's research also showed that it is not just the victim who is marginalized, but the criminal acts themselves, along with the perpetrators. Koretskaya also concluded that when this agenda-based marginalization occurred, spillover appeared in the external realms of politics, social action, and other societal systems.

Because my goal for this study was to explore how MDV victim-survivors are portrayed by the mainstream media/government and whether an agenda has impacted

victim support (like underlying politics or implications for social reform), comparative studies were explored. Comparing MDV with the widely researched polarization of the U.S. population, like the importance of placing value on the military's reputation, Dickerson and Hodler's (2020) study surveying different media avenues concluded that patriotism, the military, and a politically correct culture are perceptually important to individuals living in the U.S. Hence, the media agenda in Dickerson and Hodler's (2020) study was that the media's underlying purpose was to evoke favor for the military, the country, and a united culture in this instance.

According to Choi et al. (2020), human rights are at the core of U.S. Foreign Policy, and the mainstream media has been the catalytic agent in that equation whereby the U.S. government has been motivated by news reports to participate in several international interventions. In that instance, a recognizable media agenda related to foreign policy existed. The social problem in this case is a lack of awareness; however, multiple researchers and at least one news media outlet had outlined how the military construct may have failed a vulnerable population needing explicit care, appropriate response, and understanding because of cultural or other institutional barriers due to a lack of public portrayal overall (Bonnes & Palmer, 2020; O'Donnell et al., 2021).

Although the aforementioned research regarding MDV and the media illuminated important findings, I found no research that examined U.S. news articles or other publicly available government documents involving the portrayal of victim-survivors/support and that investigated the underlying problem of persistent DV within the U.S. military. Further research was warranted that could examine accessible media stories/government

publications in an effort to address the documented problem of U.S. MDV survivor support and a lack of attention in the public realm (see Andresen et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative generic design study was to explore mainstream media and accessible government content related to the depiction of U.S. MDV victimization to discover how stories portrayed survivor support and whether those documents, at minimum, provided awareness or some other agenda. I specifically examined if the stories could be helping survivors in an actionable way, hindering or allowing the media/government to have ulterior motives concerning this specific topic or the military organization itself. A thematic content-based approach was appropriate because it was essential to explore a sample goal of 100 publicly accessible press accounts/government documents found on the internet to determine how the media/DoD portrayed support surrounding MDV victimization, if at all (see Gilardi et al., 2022). That is, textual archival data (coded words and phrases) derived from source documents created a research-based understanding of media/government-driven popular culture beliefs, perceptions, experiences, attitudes, and potential external actor impacts related to both social and research problems surrounding ongoing MDV in the U.S. (see Wang et al., 2021). I evaluated the use of journalistic or other language to uncover themes, patterns, code groups, and connotations derived from published communications about MDV victimization to ascertain whether narratives might specifically have sensationalized, supported, generated action, distorted perceptions, marginalized, helped, hindered, or possibly even exploited survivors.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Since 1999, excluding anything uploaded to social media sites, how do mainstream media narratives or government documents like news articles or other reputable news agency broadcasts found on the internet depict survivors and support related to United States military-affiliated domestic violence?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How does the use of journalistic language or other jargon derived from internet-based mainstream media narratives or government documents involving United States military domestic violence depict a pattern of communication that suggests an agenda or lack thereof?

Theoretical Framework

The theory that I used to ground this study was agenda-setting theory. According to Ragas (2013), agenda-setting theory is a communications-specific theory that researchers have shown influences individuals or organizations based on several factors. Hügel et al. (1989) first applied this principle to how the media shapes election campaign outcomes. Agenda-setting theory in today's social climate is generic, a communications-specific theory that researchers show influences individuals or organizations based on what entities like the media dictate (Julien, 2020). Julien (2020) also explained that while an entity like the media creates a seemingly informational perspective, the public ignores other more prominent issues. Mohn (2020) asserted that an awareness of agenda-setting theory is paramount because the topics propelled to the forefront of public awareness by various government agencies or mainstream media

mechanisms like news articles, newspapers, magazines, or syndicated broadcasts influenced public opinion and policy.

Using this theory to explain behavioral outcomes, Mercadal (2021) argued that some agencies sanctioned and sensationalized certain crimes while disregarding others, leading to fear and public prejudice against certain types of individuals or entities like the U.S. government. Alternatively, Asogwa et al.'s (2020) research outlined that a cornerstone of this theory is that an agenda ignited public debate or action and influenced how/when the government prioritized, created, or implemented specific policies over others. Under an agenda-setting theory lens, I explored internet-based media stories/publicly available government documents containing journalistic or other military jargon-based language that may contain agenda-driven undertones, like those directed at swaying public opinion, policy, or that may hinder awareness altogether. Several researchers confirmed that the underpinnings of this theory applied to many topics, including that of MDV (Kroon & van der Meer, 2021; Naser, 2020). Overall, I used agenda-setting theory to analyze media/government narratives as in-depth as possible to explore any depiction of MDV victimization and, if present, any identifiable agenda.

Nature of the Study

Using extant data from data sources found on the internet, the logical connections between a relevant theoretical framework and the nature of this study involved the generic qualitative inquiry exploration of media stories/government documents or affiliated video/broadcast transcripts related to U.S. MDV survivor support using an agenda-setting theory lens. Specifically, journalistic language or military jargon may or

may not construe perceptions related to support measures or promote an agenda surrounding those victimized within the military sector of the U.S. government. Using agenda-setting theory, the thematic analysis of previously published data within these communications found on the internet explored MDV depictions and identified how those stories communicated survivor support or the overarching issue at all, with or without an identifiable agenda.

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design involved a generic qualitative inquiry approach to coding media stories/government documents or associated video/broadcast transcripts related to MDV using thematic content analysis. A generic qualitative inquiry design was the best approach for this study for several reasons. Namely, generic qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate, broad design as study parameters in the research questions did not align with other qualitative designs such as narrative inquiry, grounded theory, or ethnography (Kahlke, 2014). This approach is supported by Head's (2020) research, in that, through the application of generic qualitative inquiry, researchers derive meaning from written language whereby they build an analysis around those constructive interpretations. In the data collection phase for this study, secondary data includes codes (words and phrases) found in text from media articles/government documents containing deliberate language related to MDV, meeting predetermined criteria, and evaluated using theme-based content analysis (Manimozhi & Srinivasan, 2018). As part of predetermined inclusion criteria, three reliability websites ("sites") initially qualified news agencies as reputable and as verified mainstream media prior to deriving any secondary text-based data from

their published stories or broadcast/video transcripts (Mazzeo & Rapisarda, 2022). Specifically, thematic content analysis was utilized to evaluate an initial goal of 100 purposefully sampled and coded news articles/documents given the unique use of language journalists/the government uses and any framed syntax (Kaefer et al., 2015; Manimozhi & Srinivasan, 2018). Microsoft Excel (“Excel”) was the chosen tool for all archive-derived data entry, organization, and analysis results retrieved and then input into a qualitative data software analysis program called NVivo. In all, to address the research questions in this qualitative approach, research supported that both agenda-setting theory and a generic qualitative inquiry design were appropriate for this study (Head, 2020; Julien, 2020).

Definitions

Domestic Violence:

A universal definition of DV does not currently exist; however, researchers and several prominent change agents have provided multidimensional and research-based classifications of what constitutes this specific type of familial/partner abuse (Wilson et al., 2021). Some researchers explained that the lack of consistency with the very definition of DV causes issues within the military, other systems, and judicial processes (Postmus et al., 2020). In some situations, DV perpetration may include social seclusion or isolation, economic or financial abuse, acts of intimidation (with or without a weapon), physical assault, sexual violence, emotional abuse, mental neglect, psychological manipulation, any combination thereof, or any other act of harassment or controlling behavior technology-based on in-person (Henry, 2020; Postmus et al., 2020). For this

study specifically, it was important to understand what DV is or could be and other terms utilized throughout the research narrative.

DV as a term and occurrence captures various types of abuse occurring most often by a family-based perpetrator (Park et al., 2021). More so, this global public health matter can have specific subsets and subdivision terminology is used interchangeably like IPV occurring between spouses or other partners like a boyfriend, girlfriend, or significant other; however, varying between cultures, demographic populations, and may be dependent on the nature of the incidents, frequency, or severity of those occurrences (Adhikari, 2020). Another common subset of DV is SA, which may occur when an intimate partner or other family member initiates or performs an unwelcome sexual act on an individual (Henry, 2020). It is important to note that DV, SA, or IPV instances are not mutually exclusive; hence, they were considered subdivisions or extensions of MDV for this study and as they have been for other studies (Agüero et al., 2022).

Femicide:

According to Garcia-Vergara et al. (2022), femicide is an international issue and is the motivated act of murder targeting the female gender only (women and girls). The researchers explained in their study that the overarching term has deep discriminatory roots in many cultures and social groups; however, intimate partner femicide specifically involved individuals killed by a previous or current significant other and was grounded in discriminatory/overtly gender-based motives Garcia-Vergara et al. (2022). Such acts and associated cultural norms were present in the literature on the military population (Clary et al., 2023).

Support:

The word "support" throughout this narrative is all-encompassing and intended to mean any service, entity, program, element, group, or individual in place within any given system or mechanism that is directly or indirectly in a helping position or dedicated to helping DV victim-survivors (Liukka et al., 2020). Some examples of victim-survivor “supports” include military or civilian law enforcement, judge advocates (JAs) or legal members, the commander or a supervisor, the Air Force SAPR Program, a victim advocate, peers, victimology practice, a training initiative, healthcare professionals, or the like.

Mainstream Media:

This study's derived [archival] data is not from any social media platform. Following the research outlined herein, affiliated articles or broadcasts (using transcripts) posted by mainstream media outlets are data sources. As such, text-based data for this study is affiliated with designated and more reputable news agencies dedicated to delivering the news via broadcasts or other official avenues on the internet outside of the social media realm. Originally, mainstream media only included print newspapers; however, that definition has been expanded (Asogwa et al., 2020). According to Cooper and Abbas (2019), due to the accessibility of the internet, the definition of journalists and what is considered news media have changed substantially. Specifically, Cooper and Abbas confirmed that mainstream media was comprised mainly of traditional news outlets delivering information in particular ways during designated cable news slots or via hard-copy print newspapers; however, those time-lagging mediums are obsolete given

that an instant information-sharing environment comprised of social media platforms and internet search engines exist. That is why Cooper and Abbas (2019) and researchers like Allen et al. (2019) focused their studies on the importance of journalistic integrity and ethics—given the uptick in reporting within the online realm. Allen et al. (2019) loosely defined mainstream media as delivered content from providers not in the business of what has come to be known as "fake news," and they found that these alternate narrative accounts differed from other agencies claiming to be more reputable sources like tabloid press or social media agents that have not been responsible in safeguarding the integrity of fact-based communications. Villar and Marsh (2020) explained that media framing through more legitimate media sources is productive communication, appropriately alerted the public, and involved certain degrees of relevance and accuracy in stories. Alternatively, Villar and Marsh (2020) also confirmed that there were no formal protections in place regarding news-based information posted on social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, Reddit, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp; hence, why three different reliability sites were utilized in this study to determine which news agencies could be classified as mainstream media on the internet.

Military:

The term military generically refers to those individuals or groups falling under the purview of the U.S. DoD. The U.S. military currently includes more than 2.91 billion service members or civilians in over 160 countries (United States Department of Defense, n.d.). Some other groups designated generically as military for this study include but are not limited to healthcare systems like Tricare (the uniformed services health care

program) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), an overarching legal system that creates and follows its own judicial mandates under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and applicable to all members, and other specific programs like those attached to exact military branches (e.g., the Army's SHARP or the Air Force's SAPR Program). Within this system, there are also those individuals who are no longer under military service contacts and who are now considered a “veteran” of the armed forces. It is important to note that some veterans are not eligible for specific program assistance—health-based, recreational, or others if they are not considered retirees, do not have the required degree of military service-connected disability, or are unqualified due to a “less than honorable”/“dishonorable” military service termination status on their report of separation (known as a DD Form 214; McClean, 2021).

Survivor:

The term "survivor" is used to classify those individuals who have experienced DV and have survived such instances in a more positive and empowering way (Jungersen et al., 2019). As will be outlined in Chapter 2, although victim-survivors have lived through abuse, lingering adverse effects or resulting trauma leading to secondary health or personal problems persist (Abdi et al., 2021). As such, victim-survivor is utilized throughout this study to refer to those impacted by MDV and all those who have been victimized, in any way, by their family member or partner abusers and lived through one or any number of incidents defined as DV or defined under an affiliated term (like SA, IPV, or military sexual trauma [MST]).

Assumptions

Certain assumptions exist in the qualitative paradigm and were relevant given the specifics of this study. Namely, generic qualitative inquiry researchers work under the assumption that no other specific paradigms within the overarching qualitative methodology encompass study parameters (Jahja, 2021). As it also related to this study, one of the major challenges with conducting research of a personal nature was an increased potential for personal impact; however, some researchers like Amann and Sleight (2021) confirmed that vulnerable group members should be involved in research endeavors. As such, in my instance, a deliberate attempt to apply what is known as reflexivity in qualitative research was required (Erhard et al., 2021). Namely, as a researcher personally connected to the overall topic of DV, it was vital to situate myself within the context of this approach, fully disclose any potential limitations related to bias, and address the extent to which I could be exposed to any first-hand accounts of abuse found in news articles, government documents, videos, or broadcasts. Ravitch and Carl (2021) recommended that researchers create an "identity and positionality" memorandum to mitigate any conflict-of-interest impact or other influences in these situations. These weekly "letters-to-self" were a chance to identify any assumptions and feelings about my personal and direct relationship with the research. In conjunction with a comprehensive literature review, and in an attempt to curb bias, full disclosure, exploring thoughts, feelings, and personal predispositions relative to the research was vital in sustaining and producing a viable study endeavor (Coleman & Ed, 2022).

Additionally, it was essential to recognize that I was not infallible as a new human services researcher. Exploring any predispositions with seasoned researchers like my chair, methods mentor, peer mentors, and therapist was important. All biases, feelings, thoughts, and observations were journaled (memoing) and continually addressed (Birks et al., 2008). Specifically, I was not searching for an agenda in any news stories, government documents, or associated transcripts I intended to locate on the internet and code using NVivo. Namely, it is common for some researchers to claim that something like agenda-setting is occurring and then look for said agenda in the data (Benoliel, B., personal communication, June 14, 2023). As such, this may also be a limitation of this study; however, it was not my intention to impose an agenda on any findings as opposed to deriving one naturally from what the narrative secondary data, in the form of already published words and phrases located on the internet, illustrated.

A final assumption for this study was that reporters and other newsagents working for even the most perceptually credible news agencies all abided by the same journalistic values, which, some of those ideals included integrity, accuracy, impartiality, and credibility (Duffy & Knight, 2020). At present, a uniform and universally adopted standard of journalism code of ethics does not exist. According to Humam and Susanto (2022), however, there is a standard code known as the "6 Canons of Journalism," which outlines specific media responsibility in safeguarding public welfare, avoiding private interests, trustworthiness like headlines realistically matching article content, neutrality, moral purpose, targeting topics/individuals, and other charges. Alternatively, it is common practice that newsagents are not required to publicly state, as a disclaimer or

otherwise, that they followed any ethical guidelines when conducting their investigations or reporting the news.

Scope and Delimitations

This section describes specific aspects of the research problem addressed in this study and focuses on theory, other concepts, population specifics, and important considerations for carrying out a qualitative research approach like transferability (generalizability/external validity; Liu et al., 2019). Again, the research problem addressed throughout this study is related to an identified research gap involving how MDV survivors are portrayed and any support these individuals may or may not be getting from the media or the U.S. government. Using internet-based media content/government publications or affiliated video/broadcast transcripts reporting on DV in the military, the research problem was explored with an additional consideration that media/government agents may be promoting an underlying agenda. Independently, this approach contained two fundamental aspects. For one, this study involved one theory, agenda-setting theory, as opposed to other mass communications theories that often relate to politics, misinformation, or other researched mass communications concepts like media manipulation, media tactics, or fake news (Ferrara et al., 2020).

Deliberately so, this study did not include a conceptual framework. Equally important to using only one theory or omitting certain topic-related concepts, this study does not include commonly DV-affiliated models like the *cycle of abuse* or the *continuum of violence* along with not implementing certain practices like interviewing victims for personal reasons (Benjamin & Sherna, 2021). Not utilizing an accepted DV

model or participating in common qualitative practices like interviewing survivors as a victim-survivor researcher myself are other limitations in this study.

Finally, for this study and qualitative approaches in general, an important question was whether this specific research endeavor could be replicated or mirrored to a certain extent by applying processes herein to the same or other sensitive topics or populations (Baumgart et al., 2021)? As such, several safeguards were applied throughout to ensure the process is replicable to achieve the required analytic generalization and a maximum amount of reader-perceived trustworthiness. Both must exist in this study, as generalization and trustworthiness are commonplace in credible qualitative research outcomes (Maxwell, 2021). Some offsets of foundational elements included in this study relate to researcher impartiality and the application of reflexivity measures like the use of peer reviewers, personal therapy sessions, purposeful sampling, an attempt to aim for unbiased coding in using NVivo software over more intimate manual/hand coding, and finally, media source inclusion criteria inclusive of three separate reliability sites (initially vetting and externally substantiating the credibility of news agencies). Chapter 2 further outlines that study boundaries exclude other mass media theories and concepts, and ultimately, transferability is possible based on a combined application of the aforementioned process safeguards.

Limitations

The main limitations of this study relate to using an overall generic qualitative inquiry design, personal restrictions related to DV, and an apprentice-level application of thematic content analysis. First and foremost, Lewis (2019) explained that novice

researchers experience difficulties analyzing narrative data and potentially need substantial help. However, Lewis clarified that difficulty with the data is a direct result of published researcher preferences. Since a debate exists over which researcher (novice or otherwise) application is most appropriate for this exact methodological approach, any real or perceived difficulties may be subjective (Lewis, 2019). Openly stated, I am a novice researcher analyzing extant narrative data derived from news articles/government documents or videos uploaded to the internet, located within an infinitely vast and intricate public domain and only accessible if search engine algorithms respond appropriately to researcher-created search parameters (Bradshaw, 2019). The internet was a complicated environment to mine data—even data previously published on the World Wide Web (WWW; commonly called the “web”). Namely, Bradshaw's (2019) research supported the idea that particular search engine strategies leave users with disinformation or propaganda results. Hence, this study had four different search engine platforms and an additional reliability measure using a scholarly database to safeguard news article search results containing archival data. With consideration for research findings related to poor result outcomes of studied search engines, fine-tuning keyword/chain searches that produced the best "batch" of news article/government publication results (up to the 100-useable source document goal) using four popular search engines as opposed to one was a prerequisite for successfully applying generic inquiry and subsequent thematic content analysis processes (Paul, 2021). Paul's (2021) article explained that text-mining using keywords in search engines should not only include Boolean operators (connecting words like “and,” “or,” and “not” in keyword chains), they should also include search

terms using common language as text processing technologies easily identify more naturalized text chains and keywords over concepts. As a result, Bradshaw's (2019) and Paul's (2021) research and more favorable outcome-based search techniques were especially valuable for this study in order to address limitations related to researcher inexperience, using a generic qualitative approach, and applying thematic content analysis.

In alignment with a more generic approach to qualitative inquiry, Kahlke (2014) found several benefits and pitfalls surrounding my intended method and overt design that are not associated with other more specific qualitative frameworks like narrative inquiry or grounded theory. In the positive realm, Kahlke's (2014) research supported that a generic qualitative design was the best choice for my study as my research did not perfectly align with other more defined qualitative approaches and allowed me, as the researcher, to construct my study within the boundaries of a more fluid research framework. As a result of study parameters needing to be more all-encompassing, scholarly journals containing similar studies with researchers employing generic qualitative inquiry and theme-based content analysis approaches for their research were cited and referenced often. Doing so was essential as I was without more explicit qualitative design approach parameters that contained more specific guidance on employing more rigidly defined and framework-based tactics under other qualitative methodology subsets (like those found in narrative inquiry, phenomenology, case studies, ethnography, or even grounded theory qualitative approaches; Percy et al., 2015). As a novice researcher, it would have been challenging to create processes independent of any

set precedent, guiding references, or another scholarly blueprint (Clarke, 2021).

Specifically, other qualitative approaches included more focused design questions, finite disciplinary roots, unique terminology, analysis plan guidelines, and sampling guidance (Kahlke, 2014). Overall, despite a certain amount of researcher freedoms associated with employing a generic qualitative inquiry approach to a research study, in designing the design, a literature review on generic qualitative inquiry and continual mentor consultation prior to application was beneficial for my broad-spectrum generic qualitative approach to U.S. MDV research.

One of the major challenges with conducting research of a personal nature was self-checks and an overall focus on what is known as reflexivity in qualitative research (Given, 2008). Namely, as a researcher connected to this topic, it was vital for me to situate the intended approach and my mindset within the context of the overarching method, design, and a rigid thematic content analysis plan, fully disclose any potential limitations related to bias, and address the extent to which I can expose myself to any first-hand accounts of abuse. In order to mitigate bias, I elected to utilize volunteer-based independent PhD peer reviewers. Additionally, my exposure to this topic could have been triggering, so I elected to accomplish and document debriefs with a licensed therapist through memoing. Incidentally, I also attended scheduled weekly research progress debriefs related to research with my primary committee member, methods mentor (when available), and other members of my dissertation course family (comprised of 45 current and past members).

Doing so aligned with Given's (2008) prescribed feminist-based approach to researcher reflexivity. That is, a feminist approach was most appropriate for me to situate myself in the best possible position about my specific situation because research linked to the most intimate aspects of a person's life should be considered, appropriated, and accounted for throughout the course of conducting research where individuals have a personal connection (Brickell & Cuomo, 2020). Finally, I used NVivo qualitative analysis software that allows users to journal/memo, note observations or ideas, and attach them to a project, file, or code (words and phrases) derived from purposefully sampled news articles/government documents or video transcripts. Ultimately, awareness of all defined and potential limitations like the potential for "reexposure" to trauma, no practiced/published application of analysis as a novice researcher, and the pitfalls of a generic qualitative inquiry design were all initial limitations of this study (Ennis et al., 2021). Regardless, continued self-assessments, peer support, active therapist engagement, and frequent mentor debriefings mitigated any final study impact of these limitations, like bias. When used in conjunction with one another, I ensured researcher reflexivity throughout the research endeavor.

Significance

This study was significant in furthering an understanding of MDV survivor support that some researchers confirmed has been directly impacted by institutional barriers and military culture (Lai et al., 2023). In further exploring the portrayal of military-affiliated DV survivors within the mainstream media realm using news articles/government documents or videos linked in internet searches, this study's

significance also included media agents or the DoD as stakeholders in that findings may contribute to ongoing discussions related to responsible journalism, ethics, and overall responsibility to the public. As outlined in the study analysis/results section of Chapter 4, the latter is dependent on journalistic language and other freedoms exercised by the free press or government agents promoting their agenda—if such agendas do exist.

As a means to make this study initiative more relatable and considering the recent #MeToo movement or increased spousal violence while in isolation during the global COVID-19 pandemic, any initiative promoting an appropriate narrative surrounding victimization and support initiatives may save lives (Emezue, 2020; Maji et al., 2021). Furthermore, The results of this study may assist those individuals in vital MDV support positions and within groups like the U.S. DoD who are policymakers, military family advocates, and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) professionals contribute to the more extensive public discussion on preventing DV as a broader community (inclusive of military members, their families, and intimate partners), understanding the underlying root causes of inadequate survivor support, and enhancing the overall MDV narrative in some positive way—through training, awareness, legal changes, or preventative measures. That is, all proponents should gain insight from how the media/government may have chosen to provide a specific perspective or plan outlining why this sensitive topic was communicated to the masses and in such a deliberate way using pointed journalistic/military-specific jargon and, possibly, why any overt/covert agenda existed within stories/narratives or broadcast/video transcripts. This study also provided an awareness that media agencies and government entities have decided to silence certain

aspects of the U.S. MDV narrative overall. As such, resulting knowledge will inform advocates on how they interact with the public, the media, and survivors through a more constructive dialogue regarding DV occurrences and survivor support at various levels of the military or other public constructs. Overall, researchers illustrated that victims are not getting the help they deserve; therefore, any insight into how survivors can best be supported, why MDV is still prevalent in the U.S. armed forces, and how victim-survivors now have to navigate these traumas should be a common goal amongst scholar-practitioners and human service professionals alike (Walgren, 2022).

In the realm of positive social change, this study should inform media outlets on their social responsibility and ethical compliance related to human services issues for the sake of victim-survivor public interest and given that the topic of MDV has received national news syndication from a myriad of sources (e.g., Military Times, CBS, HuffPost, USA Today, The New York Times, PBS News, Inside Edition, Al Jazeera, The Washington Post, Time Magazine, and many more). Specifically, results from this study suggested that media agents could have skewed the initial MDV support narrative to a certain degree, promoted an agenda, and the use of journalistic language may be biased in some ways. It is not known whether media stories have had a true positive or negative influence on MDV support initiatives; however still, the most ethical journalistic approach leading to advances in policy, victim-survivor protections, a productive conversation, prevention, awareness, or any other initiative, broadcasted or in writing, that generates a more favorable result related to survivor support should be the most desirable outcome for media/U.S. government agents, this study, and beyond. It was

within the scope of this study that positive social change and understanding might occur, at least nationally, in ultimate support of key stakeholders like globally displaced military members, veterans, military families, the media, the public, government agents, and other MDV-affiliated survivors like intimate partners. As prescribed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2020), this initiative may overarchingly support the specific determinant of health under the pillar of social and community context, whereby better defined and fortified relationships between all actors in a person's life impact overall health and wellbeing.

Theoretical Foundation

The theory that grounds this study is Ragas' 2013 agenda-setting theory. According to Ragas (2013), agenda-setting theory is a media communications-specific theory that researchers have shown influences individuals or organizations based on several factors—including what the media or another agency dictates. Overall, researchers explain that the underpinnings of this theory applies to many topics—including military DV (Kroon & van der Meer, 2021; Naser, 2020). The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of my study include the generic qualitative inquiry exploration of media stories/government documents or affiliated video/broadcast transcripts related to U.S. MDV survivor support using an agenda-setting theory lens. Specifically, the use of journalistic language/military jargon may or may not construe perceptions related to support measures or promote an agenda surrounding those victimized in the U.S. government's military sector. Overall, using agenda-setting theory for this study, I analyzed media reports/government documents to

explore MDV depictions in certain publicly accessible narratives or associated video transcripts, and specifically, how useable chronicles related to U.S. MDV may or may not be getting any public attention, construct the survivor support narrative, and all with or without an identifiable agenda.

In alignment with the aforementioned parameters, other theory-based research was reviewed on a more study-specific level. For instance, Kroon and van der Meer (2021) investigated the relationship between organizational and news agendas. Using agenda-setting theory, the researchers found that, at varying levels in a total of 91,288 press and news releases, the agenda of the media agency and a given organization were the same within what Kroon and van den Meer call a reciprocal relationship. However, after a review of different levels of interaction and collaboration, the researchers revealed that organizational and media agencies had dissimilar positions and, finally, that certain news agencies did not actually aid organizations in promoting the latter institution's position or agenda. Alternatively, Naser (2020) researched the applicability and difficulty of applying agenda-setting theory to the current media environment in the same 91,288 news articles. Despite previous research stating the contrary, Naser found that news media sources and organizations like the government have different agendas. They also concluded that exceptions to those findings included less formal or less neutral formats such as opinion-based articles and editorials. Additionally, these studies identified three types of mass media-focused external organizations: public, private, and non-profit (Kroon & van der Meer, 2021; Naser, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, the military organization is considered a public organization with clear private caveats (Dycus et al., 2020). This distinction is important as researchers have struggled to define the parameters of a public military organization given the nature of military operations and as some mission-specific or other information is explicitly withheld from the larger society in the name of national security (Shearer, 2020). According to Charbonneau et al. (2021), it is important to remember that the military organization is a public entity that is restrictive and guarded beyond the norm or what is otherwise researchable in what would be considered a more open or transparent civilian equivalent. With that consideration for the military at the forefront, Ragas (2013) outlined the major facets of agenda-setting theory from both an organizational and media perspective. Ragas indicated that media entities substantially influence which organizations get particular coverage, generally under the guise of some pretext or ulterior purpose promoted by the news agency. All three of these texts (Charbonneau et al., 2021; Ragas, 2013; Shearer, 2020) serve as important foundational tools, and contextually, serve as the basis for exploring the underpinnings of the theory utilized in my study as well as my research questions surrounding ongoing MDV, survivor portrayal/support, and any potential agendas that could be found in news articles or broadcasts/government documents or videos uploaded to the internet from the year 1999 on. Of note, the research is date-restricted and uses the year 1999 as that is the first known published news report date of MDV online (CBS News, 1999).

Agenda-setting theory relates to both the present study and how the research questions (victim portrayal, support, and any identifiable agenda) connect with existing

research stances. For one, in their study involving 815 online news articles or social media postings with 40 commentator remarks for each article on the topic of interpersonal violence, Saifuddin and Zanuddin (2021) found that public officials were the “agenda setter” for more traditional news formats whereas the public influenced the agenda on social media platforms. Or, what the researchers call the effect of the “elite-non-elite-elite” relative to agenda-setting (Saifuddin & Zanuddin, 2021). In terms of how victims are possibly portrayed, that means that the information platform and the individual (whether those individuals are politicians or public officials) telling the news story makes a difference. In a similar framework, Ahmad et al. (2020) discovered that the use of language when discussing instances of rape, namely, the type of speech, word choice, and how statements from the witnesses were used, mattered in terms of promoting change. Moreover, those researchers confirmed that however sensationalized the press headlines and the direct quotes they reviewed were, the way these stories were portrayed did not lead to action in terms of what Ahmad et al. called an overall social responsibility to do something for all those involved.

Providing a bigger picture for the two previous stances, Geiß (2022) explained that the media's and the public's agenda-setting effects are malleable and dependent on context or other conditions. According to Geiß' research, some topics come in waves, may be temporary, and are time-based situation-dependent events without any guaranteed reoccurrence unless a triggering event occurs. So, regardless of how victims are portrayed or the agenda, researchers like Geiß would encourage other researchers to examine the underlying conditions within which these articles were produced. Overall and in relation

to this specific study, Saifuddin and Zanuddin (2021) focused on media-based agenda-setting related to interpersonal violence, Ahmad et al.'s (2020) research involved articles about rape victims, and Geiß' research emphasized that the content does not matter over the circumstances surrounding published articles. Considering all three of the aforementioned researchers conducted a similar research undertaking, I was confident that, under the umbrella of agenda-setting theory, I could explore how victim-survivors/support options are portrayed by media agents or the U.S. government, if at all, and whether or not the media/government does have any identifiable agenda within internet accessible articles/documents.

To provide a more explicit definition, according to Asogwa et al. (2020), "media agenda-setting is the ability of the media, through their choice of report, style of report, position and frequency of report, predetermine what issues are regarded as important in a given time in the society" (p. 378). Of note, this definition of media agenda-setting is separate from media agenda-setting theory outlined in the theoretical framework section of Chapter 1. Stated another way, media agenda-setting has evolved. As another example, Thorbjørnsrud and Ytreberg's (2020) research showed that public health issues or human-interest matters found in the news have transformed ordinary citizens into advocates, interested parties, activists, and well-informed individuals as a direct result of a more open and legitimate approach from newsagents. However, some researchers confirmed that which news agency people get their news from matters. According to Meachem (2020), in their evaluation of the top three news broadcasts according to viewership, Cable News Network (CNN), Fox News, and the Microsoft/National

Broadcasting Company Cable Network (MSNBC), from 2008-2018, there was a marked difference in how the news was "framed." Particularly, Meachem confirmed that most Americans have difficulty deriving fact versus an opinion from these broadcasts and that U.S.-based journalism historically blends the two. Meachem's (2020) study paralleled and cited Bode's (2014; as cited in Meachem, 2020) findings, where Bode discovered that 85% of content on MSNBC was opinion-based, 55% was opinion-based on Fox News, and 46% of content was biased on CNN.

Meachem (2020) also explained that newscaster bias, more precisely, a specific slant, increased viewership numbers. For instance, as a direct result of increased public shootings, a recent topic reported by media outlets has been that of gun violence (Koo, 2023). In their study, Koo (2023) found that children exposed to news stories of school shootings now perceive the world as dangerous. Similarly, McKeever et al. (2022) completed a study on gun violence through the lens of media portrayal using TV news, social media, and newspapers. Their research on media influence showed that newspaper coverage is the most valuable, and McKeever et al. (2022) research also confirmed that news outlets, over that of social media, are the best medium to frame complex problems. From a more longitudinal standpoint, researchers like McCombs (1972) are still the seminal standard when discussing mass communication theory. As outlined in the introduction to McKeever et al. (2022), they prove that within the mainstream media schematic, some type of agenda exists 50 years later. Although McKeever et al. conclusions about newspapers are valuable for this discussion, Tsai and Wu (2022) confirmed that the internet has become the most popular choice to deliver the news over

hard copy newspapers and magazines as a direct result of wide-spread individual accessibility and speed of transmission. Using various algorithms and datasets for their research, Tsai and Wu proved that the internet has normalized how the world population accesses information. Hence, why mainstream news broadcasts, special news bulletins, documents, and uploaded news articles found on the internet and published/uploaded by specific news agencies/government entities were utilized explicitly for this study.

Furthermore, recent research showed that media agency agendas have influenced political outcomes and changed public perception of how the larger society views or chooses to support organizations/ideas (Fogarty et al., 2021). Semetko and Varughese (2021) confirmed that research surrounding the genuine media influence on public opinion has been documented since the 1960s, and, as solidified by McCombs and Shaw later in 1972, they confirmed that the news media machine influences policy directly linked to institutions, often involves outing elite members of society, and is a driving force behind politics. Alternatively, the media is not the only entity with an agenda; however, in their studies, Vliegthart and Walgrave (2019) confirmed that the media agenda explicitly is very responsive, is "volatile," and certain entities within the media conglomerate are not only interconnected, but they do influence one another. Therefore, this project was distinct because it addressed a research-based problem related to survivor support in the context of the different news media mechanisms, given that researched institutional/cultural barriers surrounding MDV do exist (Kwan et al., 2020). Also, in applying an agenda-setting theory lens, journalistic depictions of military victims in the news did uncover a media agenda (Foster et al., 2020). Using a generic qualitative

inquiry approach to exploring media stories and current literature, information from this study did bring about a more comprehensive understanding of MDV victim-survivor representation and whether the mainstream media or the U.S. government were promoting any possible agenda within these far-reaching internet communications situated at the forefront of the larger public's purview (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020).

Several other media theories that were considered but not utilized for this study. For example, *direct effects theory* research involves the idea that media consumers are drawn to certain information and stimulated in a way that produces a need to watch or engage with a chosen news platform (Robinson, 2021). This need is measured at the same level as drug-induced satisfaction, where the news medium serves as the “hypodermic needle” in any given scenario (Robinson, 2021). Similar to direct effects theory, the *uses and gratifications theory* involves more technology-based forms of consuming mass media whereby users of more interactive platforms like TikTok are more directly engaged with a communication medium and continue to seek out the same level of social and personal enjoyment with subsequent interactions (Falgoust et al., 2022). In an internet-laden age, researchers conducting studies involving another theory like *symbolic interactionism* show that there is a connection between how societies are maintained through technology, as a symbol, and as derived from messages within such communication channels (Chen et al., 2020). In the digital age, other researchers like Hakobyan (2020) emphasize that theories like the *spiral of silence theory* show that the more messaging put out on places like the internet influences whether individuals choose to voice their own opinions—especially as they relate to political views. *Media logic*

theory simply involves consumer perception of the type of communication medium they are consuming, like whether or not it is a dedicated news platform or social media site (Johns & Cheong, 2021). In television specifically, *cultivation analysis theory* researchers like Pratt (2022) showed that perceptions of difficult topics like sexual harassment can cause a skewed reality of the matter. Given that so many different theories exist related to mass communication, agenda-setting theory was the most appropriate for several reasons, but most prominently because this study did not intend to measure the effects or perceptions of the end-user as other theories generally do.

Summary

In summary, this research was warranted in that examining media stories/government documents or affiliated broadcasts/video transcripts exploring the portrayal of military-related victim-survivor support for a vulnerable population could bridge the gap of missing research in current literature related to both the social and research problem of U.S. MDV. Specifically, the research problem addressed in this study related to reports surrounding MDV survivor support in relation to how specific language found in the content of news reporting/government publications depict survivor initiatives or include a possible agenda given that hindrances to help do exist for the larger MDV population (Alves-Costa et al., 2021). Two research questions were focused on for this study and aligned with the purpose and paired research problem. Moreso, grounded in agenda-setting theory and a generic qualitative inquiry approach, this study should, at minimum, inform military agents, the public, the MDV victim-survivor population, and possibly, media outlets in various ways. The next chapter provides a

more comprehensive understanding and comparison of collected peer-reviewed and research-based literature—the pillars of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To address relevant constructs related to the research problem, this exhaustive review of current scholarly literature includes studies that encompass concepts of interest. Mainly, few researchers within the human services field and beyond have addressed the problem related to persistent DV within the U.S. military based on the root systemic and cultural barriers that exist for military victim-survivors in various ways (Morgan et al., 2020; Wilcox et al., 2020). At the onset of defining study parameters, there was a perceptual lack of attention in the public realm, and specifically, on the internet. Namely, I found no research that has examined U.S. news articles or other publicly available government documents involving the portrayal of victims/support and that investigates the underlying problem of persistent MDV. As such, I conducted this qualitative generic design study to explore mainstream media and accessible government content related to the depiction of U.S. MDV victimization to discover how stories portray survivor support, and whether these documents, at minimum, provide awareness or some other agenda.

Current literature in this specific chapter illustrates the history of DV, research-based considerations for addressing study gaps, and how the problem is relevant to the MDV victim-survivor population. As such, justification is provided for the inclusion of former studies and derived concepts in this literature review as they relate to the overarching research problem of MDV persistence and a current research gap that explores web-based news articles/U.S. government directives related to a possible

agenda. Major sections of this chapter include an overview of recent research, help avenues, multicontextuality approaches to the problem, and alternative theories. In my extensive examination of current literature (peer-reviewed studies published within the last 5 years) in Chapter 2, I outline how researchers have arrived at numerous study outcomes, substantiated results, and support research for this study; though, in comparison to other published journal articles.

Literature Search Strategy

Finding scholarly resources and an associated literature gap was not a linear or finite process. In addition to multiple meetings with a Walden University Librarian, chairperson, or faculty member in four different doctoral residencies, several steps and a baseline approach were used as a prerequisite for finding current literature on my topic. Using the associated practices outlined herein, a cyclical approach to finding peer-reviewed journals and other resources yielded the best results. Step one involved building a search process guide. Specifically, a simple flowchart served as the initial locus to annotate findings tailored for each search cycle. After multiple search attempts, I documented specific search engine or database keywords I used to track the specific words or word chains and then denoted result viability for each. In an initial search, I chose a much larger scope and approach with the keywords *theory*, *military*, and *domestic violence*. I subsequently noted the variations and other options provided in the search engine dropdowns such as *military* or *veterans* or *soldiers* or *armed forces* or *service members*, *institution*, *culture*, *system*, *subculture*, *intimate partner violence* or *domestic violence* or *partner abuse* or *intimate partner aggression* or *ipv* or *IPV*. With

new search chain options, I started the search over and over again to refine and appropriate the research result. Overall, this series of steps and repeat actions aligned with the search cycle and produced the most usable outcomes for future searches.

Specifically, 16 tailored searches using each of the 31 constructs and concepts within the literature review outline, and more so, toggling advanced search options like full text and peer-reviewed articles within a specific date range (2018 through 2023) yielded current articles related to my identified focus areas. Independently, these studies lent support to the overarching topic of U.S. military-associated DV. Through manipulation of keywords, the initial articles found with a broader focus supported an ongoing endeavor to narrow my dissertation focus. Based on this experience, I sought to develop and enhance an applied method to conducting research using a cyclical plan of action; however, noting that the process should be repeated, with keyword variation, advance search option manipulation, and multiple times to garner the most applicable results. For instance, the best word chain that yielded the most appropriate result was “military or veterans or soldiers or armed forces and domestic violence or domestic abuse or intimate partner violence and united states or america or usa or U.S. or America.” In instances where search results yielded less than 20 journal articles, larger search chains were not utilized and a combination of different or more singular key words were.

For example, one specific search activity used to find scholarly support for discussing analysis took on the same search path as all other outlined topics and subtopics in Chapter 2. In this instance and within the Walden University Library academic search engine, I went into advanced settings and unchecked the full text only option. Doing so

yielded the largest initial result using the basic search phrase “content analysis,” noting that methodology and theory scholarly resources are more lenient for use given earlier publishing dates. I performed the initial very broad search and started reviewing the first few pages of those 46,427 results. I then left the Walden site and did the same search in Google Scholar. Google Scholar produced too many results with over 5,360,000 options. As such, several variations and advanced search options were implemented as per my flow chart. One being the use of quotation marks grouping the exact search phrase together in whatever search option chosen of two (searching for the specific term in the full text [“TX All Text”] or subject [“SU Subject Terms”] space in the search bar). Those variations then included: “thematic analysis,” “content analysis,” “qualitative analysis” and content analysis, “qualitative research analysis” and then analysis, etcetera. Using broader terms in the initial search phase was intentional in order to first generalize to get ideas and then narrow the result at a later time or in subsequent searches. Similarly, I searched for the baseline topic apart from my overarching topic of DV to locate foundational research prior to any content analysis and DV pairing. I repeated the flow chart process and same search patterns by selecting and then deselecting the full text only limiter and conducted searches with or without quotation marks. Each time, I made notes about the number of results and validity of articles that populated. Always saving and making annotations for any articles that might be valuable to review. Specifically, I had a separate list and an annotated bibliography whereby I retained any article titles, with abstracts, that could possibly contribute to my study in a draft list for future review. The most successful combinations of the final search chains were “content analysis and

domestic violence and news or military” located in the SAGE Journals and Google Scholar platforms. In addition to “citation chaining” using linked references from source articles within scholarly and non-scholarly references from Google Scholar sources, I performed this type of search for all the constructs and subtopics listed in my dissertation committee-reviewed Chapter 2 outline. Overall, a minimum of 248 flowchart paths were used to locate research to support my literature review findings. Library databases and search engines used included:

- Thoreau multidatabase search through the Walden University Library
- EBSCO Discovery Service
- Google Scholar
- Military and Government Collection through EBSCOhost
- ScholarWorks Walden University Dissertations and Studies Database
- Taylor and Francis Online. Specifically, the Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment
- SAGE Journals
- Library of Congress Congressional Records Online (congress.gov)

The specific word-based approach to finding current literature included the following key search terms: media portrayal of military, media and influence, bias, or media representation or media portrayal or news media or mass media or media discourse or ethics and military or veterans or soldiers or armed forces or service members and intimate partner violence or domestic violence or DV or partner abuse or intimate partner aggression or ipv or IPV plus *system or culture or subculture or

institution. For instance, a combination of the following key words was incorporated into these searches: existing prevention and screening initiatives, military law and DoD or reporting agencies, journalistic tactics and ethics, and mass communications theories.

Finally, after the search flowchart was utilized, a literature search matrix was implemented to annotate results using the following keywords and linked word chains guiding the bulk of a more refined literature review search: military or veterans or soldiers or armed forces or service members, institution, culture, system, subculture, intimate partner violence or domestic violence or partner abuse or intimate partner aggression or ipv or IPV, theory. Military and violence were added to the search chain, but interchangeably. The variations were annotated, and other options populated for each search subdivision. For example, some of those included: agenda-setting theory, ...of mindset, and violence, aggression, hostility. In other searches, I ensured all common acronyms and abbreviations were spelled out as a safeguard like domestic violence, spouse abuse, intimate partner violence, military personnel, active duty, and veterans (as opposed to vets). The following keywords were also annotated and utilized in the model, albeit interchangeably: *INTIMATE partner violence, *VETERAN health, *AMERICAN women, *MEDICAL records, * WOMEN'S, primary care screening, stepped wedge, *WOMEN veterans, *SUICIDE risk factors, *META-analysis, *SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC factors, *MENTAL health, *MILITARY service intersection, suicide, veterans, *HEALTH services administration, *at-risk people, * VETERANS' health, *THEMATIC analysis, *ABUSED women, healthcare needs, healthcare response, patient preferences, provider preferences, screening, and violence

perpetration. Noting that the asterisk prior to any keyword (*) allowed for equivalent subjects to populate in certain databases like the Thoreau multi-database search fully accessible through the Walden University Library. In total, over 50 search terms were annotated, and articles were reviewed for the ideal theory for this study, agenda-setting theory.

Literature Review

In their text, Hague (2021) investigated the one movement that raised awareness and was the catalyst for publicly outing DV as a form of gender violence (inclusive of femicide) and sexual violence (in the realm of domestic abuse only) against women: the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s. In this brief history, Hague affirmed that the DV endemic is still happening to women; however, social movements have propelled all manner of individuals forward in terms of policy, laws, and other protections that would not exist without those feminists, activists, researchers, and lobbyists who had been championing for victims for over 60 years. In reviewing only one side of the movement and under the lens of one sex, Hague's (2021) stance is somewhat flawed. However, other proponents agreed that, statistically, women's rights movements have produced results in terms of awareness on life-saving issues for women (Htun & Jensenius, 2020). With an exception, based on their analysis and using scientific literature published between 1990 and 2019, Kolbe and Büttner (2020) confirmed that DV is not just a problem for the one gender. Specifically, using a comparative study from 2013-2018 to validate their results, they confirmed that there is a 3.4% to 20.3% incident rate for DV committed against men (Kolbe & Büttner, 2020). Those men experiencing

abuse, in turn, abuse their partner and 10.6-40% of those individuals had once experienced some form of maltreatment as a child (Kolbe & Büttner, 2020). In all, the women's liberation movement had proven to be a valuable start in alerting the public to DV; however, true awareness for all was not accomplished by that movement alone.

On the surface, DV appears to be rooted in gender; however, other researchers like Femi-Ajao et al. (2020) argued, that yes, as a baseline, gender is important, but certain minority groups are at higher risk for abuse based on other cultural, community, or socio-economic factors. Namely, the researchers concluded that groups with certain characteristics from the larger population face barriers beyond the norm—inclusive of holding a non-naturalized status, cultural shame/embarrassment, language barriers, and a general lack of concern from dedicated DV support services members (Femi-Ajao et al., 2020). Other researchers like Costello and Greenwald (2022) proclaimed in their narrative review of 60 different studies that “domestic violence is not limited to any demographic” and any stereotypes or predispositions related to victimology should be discarded in order to help victims (p. 4). For example, an individual who is a foreign national living in the U.S. or an expatriate married to an individual in a different county is now common and, at minimum, a substantial cross-cultural adjustment whereby social support/integration is necessary for transitional success is necessary in order to address just some of the underlying facets of the overarching DV problem (Bayraktar, 2019).

Similarly, Hague (2021) affirmed that DV is complicated and cited World Health Organization statistics as a way to measure the foundational issue. According to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research World Health Organization fact sheets and

numerical data derived from two different databases (the Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women and the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policy portal), one out of three women will experience this type of violence in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2022). At this time, the World Health Organization does not have any published statistics for men or by minority groups like different races. Similarly, in a study conducted by Morgan and Truman (2020), in the U.S., and using the National Crime Victimization Survey accounting for 1.2 million domestic abuse victims, researchers illustrated that there is a slight decrease in abuse from years prior (from 2010 to 2019) with an average abuse rate of 4.2 victims for every 1000 people. However, their report still confirms that, overall, 25% (or one in four) women experience abuse over 10% of men (or 1 in 10) where approximately half of all DV incidents go unreported to police (Morgan & Truman, 2020). As evidenced by current research outlined in this section, reported numbers, information, and statistics on DV are not always in sync with one another. As such, a common denominator must be outlined: a top-down, baseline comparison of DV.

Overall Civilian Comparison

As outlined previously, several researchers have shown that DV does occur to everyone—men, women, and other populations like racial or ethnic minority groups, within socioeconomic groups, and all manner of individuals with more specific characteristics outside of gender (Ragavan et al., 2020). Given so many people are impacted by these events, even broadly, there are several things to note for the larger community as some researchers like Wilcox et al. (2021) claimed that DV is a global

pandemic that furthers inequality whereas Dey and Thakar (2022) called it an invisible pandemic—especially in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns. This overview is important in terms of a military comparison of support programs and providing resources to families, and, in general, due to the true cost of DV. That is, the mental and physical health toll these acts take on the victims, witnesses, and their families (Mitchell & Wupperman, 2022).

Specifically, there are several major health concerns for individuals impacted by DV. According to a World Health Organizational multi-country study, those include and are not limited to mental health related problems like suicidal ideations, insomnia, isolation, poor work performance, PTSD and DV generally involves multiple forms of violence where “sexual and psychological and/or physical IPV is the most prevalent pattern of [combined abuse] and is associated with the poorest health outcomes”—nothing that the researchers also concluded that physical abuse is just as damaging as psychological abuse (Dheensa et al., 2022; Potter et al., 2021, p. 657). Alternatively, in their study, Coomans et al. (2022) confirmed that the home is supposed to be a physically and psychologically safe space; however, when DV occurs, it is on the state, neighbors (bystanders), and support agents to recognize the signs take action to help these individuals. In that same arena, some researchers like Jordan and Pritchard (2021) found that individuals will not self-disclose unless asked directly, universal screening is in place whereby professionals do have to ask whether or not an individual has been impacted by DV (e.g., “Do you feel safe at home?”; this is not required/implemented in all states); however, they concluded that a more sensitive line of questioning does not necessarily

legitimize disclosure due to other factors involved. Specifically, 63.6% of surveyed women said that mandatory DV reporting to police or another entity would make them less likely to disclose where 28.8% said they would disclose anyway knowing that a report or equivalent record would be filed (Jordan & Pritchard, 2021). For the purpose of this study, only certain civilian counterpart information has been used as a comparison for the military DV population. Particularly, DV is complicated as it involves a myriad of diverse populations, countries, states, policy, news media coverage, research, laws, and it would be difficult to cover such a complex problem in this one publication alone (Hamel, 2020).

The United States Military: An Overview of the System and Culture

Beyond what the media or public perception may be, this section includes current research about the situations impacting military members and any extensions thereof. For one, the military culture and system are often described as social constructs situated far beyond what civilian counterparts, in what could be considered standard working systems or subcultures, experience (Babut & Moraru, 2021). In fact, Babut and Moraru explained that the military sector is exempt from certain health, law, and safety standards where the organization is allowed to make and abide by their own rules. As a possible result, some researchers like Cebul and Grewal (2022) go further into the protected military bubble and make it clear that there is a marked force regression despite a public demand for social change. On a smaller scale, relationships are different within the military construct. That is, some researchers like O'Keefe et al. (2022) studied relationships where manager-supervisor relations are perceptually more invasive and do not come with

common boundaries in regard to family life, financial responsibility, and other generally disconnected-from-work elements. Overall, O’Keefe et al. found that, in the military context, supervisor ethics have an impact on personnel, and in turn, their actions do affect those individuals. Taking this facet further, Breslin et al. (2022) confirmed that discriminatory practices by military leaders and the like within the military environment amplify common occurrences like sexual harassment in this secluded realm.

On a more fundamental level, military professionals are subjected to a lifestyle often only understood by those living and working under high stress, and at times, life-threatening conditions (Good et al., 2020). Specifically, military members are subject to deployments, training, or other “mission essential” duty displacements all over the world for any given amount of time. These dislocations from the family and other support units have been researched extensively and have been found to have a direct impact on both the military member and family unit (Rossetto & Owlett, 2022). Good et al.’s (2020) findings showed that some of the major health and wellness issues displaced individuals experience include chronic sleep disorders because of shift work or abrupt time zone changes, physiologic or psychologic diagnoses like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and physical manifestations such as cardiovascular disease or traumatic brain injury. However, one study suggested that when certain healthy outlets like fitness-based leisure activities are made available and taken advantage of by deployed military members, some military members experienced a positive outcome during displacements (Sediak et al., 2021). As an extension thereof and in relation to the media, researchers like Zhang et al. (2020) have identified that there is a succinct difference between the

health literacy and a health-based lifestyle within the military in relation to what the researchers called a need to filter “new media” like social outlets such as Facebook and other quick access blogs portrayed as news articles that may not be accurate.

Given the studied and substantiated blurred lines between the personal and professional elements of being a military member, coupled with all that military service entails like rigid customs and courtesies, exploring overall violence in the military is a central part of the research discussion (Phayalv & Prins, 2020). According to some researchers like Tidy (2021), violence is deeply rooted within the military construct structurally between members, institutionally, and systemically. On a more individual violence level, multiple study findings (48 journal articles from 2010-2018) indicated that, historically, military members have increased rates of self-harm (e.g., suicidal ideation, attempts, and suicide completion; Holliday et al., 2020). Without exception, the impact of overall service-related violence attached to war also impacts the family dynamic (Mulholland et al., 2020). Additionally, Powers et al. (2020) found that at least one facet of DV, SA, is more common on densely populated military installations and is compounded by surrounding community factors (i.e., economic deprivation and other socioeconomic disadvantages). As a reminder, according to research findings, SA encompasses any number of behaviors related to an act, in a sexual nature, that was unwanted by the victim and forced or coerced by the perpetrator (e.g., an attempted or completed rape, an incident where the victim was underage, disabled, or incapacitated/unable to consent, unwanted touching, and even a threat of a forced sexual

event; Dworkin et al., 2021). Generally, each of the aforementioned researchers have connected violence to the military in various ways.

The Intersection of Intimate Partner Violence and the Military

With an understanding of the military culture or system and, given the existence of other forms of violence, IPV will now be explored more in-depth. To illustrate, Cowlshaw et al. (2022) meta-analysis explored the intricate nature of DV occurrences in both active duty and veteran populations; whereby, in 172,790 participants, ~22,462 individuals reported that they had perpetrated some form of violence and ~36,286 had been victimized. The researchers found that, in those cases, psychological partner abuse prevailed over other forms of abuse. Other researchers delineated between two distinct eras regarding this topic—pre and post “9/11/2001” terrorist attacks (DePierro et al., 2020). That is, in his study, Cancio (2020) pre-September 11, 2001, military-based perpetrators chose verbal and mental abuse more often than other forms of IPV and substance abuse was a greater factor in this population over comparative civilian perpetrators. In what is considered the more contemporary family dynamic in recent times, Bermea et al. (2022) explained that partner violence takes on three distinct overarching forms—situational, coercive controlling, and violent resistance. What has been considered a new era, more recent military-related DV involves a more extensive range of abuses including geographic isolation, post-9/11 veterans have double the PTSD rates over pre-9/11 veterans, alcohol or substance abuse leads to more severe and frequent violence, and a social environment, by affiliation, that allowed violence to manifest (Cancio & Altal, 2019). Regardless of the terminology used relative to military

DV, researchers like Collette et al. (2022) found that instances of sexual, emotional, and physical abuse go underreported in the military; however, noting that, statistics indicate that abuse reporting has sharply increased since 2015—possibly due to a shift in reporting mandates and availability of institutional support/resources.

Cross-Section Review of Prevention and Screening Resources

Currently, there are a great many researched DV programs for active, inactive service members, and their families. Pre-COVID-19, a congressionally mandated Family Advocacy Program (FAP) for all military departments was created for intervention and impact-of-violence reduction within the military family (Aronson et al., 2018). Conversely, an Aronson et al.'s (2018) case study of 226 families found that overall family engagement with the FAP was low and program administrators needed to find better ways to engage with families. One such medium may be through technology. For instance, in 2022, an Army New Parent Support Program (Army NPSP) team used telehealth and other remote services to curb violence related to social and physical isolation (Ferrara et al., 2022). Supporting this endeavor in the external (civilian) realm still accessible to military families, Slakoff et al. (2020) found that the use of technology was important due to additional stressors on the military member because of the pandemic where the mass media agencies were pivotal in terms of educating the public and providing resources. In fact, news stories within prominent publications reported that some abuse hotlines had a 300% and 700% increase in call volume at the onset of the pandemic (The Canadian Press, 2020, para. 2, as cited in Slakoff et al., 2020). Overall,

military members and their families do have both internal and external avenues for support.

Other prevention and screening proponents such as Hodges et al. (2022) advocated for a more face-to-face approach through programs like the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) to address military DV, and specifically, because of the “institutional and cultural conditions quite different from civilian life...[where] service members are at elevated risk for health dysfunctions that can contribute to violence” (p. 1). Georgia Salivar et al. (2020) almost confirm Hodges et al. findings when comparing the success rate of military couple effectiveness in online “OurRelationship” and “ePREP” programs intended to have a possible effect on relationship violence where program completion was lower among military couples (57%) compared to civilian counterparts (71%). Regardless of the prevention programming medium, Jewkes (2022) explained that those who have experienced active military service are at a three times higher risk rate for experiencing and perpetrating IPV. As such, Jewkes concluded that identifying at-risk groups within the former active military service association subset is key to both support and prevention program implementation. Given that different considerations for screening, prevention, and support must exist for this specialized population, military members also have different DV reporting avenues.

Reporting Domestic Violence in the Military

Reporting instances of DV in the military environment has changed drastically in the last 10 years, continue to evolve, and, within this already complex system, may be difficult for individuals to navigate (Hinton, 2020). For one, the military has its own

police force separately governed by the military law book (the UCMJ) and there are civilian justice counterpart differences to highlight as a result (Priambada et al., 2022). Specifically, Priambada et al. emphasized that military police could delegate punishment to supervisors. Completely different from within the civilian realm, the military commander of the alleged offender, not a military judicial official or third party that may not know the offender or the victim, is responsible for issuing protective orders for victims; however, that order cannot be enforced by a civilian court or civilian law enforcement (Nguyen, 2020). Nguyen (2020) confirmed that in issuing or not issuing these protective orders, akin to a civilian restraining order, the commander of the supposed perpetrator is acting as the judge, gets to circumvent any peer jury, and is the sole individual making the decision for the military to protect or not protect the alleged victim. In a similar vein, it is important to note that the UCMJ did not include DV as a crime until 2018, and on a criminal-level, violent offenses against an intimate partner were not defined in that governing document until 2019 (Joint Service Committee on Military Justice, 2019). In any event, commanders (top-tier unit supervisors) are reliant on their personal judgment and assessment of the DV situation commonly occurring in the privacy of one's home (Nguyen, 2020). Moreso, the alleged victim or alleged perpetrator could act differently in a military professional setting versus within their private home environment. Ultimately, in a systematic sample of military involvement in criminal behavior, Baktir et al. (2020) concluded that intervention in MDV incidents by the commander or another entity actually led to an increase in violent crimes.

Additionally, other reporting agents outside of the supervisory chain may also be involved to various degrees. For instance, much like their religion-based counterparts commonly known as priests, preachers, or clergymen, specific members known as military chaplains are not required to report instances of DV reported to them by perpetrators or victims—resulting in an ethical dilemma about intervention and their aptitude related to these matters (Whiting, 2020). In terms of these entities evolving to provide support, only certain facets of DV like that of SA were supported by certain and often limited, trained individuals within the military system (Menezes et al., 2020). Specifically, the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act made trained support persons known as Special Victims Counselors, a specialized military attorney, available to DV survivors (William M. (MAC) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, H.R. 6395, 116 Cong. (2021). Alternatively, other programs such as the Army’s SHARP program or the Air Force’s SAPR program, with embedded bystander intervention training, are known to have been tailored for different military departments, and support only those who have experienced some form of military sexual trauma as opposed to other forms of domestic abuse (Frey-Ho et al., 2021; Skopp et al., 2020). Notably, the latter programs were created to address a need for prevention and response initiatives because of military-related public incidents and statistics published in 2004, now over 20 years ago (McCabe et al., 2020). Compared to sexual harassment/assault initiatives beginning in 2004, given military justice mandates defined DV only recently and as of 2019, so these initiatives and support relationships are still relatively new. That is, with all the changes occurring within the last few years,

efficacy has yet to be researched and not much is known about any possible culture or systemic shifts as a result; however, proponents agree that there are lessons in what has come to be known as the MDV tragedy (Jaffe et al., 2020; Joint Service Committee on Military Justice, 2019).

Restricted Versus Unrestricted Reporting Forms of Assault

One of the major facets of DV is sexual violence (Sharifi et al., 2022). In the realm of reporting and the military's response to this specific occurrence, two reporting pathways were defined and developed in 2004 (McCabe et al., 2020). Both of which are outlined in various studies. That is, this one specific subset of DV, has certain protections when it comes to notifying military channels of an incident involving a form of sexual abuse. Namely, individuals can report instances of military sexual assault (MSA) two different ways—restricted or unrestricted reporting to certain officials (Lucas et al., 2022). Lucas et al. noted that MSA is distinct from that of civilian SA given that military-based occurrences of sexual abuses are more complicated and compound trauma due to military culture, betrayal, having to work with the perpetrator, real or perceived fear of retaliation, and more. Given the method chosen by the victim-survivor, different individuals may or may not be involved in the process and each channel offers certain protections for the alleged victim (Kuhlenhoelter, 2021). Alternatively, some researchers do not attribute these pathways to a form of protection for the victims; rather, they suggest that these avenues further discriminate or retaliate against survivors—especially women to a much higher degree than men and who are known to be marginalized in the military male-dominated culture (Reis & Menezes, 2020). To understand these

contrasting views, Lucas et al. (2022) breakdown restricted and unrestricted reporting, as follows:

1. Restricted reporting is done through a healthcare professional, who, in turn, may notify a SA support staff member (from the SAPR program or equivalent). An individual can go directly to that support staff member or a mental health/medical professional. This type of reporting is confidential where the perpetrator, their immediate chain-of-command, and authorities are not notified of the incident; rather, the victim is able to access care and treatment unimpeded.
2. Unrestricted reporting is different. If an individual discloses the event to what is considered a mandatory reporter (like an immediate supervisor), the matter is automatically unrestricted. Unrestricted means the perpetrator, their supervisors (up to the highest person in the immediate chain-of-command or beyond), and law enforcement are notified. The victim-survivor still has the right to seek medical treatment or counseling. The SA support team is also notified.
3. In both cases, the individual reporting the incident can request what is known as a Special Victim's Counselor. This is a trained military attorney, who can serve as a liaison between entities and on behalf of the victim-survivor to support the individual's wellbeing.

The Impact of Military Domestic Violence

When military-related DV occurs, the impact on the military member, family, and military overall is substantial; however, these instances have not been researched as much as they have been in civilian populations. Alves-Costa et al. (2021) confirmed that military populations should be a growing research focus and are relevant because of the amount of harm suffered by the victim and affected children who are then put at a greater risk for harm, mentally and physically, socially, and even on a societal-level as a direct result of MDV. Alves-Costa et al. (2021) cited that some major cities report social and economic costs for victim-survivors of domestic abuse into the billions for the civilian populace. In their conclusion, they reiterate that this type of violence has been found to be a concern for the larger society; however, “military-related factors, such as military culture of machismo and hierarchy, the prioritization of the needs of the military over family, reintegration and transition, and mental health issues can contribute to relationship difficulties and IPVA” ([intimate partner violence and abuse]; Alves-Costa et al., 2021, p. 11). Comparably, in a study conducted by MacKenzie et al. (2020), researchers found that DV and other “scandals” degrade public confidence in the military institution as a whole; however, their research indicated that the institution remained largely unaffected. More specifically, MacKenzie et al. concluded that publications involving military sexual violence specifically from 1989-2016 all promoted a common theme in that the media “narrative cohering these disparate frames is that military sexual violence is a phenomenon that cannot be prevented or addressed and is therefore unproblematic for the institution” (p. 45). Often associated with 20 years of wartime

operations, extensive research has been conducted on the issue of violence in the military and the DoD and Veterans Affairs have invested a great deal of funding into health issues associated with any resulting violence or aggression (Moore & Baker, 2022).

Alternatively, Sommer et al. (2021) advocated for a more proactive versus reactive approach related to what they concluded is a “pandemic of domestic violence” in these matters because certain scenarios or environments make victimization predictable. As was the purpose for this study, the issue of overall DV narratives/broadcasts in the media or publicly accessible government documents/videos had yet to be explored to a similar degree of MacKenzie et al.; therefore, this section currently only outlines the DV impact on the military-affiliated individual.

In terms of military culture, individuals within this system are trained and required to face impossible circumstances such as war or perform duties that put their lives at risk (Pamplona & Alves, 2020). In order to combat any mental or physical barriers civilian counterparts would not be exposed to or conditioned for, military members are required to be resilient (Schimschal et al, 2020). That is, a central component of military life involves a type of semi self-efficacy commonly referred to as “grit” (McInerney et al., 2022). This concept is so important that the DoD has designed morale, welfare, and recreational programs around it whereby researchers like Dragonetti et al. (2020) have shown that these programs focus on prevention and overall wellbeing in the realms of social, health, and education for all military members. As a downside, when DV occurs within the family unit or intimate partnership, certain mental and physical resilience barricades deteriorate and become more serious mental, social,

emotional, physiological, or psychosocial issues—despite certain preventative measures such as developed resilience initiatives (Mancini et al., 2020).

Many of these studies have been from the viewpoint of the victim and surround quantitative measures where researchers like Travers et al. (2020) have now linked military-related trauma exposure to DV and other health problems statistically. That is, Travers et al. confirmed that DV perpetration is common post-military conflict and poses a unique risk to both the offender and the family unit. Additionally, Costello and Greenwald's (2022) qualitative narrative review involving 60 different studies found that traumatic brain injury (TBI) resulting from a violent behaviour incident occurs frequently in these situations. Specifically, resulting TBI related to MDV incidents can also lead to other conditions such as PTSD, loss of memory, and impaired cognitive functioning for the victim (Costello & Greenwald, 2022). As such, both of these qualitative and quantitative approaches combined show that TBI resulting in PTSD and other symptoms are a factor for both the victim and the perpetrator.

Thus far, both military and civilian populous researchers have connected DV to a myriad of health problems for the perpetrator, survivors, witnesses, and/or their families (Hine et al., 2022). Given the military construct is very different from other social environments or circumstances, there are two occurrences relative to DV that should be outlined—moral injury and institutional betrayal. In a cross-sectional survey of 14,057 post-9/11 veterans, Maguen (2022) found that, in both men and women, 50% were impacted by what was identified as “potentially morally injurious events” (perpetrating, betrayal, or witnessing a distressing event) ultimately leading to a substantial mental

health event. In turn, researchers like Monteith et al. (2021) found that military DV survivors are more likely to experience what is known as institutional betrayal whereby individuals who experience military-related sexual trauma are less likely to seek help and use military-based support programs. Instead, they will seek help from community venues because they distrust the military institution. Given these specifics, I agree where the researchers affirm that this institutional betrayal must be addressed, because, even after leaving military service, based on responses from 242 study participants, those individuals who are highly impacted by certain facets of DV may not be seeking help at all (Monteith et al., 2021).

Studies Involving Survivors

To understand the underpinnings of DV within the U.S. military subculture, a unique social ecosystem, several studies attempted to explain the intricacies of such occurrences involving military personnel commonly referred to as veterans that make up 10% of the U.S. population (Cacace et al, 2022). Each of the studies analyzed herein have certain research designs and contribute to the more extensive discussion on the overall topic in various ways. In total, my study approach encompassed overarching problems related to underreported, undisclosed, or untreated victimization that may have been ignored, in practice, by military leadership or other support agencies like military medical practitioners, through inadequate or nonexistent training, processes, decriminalization due to mission requirements, lack of regulation enforcement like that of "zero tolerance" policies or victim's fears and reservations derived from the social or systematic barriers attributable to cultural norms (Bourke, 2021; Tosto & Bonnes, 2022). As such, the

following evaluations of current literature are an attempt to connect my proposed research problem's various components based on the described approach and recent scholarly works.

In a qualitative study providing context as to why the military environment statistically produces more cases of certain subsets of DV like IPV and SA, Dichter et al. (2018) matched existing literature under the Military Occupational Mental Health Model to evaluate "women's narratives about their experiences of IPV/SA in the context of their military service" (p. 845). The main findings of the study involved the lasting impact IPV and SA had on military members during and after military service. Some of those instances for victim-survivors included leaving military service earlier than intended, impact to personal or career goals, job attainment or retainment, and ultimately, prolonged physical, mental, and emotional health issues. The overarching purpose of this study was to collect and evaluate the varied experiences of survivors within the military culture and any given transition into civilian realm to find support (Dichter et al., 2018). The study methodology included the use of grounded theory to evaluate interview transcripts to identify common themes between each narrative and inclusive of 25 veteran participants in a smaller study and 249 in a larger offset whereby results in both pointed to the same conclusions (Dichter et al., 2018).

Overall, Dichter et al. (2018) study was constructed differently and provided extra elements to lend credibility to the researcher's approach in evaluating sensitive interviews involving many cases of MDV abuse. This is an important facet to note because media stories/government documents may also contain these survivor narratives.

Additionally, the researchers took the vital step of defining or indicating whether or not original model frameworks were modified or adjusted in any way. Also, each individual's background and affiliation with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs was made immediately clear—lending more credibility to researcher first-hand exposure to these issues related to this specific population. Most importantly, two different approaches and sample methods did converge, and researchers outlined, in-depth, how their work was generalizable.

Considering how well this two-part study was conducted and the universality of conclusions, this article applied to my focus. In various ways, it lent support to the fact that instances of DV are prevalent within the military culture. Most prominently, sample size and the range of individuals included from all service branches with varied years in service were personally important to my analysis as I did not have a distinct sub survivor population I focused on for my study. Results and contextual references outlined by Dichter et al. are beneficial because they illustrate the distinctive differences between military and civilian environments.

In a comparative study directed at discovering possible factors leading to military member-perpetrated IPV, Kwan et al. (2020) completed a meta-analysis and subsequent systematic review involving 42 studies comprised of over 300,000 service members or veterans. The conceptual framework for undertaking a study with explicit data collection parameters, review, and analysis was twofold. First, researchers sought to perform an initial review of data-driven conclusions found in existing literature against strict derivative guidelines. They then identified correlative analysis data points related to

offender gender, service status, an associated branch of service, and six other categories through various extraction and statistical measures. Similar to my study, data collection methodology involved a formulaic process. The researchers affirmed that study tools and design attempted to prevent bias using a dual-review quality appraisal tool, a governing board's IPV standard definition used for external study evaluation, and selected studies contained five eligibility markers. One of those included meeting every requirement for peer-reviewed and published journal article designation. By including all available demographic data, the researchers found no significant indications that offenders were overtly male and instances of psychological/emotional IPV were more common than physical abuse amongst military members. Overall, the meta-analysis findings were consistent with the selected research study's conclusions.

An assessment for dissertation inclusion was completed on this study based on 78 markers within this study involving credibility, journal specifics, and use of literature criteria located in applicable guides. First and foremost, this meta-analysis and the associated narrative is recently published; however, 34 of the 42 studies included in the overall evaluation fall outside of an established currency range within the last 5 years (one dates back to 1983). Other disclosed limitations or discrepancies included participant sample size, varying types of violence, a wide range of study methodology, assessment tool or measure changes over time, nonstandard definitions surrounding incidents, the context of abuse, and study settings. Other variability outliers contributed to incompatible aspects resulting in "poor comparability of included studies" (Limitations of research section, para. 1, p. 15). Also, identified studies were conducted in North

America only. This is mostly applicable to my study as I am focusing on the U.S. military. Notably, Kwan et al. explicitly state that their analysis and associated conclusions are not generalizable to an international military population. Nonetheless, researchers used various anti-bias safeguards and provided a substantial amount of limitation disclosures related to derived conclusions or evaluated study variables. Doing so promoted transparency to boost reader trust and lent credibility to the overall research endeavor (American Psychological Association, 2020). As such, researcher-addressed limitations and prescribed discussion topics like disclosures are this study's biggest strength. Despite disclosed study limitations and a potential external validity threat pertaining to generalizability, this study's secondary data-driven conclusions demonstrated that further research is needed to influence social change actions surrounding prevention, communication, and management of MDV.

Implications and potential future research guidance prescribed by Kwan et al. (2020) conclusions and the corresponding collection of statistics apply to my overall research interest—military-affiliated individuals impacted by DV and portrayed in the media/by the U.S. government in documents/videos found on the internet. Specifically, the combined and generalized quantitative analysis guided my approach to inform research or close existing literature gaps. For instance, researchers concluded that some published articles either identified, implied, or assumed that violent incidents involved only men hurting women. This illustration and others presented an opportunity to address missed opportunities or misdirected research ventures based on unintentional or overt biases surrounding commonplace stereotypes leveraged against different gender groups,

notwithstanding the complexities involving military life or contextually-imposed member characteristics. Specifically, my research approach and blueprint paralleled significant elements included in this study and involved establishing a more selective literature and analysis processes, deliberate design formulation, the use of secondary validity measures to address outcome variations, study comparison through synthesis, and making deliberate disclosures about selection and measurement biases or other limits.

Conclusively, this meta-analysis may not be universally applicable; however, the Kwan et al. (2020) meta-analysis had merit as a reference document considering that multifaceted suitability factors supported my specific research approach within the unique social change arena involving military-related DV.

In an abstract not seen in previous studies found in this analysis or otherwise, Portnoy et al. (2021) outlined every significant facet of their study with an extensive initial explanation of objectives, methods used, results, and conclusions. The study's conceptual basis is to influence a social change process based on current statistics that illustrate that the VHA does not do what it should to screen and support female veteran survivors. Most importantly, the researchers employed four different evidence-based measures to evaluate 82 medical sites that had low screening measures. As in other studies, certain safeguards in terms of multiple analyses were utilized. As will be the case for my study, a peer reviewer will be utilized in the same way. In terms of important findings, the researchers highlighted several barriers with survivor care based on current incomplete or non-existent practices.

It was immediately evident that the individuals spearheading this study were credentialed and interested in being responsible change agents in this arena using previous research and data-driven analysis. Additionally, it was clear that this group of individuals attempted to contact many medical sites. In total, 82 medical facilities were utilized in support of the study, where 15 sites were not included due to common issues found in military healthcare systems like vacancies, lack of continuity, and incorrect contact information. Moreover, the limitations section of the study outlined that there may be validity issues concerning sites that chose to participate based on “social desirability” to do so in conjunction with already having a successful program. Overall, the group did an exceptional job of identifying key study elements and went beyond the basics in breaking down their approach to this issue of MDV.

As a direct result of the format and how the content was broken down in this study, I would like to mirror those facets for readability and as an overt access opportunity for readers. Furthermore, this method is applicable to my research and highlights that there are external agents interested in evaluating the success and impact of military programs related to MDV. Those are all in addition to prescribing social measures to influence important change. Similarly, as a former military inspector, my regulations allowed me to evaluate internal processes as an auditor, exempted me from a higher-level external review for a period of many years, and changes were made by unit members without a second verification that corrective measures were actually enacted. In relation to this study, the researchers prescribed changes but identified that there is no way to really verify that there has been any follow-through from military entities.

According to the research, this is compounded by the turnover that occurs in audit/oversight positions, and specifically, 15 sites were missing from the analysis due to personnel issues.

In their assessment of 20 random military centers, Iverson et al. (2020) attempted to assess the effectiveness of organizational measures related to IPV amongst female patients. The research approach was a national endeavor sanctioned by the Veterans Affairs Administration. Most importantly, the methodologies implemented throughout spanned a wide timeframe and included many different approaches in three different “waves” (p. 1). Of note, the study was a mixed-method approach that evaluated medical records for data points, included “key informant interviews,” surveys, and intervention training from multiple facilitators on the research team or by external members, but vetted on an academic journal level. Iverson et al. did not provide a succinct conclusion; instead, they opted to use a discussion section to suggest further and “urgent” actions are required to support individuals who have experienced IPV.

As with the previous article, it was challenging to find faults within this journal narrative. The research initiative was well-framed, and the content illustrates that this undertaking was substantial but most correct for the topic. Notably and previously unseen, the researchers identified that they intended to convene a special advisory board to “help frame and monitor the progress of the study while guiding values and practices to enhance the feasibility and acceptability of future implementation efforts” (Advisory Board section, p. 8). Such an enterprise solved the problem found in previous and other studies involving researchers who do not or cannot follow-up with their studies to see if

VA sites actually implemented any changes or updated their processes. Additionally, the researchers took a different approach to limitations by adding “anticipated challenges” to the analysis. Some of these included missing patient input, unknowns about community partnership or cross-functional measures, and safeguards to protect the mental welfare or overall wellbeing of patients being screened for MDV. Overall, the narrative was well constructed; it displayed a substantial amount of effort on the researchers to actually do something about the statistically-verified problem. One of the main reasons for my research is the lack of awareness or published information regarding survivor experiences from entities like the VA (a U.S. government entity) evaluated in this and former studies. Hence, why the exploration of narratives/transcript data uploaded to the internet by the media/U.S. government were important. My research approach also included the same records that supported and helped frame qualitative measures.

Of the many studies synthesized in this analysis, each presented a series of unique and applicable discussion points and conclusions in relation to my personal research approach surrounding MDV. Qualitative studies herein reminded readers that humans exist behind these issues and are the driving force behind prescribing the right social change measures. Additionally, quantitative studies and mixed-method research approaches exist for an explicit reason in that a diverse approach to research produces some of the best results (Mathijssen et al., 2021). Ultimately, what is known about this topic is not the issue of MDV overall as most studies identified that there is a disconnect when it comes to supporting victim-survivors in the right way. A few of the studies prescribed changes and researchers have implemented social change measures; however,

neither addressed how the participants or survivors feel about how U.S. MDV victim-survivor portrayal or whether these individuals have been supported appropriately, if at all. In conclusion, these studies were valuable foundational narratives regarding my topic, but none bridged the gap between victim-survivor representation with the mainstream media or U.S. government publications on the internet.

Mass Media

Baseline concepts previously outlined are important facets to understand in relation to the overarching problem of MDV. That is, although researchers illuminated important findings regarding DV in the military, I have found no research that has examined news articles/broadcasts or U.S. government documents/videos involving survivor support and that investigate a possible agenda. As such, this final section explores the media conglomerate, the nature of public communication by media relations practitioners, and specifics surrounding victim-survivor support experiences.

Media Influence

Given recent events related to a global COVID-19 pandemic (also known as the coronavirus pandemic) and how social media has consumed the attention of online users as of late, locating recent research on alternate, more traditional forms of news was limited (Hausmann et al., 2020). Additionally, other researchers had found that mass media-based actions shaping politics has been at the forefront of research for decades; however, the U.S. had controversy surrounding the 2020 election (Hoewe & Peacock, 2020). In fact, entire texts have been devoted to conspiracy theories and American politics (Aupers, 2020; Dunaway & Graber, 2022). Regardless of the explicit topic, some

of the news media tactics and ethics can still be explored. In Rogers et al. (2021) study, the researchers explain that “mass media is a central component in people's acquisition of knowledge beyond their own experiences” (p. 441). Interestingly, several research studies have explored the integrity component of mass media portrayal. Using agenda-setting theory and others, Arafat et al. (2021b), called mass media a social institution where communications in that medium have incited fear leading to irregular human behaviors such as panic buying. In a subsequent journal article (Arafat et al., 2021a), mass media was cited as being instrumental in a chain of beneficial and healthy controlling measures used to control public behavior and perception. After reviewing the aforementioned publication involving numerous studies, two things are certain. One, there is a lot of controversy surrounding mass media, and two, whether in a positive or negative way, the media has influenced human behavior.

Researchers have shown that the media has influenced the individual, so now ethics and social responsibility can also be explored. Researchers like Ward (2021) explored this topic from a global level and cited that global media ethics is still evolving where the international media scene has been linked to promoting racism, racial intolerance, radical nationalism, and denied human rights. In their study, Hove (2021) explored several schools of thought on media ethics and morality from a conceptual social standpoint versus a theoretical one. Notably, Hove explained that in diverse societies, multiple societies (subsocieties) actually exist; hence, creating a moral dilemma surrounding equality markers and other things like those individuals with contrary social circumstances. This subdivision, taken alone, Hove’s work seems significant; however,

when reviewed with other studies where cross-cultural value conflicts and no societal norm have ever existed, the complication of the overarching MDV topic compounds (Hove, 2023). With an underlying denominator, other researchers stated that the internet does not compound issues surrounding media ethics, rather, technology allowed for a new avenue as these problems have always existed beyond the digital realm (Ljajić, 2021).

Neutrality in the News

This next section outlines the matter of neutrality in the mass media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the internet). That is, researchers have found that inherent bias existed in the reporter, within what is reported, the writer, and the person relaying the message (like a news guest commentator)—whether intentionally or not (Kumar et al., 2022). Specifically, one study of 1,837 news articles on one historical event (a protest) were evaluated and the “slant” actually occurred in the editing process whereby headlines, the font size of articles, visuals, and “gripping” quotes were used strategically to promote a certain prejudiced angle (Shultziner & Stukalin, 2021). In one study that evaluated over 280,000 news articles on different topics, Merkley (2020) exposed that the media promoted polarity as opposed to generating balance between various arguments on certain issues. Findings showed that sensationalized elements were present and inclusive of themes of novelty and drama. Providing a notable comparison, Greve-Poulsen et al. (2023) looked at the responses of 2,000 individuals to determine if the person delivering the message evoked any kind of distrust or specific perception against a male or female delivering the news. In an important turn, the researchers found

that the audience member did not question the competence of any person delivering the information based demographics like gender (Greve-Poulsen et al., 2023). When reviewed next to Merkley's (2020) study, Greve-Poulsen et al. (2023) findings formed an important conclusion. That is, the originator of any news media story may not be biased; however, the process, the focus, and even the channel by which these stories are delivered, may be an underlying issue challenging newscaster neutrality.

Summary and Conclusions

The topic of DV is complicated enough given certain health markers already exist for victim-survivors (Martin, 2020). When the military construct was added to the research evaluation of current literature, other factors like cultural and systemic influences were important to consider. More so, mass media news venues were found to be valuable communication mediums for the topic and victim-survivors; however, as has been illustrated in several studies, the media may inherently compound the problem of victim-survivor support due to a slant or possible agenda. Research identified in this chapter illuminated important findings regarding DV, DV in the military, and about the mainstream media. U.S. government documents/videos notwithstanding. However, after an exhaustive review and search through current literature on these topics, I have found no research that has examined news articles/broadcast or government documents/videos involving survivor support that investigate a possible agenda. Given such, further research through this study was warranted that examined media stories/U.S. government data sources to explore the portrayal of U.S. military-related victim support for survivors. Based on this literature review, the specific research problem that was addressed through

this qualitative human services study was how the content of reporting on DV in the U.S. military portrays survivor support or includes a possible agenda. Specifically, using agenda-setting theory to make that exploratory determination derived from an evaluation of extant data derived from news/U.S. government data sources. Following this chapter, Chapter 3, outlines the undertaken research design and other rationale for using a generic qualitative method approach to the identified research problem.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative generic design study was to explore mainstream media content and accessible government content as archival data sources found on the internet to explore how stories portray survivor support, and whether these documents/resulting transcripts, at minimum, promoted an agenda. Specifically, any news stories or directives related to the depiction of MDV or even a lack thereof of the research problem. Using thematic content analysis to explore narratives/transcripts, I uncovered how derived secondary data in these narratives depicted MDV survivors and whether an agenda existed for either the mainstream media and the U.S. government. Overall, each section of this chapter supported the purpose of the study and the intent behind publishing a study of this nature, which offers a comprehensive understanding of MDV support and any underlying agenda embedded in news stories/mandates found within the public's purview online.

This chapter includes background on the qualitative generic design approach that I used and my reasoning as to why other research traditions were not suitable for this study. I also discuss my role as the researcher. This chapter also includes study-specific ethical considerations like debriefing, confidentiality, and storage of extant/archival/secondary data (coded words and phrases already published on the world wide web). Finally, a comprehensive guide to the specific methodology that I used in this study is included so that other researchers can replicate this study.

I answered the following research questions in this study:

RQ1: Since 1999, excluding anything uploaded to social media sites, how do mainstream media narratives or government documents like news articles or other reputable news agency broadcasts found on the internet depict survivors and support related to United States military-affiliated domestic violence?

RQ2: How does the use of journalistic language or other jargon derived from internet-based mainstream media narratives or government documents involving United States military domestic violence depict a pattern of communication that suggests an agenda or lack thereof?

The research questions were the basis for a qualitative approach to this study. Edwards (2020) explained that the research questions dictate the design. In tandem, the specific use of language for each question is important and the overall study design matches the question (Kamper, 2020). Namely, word choice like “narrative,” “depiction,” “journalistic language” and question starters like “how do” and “how does” as opposed to “how many” or “how much” (more quantitative/numbers based) dictate that the study is grounded in a qualitative methodology because researcher observation, as communicated in the analysis phase, is a key component for a qualitative endeavor (see Busetto, 2020). Moreso, Kostere and Kostere (2021) stated that certain research questions should not be considered with this approach. Those are questions with unrealistic timeframes, anything requiring measurement, matters that may cause ethical conflicts, and questions that make recruiting participants difficult. Furthermore, the quality of a qualitative research question is imperative for the overall success of the study (Stenfors et al., 2020). According to Stenfors et al. (2020), success markers—all of which I will discuss in this chapter—

include trustworthiness, the understating of the paradigm, alignment, reflexivity, and the role of the researcher.

Research Design and Rationale

To address the research questions in this study, the specific research design involved the qualitative coding of media stories/broadcasts or U.S. government publications/videos related to MDV found on the internet. Specifically, full news article texts, U.S. government mandates, and affiliated transcripts were coded to derive data points considered to be extant as they have already been uploaded to the internet by media or government sources. Those narratives/videos/broadcasts were located utilizing popular search engines. Specifically, Google, Bing, YouTube, and Yahoo, to account for search result algorithm variations on each of those platforms and given that the public does not have access to login required academic databases or restricted government systems containing U.S. Military publications commonly labeled “for official use only” (Davies, 2021). I also applied theme-focused content analysis using a well-known computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program, NVivo, to explore themes, categories, and any possible agenda found within documents/derived transcripts published on what is considered the most common public information platform, the internet (Becatti et al., 2019).

A qualitative design was the best approach for this study for several reasons. According to Head (2020), external narrators using verbal or written language aided researchers in building thematic analysis around constructed meanings embedded in any given communication. Furthermore, primary source study data conclusions/study

outcomes could have possibly impacted MDV victim-survivors, so it was important to identify and explore derived themes/agendas using publicly accessible and previously uploaded internet narratives/videos only. In the data collection phase specifically, archived codes (words and phrases) were obtained from written mainstream media/U.S. government articles, other documents, or broadcasts related to MDV and meeting predetermined criteria explicitly broken down in this section.

All of the data I collected for this study were considered extant/secondary/archival, as located narratives/videos were already published and publicly accessible using a simple keyword search through various search engines. According to Meaidi et al. (2021), pre-existing data sources are valuable in research as primary data collected like first-hand accounts/interviews from study participants did not contain necessary markers required for what the researchers considered subsequent mapping in future studies needed to examine the theme-based phenomena being investigated. This specific data mining approach was appropriate for this study because several researchers explicitly used a secondary data pull design for the specific purpose of evaluating documents, journals, essays, and/or internet sources with substantial success (Fitzgerald & Douglas, 2020; Hakanurmi, 2021). Given news media narratives are rooted in popular culture and even opinion, the themes, patterns, and underlying meanings uncovered in these stories were essential to explore (Purdy, 2020). Delios et al. (2022) confirmed that generalizability is possible when utilizing archival data and even novel attempts were found to be meaningful in the social science research realm. In all, to

address the research questions in this research approach, agenda-setting theory, the use of archival data, and a generic qualitative design all appropriately grounded the study.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is important when applying a qualitative design, especially when the researcher is being exposed to potentially biased or influential media accounting of a topic surrounding a vulnerable population (Tran, 2020). As impressionable human beings, researchers are also susceptible to media influence (Bergold et al., 2021). With regard to a qualitative researcher role, issues stemming from the role of the researcher as the research instrument involve the interpretation of written texts as data (Parameswaran et al., 2020). However, foundational data set elements derived from narratives often result in a deeper understanding of phenomena or issues surrounding a specific topic (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) explained that the evaluation of media narratives is one of four specific approaches required in studying the underpinnings of news sources as organizations that have shaped public knowledge, history, perspective, and human understanding. Specifically, any resulting agenda like public perception or policy changes have effectively been explored using this approach (Adams-Cohen, 2020). Since MDV is a sensitive topic, acknowledging implications for misinterpretation, undue influence, and curbing bias related to the researcher as the individual who evaluates these narratives was paramount (see Aroustamian, 2020).

Since I had a personal connection to the topic, specific trustworthiness measures were implemented throughout the research endeavor. Those included peer reviews and self-checks. One of the major challenges with conducting research of a personal nature is

addressing or mitigating bias and maintaining an overall focus on what is known as reflexivity in qualitative research (Given, 2008). As a researcher impacted by DV, it was vital to situate myself within the context of the overall approach to research, fully disclose any potential limitations related to bias, and address the extent to which I could be exposed to any victim-survivor accounts of abuse (also referred to as second victim phenomena; White & Delacroix, 2020). To do so, Ravitch and Carl (2021) recommended researchers create an "identity and positionality" memorandum to mitigate any conflict-of-interest impact. This running text document was a chance to identify any assumptions and feelings about my direct relationship with the research or the topic overall. This memorandum was included with any research *memoing*, and some self-check notations occurred simultaneously when collecting and analyzing the data (Birks et al., 2008). In conjunction with a comprehensive literature review, full disclosure, exploring any thoughts, feelings, and personal predispositions related to this matter was vital in sustaining and producing a viable research endeavor.

Furthermore, according to Given (2008), one of the four major kinds of researcher reflexivity is feminism. Given (2008) explained that research linked to the most intimate aspects of a person's life should be considered, appropriated, and accounted for throughout the course of conducting research where individuals have a personal connection to the material. I accomplished these actions using the NVivo memo function that allows users to journal, note observations or ideas, and attach them to a project, file, or code (see Wong, 2008). I also spoke to a therapist often. I used those in-depth conversations with a licensed and credentialed individual to process my thoughts and

feelings on the topic of MDV. Ultimately, these self-checks did mitigate any issues related to bias and promoted reflexivity throughout the course of executing this study.

Another way bias was alleviated during the research endeavor was peer feedback. According to Spall (1998), peer debriefings and feedback were both an emerging and essential function of qualitative research. In alignment with Spall's research and as approved by the Walden IRB, two of my peers were dedicated reviewers. Additionally, a few other colleagues provided feedback on my protocols. Ravitch and Carl (2021) confirmed that these member checks are a viable validity measure. As an extension, a weekly peer debrief with other members of my dissertation group was also beneficial. According to Spall (1998), small group peer reviews, such as those conducted in the weekly course workshops on how to best approach any given aspect of my research endeavor was of added value within the context of my personal dissertation journey. Spall (1998) did not explicitly state what these peer check-ins should entail because they are subjective; however, weekly reviews with my peers, reviewers, methos mentor, and dissertation chair have included everything from discussing bias, various scenarios related to data collection, planning the analysis approach, journaling, and more. In every case, whether these exchanges are considered member checks or peer reviews, they have added value to the overarching now 4-year research process. Most importantly, I appropriated, acted on, and internalized all feedback from my peers, other mentors, and dissertation committee throughout.

Method

Data Selection Logic

For my planned research design, I coded text as extant data derived from news articles, other documents like U.S. government memorandums, video transcripts, or broadcasts found on the internet and uploaded by credible sources meeting predetermined reliability criteria. To elaborate, a main consideration for conducting research of this nature was the reliability and level of bias of some news and media sources (as a means to remove any social media or opinion-based stores from the data pull). For instance, certain research-based agencies developed tools that assigned bias ratings to different media platforms, including identifying those new agencies that promote conspiracies (Frischlich et al., 2021; Heldebrandt, 2019). Specifically, as an external reliability measure in the data collection phase of this study, the RAND Corporation's Media Bias/Fact Check platform was compared to other sources like the Pew Research Center tool and media ethics guides like the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart to ensure intended data source owners from which news article data was derived were both reliable and unbiased (free from overt opinion stories/personal commentary; Casero-Ripollés, 2020). Finally, the Walden Office of Research and Doctoral Services (2021) prescribed that scholar-practitioners consider using a vetted qualitative data management program while collecting data and in order to manage coded inputs more efficiently prior to analysis. In accordance with what that office prescribed, I chose NVivo as my data management tool as it had cost-effective student pricing and was recommended by doctoral-level instructors. Alternatively, due to certain elements of

media phenomena like clickbait headlines, NVivo was helpful in eliminating subconscious bias (Kaushal, 2021). In all, the coding of secondary data found in news articles as a part of my research design was most appropriate for this type of generic qualitative study approach.

To action the planned research design, collecting data (words and phrases) from news articles, other documents, or broadcast/video transcripts published on the internet, all selected news articles, government narratives, or broadcasts/videos had to meet inclusion criteria outlined in my research questions (e.g., sources were not dated prior to 1999). News articles were then collected using four different internet search engines based on a predetermined keyword search chain. Initial raw data searches included all types of media, government, and other sources like advocacy groups.

In a subsequent organization of the data, all media outlets like CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News who published the articles were evaluated for neutrality, credibility, and ethical integrity on the three decided reliability websites. Specifically, those websites contained lists of reputable news agencies and any affiliated bias rating that would impact the credibility of the data source and derived data study inclusion. As such, any source document deemed overtly biased or that lacked credibility were not included for study use/analysis.

In order, the first reliability site that qualified news articles/U.S. government sources containing secondary data was the RAND Corporation's "Media Bias/Fact Check" site that allows individuals to check the bias of over 4,100 media sources and journalists. Site users can input a URL, an individual name, or source name in the Media

Bias/Fact Check database. See the main website (<https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/>) for additional information about the Media Bias/Fact Check platform. Alternatively, the Pew Research Center has been conducting research on media bias since 2014. Most recent studies were conducted in 2020 in response to COVID-19 and the U.S. Presidential Election. See the main website (<https://www.pewresearch.org>) for additional information about the study platform. Finally, the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart evaluated over 1,200 news sources using an interactive chart for all types of users including businesses, consumers, and educators (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.). See the main website (<https://adfontesmedia.com/>) for additional information about that chart.

Prior to adding potential data source information to the RAND Corporation's "Media Bias/Fact Check" platform, the Pew Research Center tool, and the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart, or media ethics guide, a preliminary search of news media articles/broadcasts and U.S. government narratives/videos on the internet specifically related to MDV resulted in over 166,000,000 initial results. Therefore, refining my process in classifying which news articles or U.S. government sources (if applicable) were useable for raw data inclusion in my study was paramount. As such, four different classifications were created. Then, after establishing those data collection parameters and uploading or transcribing stories into the qualitative data management program, NVivo, protocols related to content analysis as my intended data analysis pathway were preliminarily formed.

In turn, it was determined that theme-driven content analysis was appropriate for my study as it is employed over narrative analysis (specific to first-hand participant

accounts) in order to develop conclusions as they directly relate to the research questions (York, 2020). In general, York explained that content analysis is not separate from narrative analysis with one exception. Specifically, content analysis is designed to evaluate those narratives that are not traditionally seen as a first-hand account or story. Therefore, content analysis was most appropriate to use in the exploration of news articles/U.S. government data sources containing extant data points.

Using the Lee and Jung (2016) data mining search engine method to account for algorithm anomalies between databases, I located types and sources of data that included the required words and phrases derived from data sources. These sources were found in historical (no earlier than 1999) and more recent (to present) news articles/documents containing keywords and phrases specifically involving the military and DV. This process utilized four common search applications. Specifically, those first three search engines are Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Those three in addition to a video-based search engine query using YouTube as a means to collect other archival data from sources derived from visual news media/U.S. government transcripts or other broadcasts about the topic of DV in the U.S. military.

Sampling Strategy

The data sampling strategy for my dissertation study consisted of purposeful sampling. With purposeful sampling, the researcher determines which steps to take in implementing the strategy (Palinkas et al., 2015). This involved setting a stepwise standard in terms of identifying sources already accounted for in the procedures section of this outline and further detailed in the next section. Also, Palinkas et al. explained that

a cornerstone of purposeful sampling is when researcher-identified data saturation occurs. Then and only then can the research questions be answered. In order to confirm that the research questions in this study had been answered, theme-based content analysis was utilized. In turn, Ravitch and Carl (2021) recognized that any outlined data decisions were ultimately constrained by the resources available to the researcher. With consideration for these constraints, mainstream media and U.S. government sources were evaluated using three different reliability sites as a means to alleviate any social media or opinion-based texts/videos. Ultimately, purposeful sampling is a researcher-driven approach to identifying news articles and other document sources that meet the study criteria, as outlined in the following sections of the data selection process.

Data Selection Process

Sources were sampled from various news/U.S. government websites on the internet using the stepwise process in the Data Collection Procedures section of this narrative, within the boundaries of the research questions, and with the additional stipulations below:

1. Review the top 50 results from each of the four search engines' (Google, Bing, Yahoo, and YouTube) keyword searches and input raw data source information into an Excel spreadsheet using a numerical identifier as an initial column of inclusion for later source suitability input against the RAND Corporation, Pew Research Center, and the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart tools. Of note, documents or mandates derived from a government source (a ".gov")

website), were rarely listed on the RAND Corporation, Pew Research Center, or the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart.

2. A secondary review for each search was accomplished using the “News” and “Video” tabs. All videos found to be suitable for inclusion were transcribed for plain text upload to NVivo.
3. After articles and associated links were input into a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet, media/U.S. government organization ratings were evaluated using the three different reliability sites: RAND Corporation, Pew Research Center, and the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart.
4. In order to determine whether source saturation existed, Latzko-Toth (2016) advised to try and keep the data manageable in pursuit of qualitative source saturation using a three-part model first searching for content, engaging with the data (preliminary review), and finally, capturing the actors (media writers, government agents, or broadcasters) and their processes to relay information to the public. What this step meant exactly is entirely up to the researcher (Latzko-Toth, 2016).

Data Collection Procedures

Study procedures related to data collection were approved and implemented in accordance with Walden University Institutional Review Board guidelines. Namely, as opposed to creating an original method for this study, Kaefer et al. (2015) study, *A Software-Assisted Qualitative Content Analysis of News Articles: Examples and*

Reflections, was used as a baseline for this process. As such, step-by-step process guidelines for this study's replication are outlined below.

1. Open the pre-study blank Microsoft Excel worksheet prior to any search as this is where search results were recorded for the keyword chain result used in every public database search. Headings for the spreadsheet included: "Search Keywords/Chain," article date (if not listed, article cannot be used given 1999-present date parameters for these articles), name of publisher (e.g., CNN, MSNBC, Fox News etc.), author (journalist, publisher, agent, or reporter), title of article, other columns and one each for Google, Bing, Yahoo, and YouTube annotating whether the article presented in one or any other of the search engines, notes for each search engine or other result Google, Bing, Yahoo, and YouTube, site traffic (if available) a direct link to the online news article, document, video, or broadcast, whether the URL contained a ".gov" in the weblink chain, and finally, three columns for each of the data source reliability site search outcomes—RAND Corporation, Pew Research Center, and the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart.
2. Open any internet browser application. Those may include services provided by Google, Microsoft (Edge), internet Explorer, Firefox, Apple (Safari), or any others.
3. Then, open a search engine page in order to perform designated keyword searches. Of note, do not type search phrases directly into the URL bar as only four specific search engines are being utilized. In Google Chrome for instance, the

search bar should automatically appear or be visible on the homepage after the Google browser application is opened. If not, the URL within the browser should display: <https://www.google.com/>. Navigate to <https://www.google.com/> if your home page does not contain the Google Chrome search bar. The web address for Bing is <https://www.bing.com/>. The web address for Yahoo is <https://www.yahoo.com/>. The web address for YouTube is <https://www.youtube.com/>.

4. Using Google Chrome initially to search, place primary keywords and the predesignated word chain related to the topic of U.S. MDV in the Google search bar. Based on Lee and Jung (2016) guidelines and intended ease of replicability, the following search chain combinations with the appropriate Boolean Operator (include quotation marks, where indicated) were predetermined to be most suitable for each of the four public database searches using Google, Bing, Yahoo, and YouTube:
 - a. “United States military domestic violence and news.”
 - b. "United States military domestic violence" and news
 - c. News on domestic violence in the United States military or U.S. military
 - d. News and “domestic violence” and “United States military”
 - e. domestic violence in the us military
 - f. U.S. military domestic violence report
 - g. “United States military domestic violence” and “press release”

5. Google does have a specific “tab” that filters general articles from what the search engine identifies as “News.” After each of the five search phrases are input into the search, the “News” tab should also be selected to see if any more new or relevant results are displayed.
6. Repeat step four and five using Bing, Yahoo, and YouTube, as applicable.
Annotate results and fill in each column on the Excel Spreadsheet.
 - a. As a means to validate search engine results, I also went through the above process using the EBSCO Discovery Database search engine through Walden University with the option to limit results by publication type and inclusive of “News” articles.
7. For videos and broadcasts without transcripts, Microsoft Word was later utilized to transcribe those recordings for thematic content analysis. At the present step in this process, descriptive and characteristic information with direct links was being utilized to fill in the Excel Spreadsheet.
8. Refer to the research questions often and compare the language with parameters in the inclusion and exclusion criteria for news media articles and government documents as data sources.
9. Evaluate the trustworthiness of news-media/U.S. government data sources given the articles selected using three different tools. Again, three different tools were selected to evaluate data source useability: RAND Corporation, Pew Research Center, and the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart.

10. Input vetted news media and U.S. government narratives/transcripts into the NVivo qualitative data management platform for analysis. Overall sample size goal was 100 articles/documents/videos/broadcasts and was dependent on source usability (defined categories) and researcher-determined data saturation.

Data Analysis

This qualitative approach applied thematic content analysis using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program known as NVivo in order to explore themes, categories, and subsequent linguistics-driven positionality of one of the most common public information formats (news articles/broadcasts; Becatti et al., 2019). In the data collection phase specifically, codes (words and phrases) were obtained from written mainstream media articles/government documents containing data (journalistic language or military jargon broken down into words and phrases) related to MDV, meeting predetermined criteria, and evaluated using thematic content analysis (Manimozhi & Srinivasan; 2018). Specifically, after applying an extensive stepwise data collection process and placing articles containing potential data sources on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to be evaluated against three predetermined reliability sites, protocols related to content themes, categories, and/or agendas were implemented. Specifically, thematic content analysis was appropriate for my study as it is employed over narrative analysis (specific to first-hand participant accounts) in order to develop conclusions as they directly relate to the research questions (York, 2020). In general, York (2020) explained that content analysis is not separate from narrative analysis with one exception. Specifically, under the umbrella of a narrative inquiry design, content analysis is

designed to evaluate those narratives that are not traditionally seen as a first-hand account or story (York, 2020). Therefore, content analysis was most appropriate to use in the evaluation of news articles, broadcasts, videos, or U.S. government documents as sources for derived secondary data.

Under the larger umbrella of theme-based content analysis, hand coding was specifically omitted from the data review process as a means to avoid any initial researcher bias that may have been included in any resulting study conclusions. As such, the use of NVivo was a major foundational tool for the analysis phase of this specific study. Additionally, content analysis overall is intended for those researchers planning to perform a more neutral evaluation of analyzed data (Mihailescu, 2019). As such, the strategic steps I undertook to apply content analysis were researcher dependent. Using Almusallam's (2021) blueprint as a guide, the first step in analyzing news stories/U.S. government documents and affiliated video/broadcast transcripts as data points was to download and organize each news article narrative, document, or video. Again, with an end goal of 100 articles/documents in the final data set. Of note, the original Excel Spreadsheet containing the raw data and inclusive of unused articles was retained for documentation purposes. The final 193 article links were selected one-by-one, and each article or transcript was transferred over and saved as a plain text Microsoft Word document for ease of input into the NVivo coding program. This was especially important as web-based content generally contained pictures, advertisements, and many contained wording (like links to other stories) not associated with the MDV story/narrative. The original article or document in the final data links was saved, with

pictures, advertisements, and all other media as a portable document format (PDF) for comparison to the derived content placed on a corresponding Microsoft Word document. In some content analysis applications, researchers preselected themes they might expect to find in the data given the nature of certain topics (Yinal et al., 2022). For this study, predetermined themes were not identified. Simply enough, each Microsoft Word news article/document that met outlined inclusion criteria was copied and pasted into the NVivo for Windows program whereby the program highlighted and ran a report on themes, patterns, word grouping, and connotation. Each news article/document/transcript was uploaded into the NVivo program separately. Resulting analysis reports for each article/document/narrative/transcript was given a corresponding identifier and has remained in NVivo throughout study execution and was retained thereafter. To compare the articles, a master Excel Spreadsheet was created to document original NVivo program-generated outcomes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness in the qualitative paradigm encompasses four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Plainly stated, trustworthiness in this and any other research endeavor is multifaceted. For one, meeting *trust* criteria in a research study has to do with the reader. To illustrate, credibility does not have anything to do with the credentials of the researcher; rather, what the reader believes is true or that the research has *truth value* (Golafshani, 2003). That is, are the major components of the research and findings believable (Nassaji, 2020)? Alternatively, transferability ensures the findings are relatable

in another situation (Baumgart et al., 2021). In the case of this study, that would mean that the news article/U.S. government source review process is applicable to a similar topic. Dependability involved what is otherwise known as rigor whereby the researcher accounted for any anomalies or situations that lead to study changes or result uncertainty (Singh et al., 2021). For instance, one trend for this study was the nature of the data source internet databases themselves. Specifically, search engine algorithms do change and each of the four utilized for this study (Bing, YouTube, Yahoo, and Google) produced different results (Narayanan & De Cremer, 2022). As such, search variability and result overlap were important to annotate on the master Excel spreadsheet. In their study for instance, Narayanan and De Cremer (2022) confirmed that search engines have the power to shape an individual's beliefs about the world. Hence, searches for this study included keyword probing using the most neutral and plain language so as to prevent any search engine bias or extreme result variability (Gao & Shah, 2020). Finally, confirmability was achieved through practices like audit trails that documented common issues related to the researcher as the instrument and that addressed researcher bias (through applied practices like memoing; Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). In general, each of the four factors related to trustworthiness were important independently; however, several tactics employed during the course of this study encompassed all factors related to trustworthiness as a combined initiative.

In order to ensure trustworthiness, various actions covered each of the four trustworthiness markers for this study. Prior to collecting the data and throughout the course of the study, reflexive journaling was adopted early on to include weekly or

bi-monthly therapy sessions, member checks, and peer or supervisory dissertation committee debriefings. Specifically, I had two PhD peer mentors. I also ensured alignment through multiple methods review meetings with individuals who specialize in qualitative research. In the data collection phase, I created a comprehensive audit trail, inclusive of a raw data matrix for referential adequacy. The audit trail specifically included screen shots of the stepwise data collection process undertaken whereas referential material, such as raw data source information was placed in an accessible format and made available for replication purposes in the master Excel spreadsheet. Notably, the connections made with all my mentors were invaluable. Their review and all guidance helped produce the best possible end results for this study. Overall, the four facets of trustworthiness were actioned as a combined, deliberate multilevel application of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in various ways throughout this research journey.

Ethical Procedures

This study was conducted using ethical considerations and processes defined and provided by the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). As such, the IRB's provided planning worksheet with 40 different ethical guidelines was utilized as a precursor to address any ethical issues related to this specific study and prior to collecting data. As of the original proposal phase, I did not have IRB approval; however, predetermined ethical matters related to proposed study implementation were outlined herein. That is, some pre-study specific ethical considerations included peer debriefings, confidentiality, and storage of data. During the debriefing process, a mentor served as an

auditor evaluating coded data, processes, and the accuracy of data source plain text files like associated transcripts (Janesick, 2007). The defined investigative process was a tool that ensured protocols were adhered to and words and phrases being used as data points were absent of researcher bias, most correct, and usable for study inclusion. Moreover, a review of the study's audit trail served to further support trustworthiness in the realm of conformability (Shenton, 2004). In terms of confidentiality, news articles quoted victims or other individuals. Despite names being used in public information forums, for the purpose of this study, names and other demographic information affiliated with identified MDV victim-survivors were not reproduced, restated, and data masked. Finally, measures were taken to ensure data will be stored for a period no less than five years and in accordance with Walden IRB standards if in the event external auditors or researchers would like to replicate this study. Overall, this specific study had important, but fewer ethical considerations because I was not collecting any form of primary/first-hand information through endeavors like individual interviews or connecting in any way with the vulnerable U.S. MDV population whatsoever.

Qualitative Methodology

Given that research questions drive the study, multiple considerations existed for choosing the right qualitative tradition (Robins, 2015). In this case, I made the deliberate choice to move forward with a generic approach for this specific study for several reasons. According to a published guide on utilizing a qualitative generic approach in the social sciences, Kostere and Kostere (2021) explained that a generic approach is all encompassing when exploring human behavior and is not as rigid as other approaches;

however, this approach may lack clarity in terms of defining the specific method and process. Due to those limitations for new researchers, Tomaszewski et al. (2020) wrote that this crossroad in the design process is where research alignment (purpose, problem statement, theory, research questions) is critical. In tandem, researchers Kostere and Kostere (2021) and Tomaszewski et al. (2020) explained that there is not currently one resource that differentiates between different designs and generic approaches tended to be a viable default choice amongst all researchers.

As such, the following section describes why a generic approach was the most appropriate design for this study. A generic qualitative design was an explicit choice for this study based on several important factors and other considerations for utilizing a qualitative tradition—just outside of using the research questions as the sole basis for moving forward with this type of research methodology. In this regard and after attending a research design appointment through my university’s research department, common qualitative experimental and nonexperimental approaches with their design criteria were compared side-by-side. Prior to writing the final study narrative, a matrix was built for each method approach outlining the goal, research question variances, common sampling strategies, data collection, and preferred analysis angle. Notably, according to multiple researchers, each qualitative design is comparatively different, they are distinguishable, and most designs were discounted from use in my specific study since a generic design is a “catch-all” approach when other qualitative disciplines do not explicitly align with the study research questions (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Broadly, generic qualitative inquiry captured all different types of qualitative research not covered by other qualitative

traditions with more explicit guidelines (Patton, 2015). Since generic qualitative inquiry captures all design outliers not confined to a particular approach, it was difficult to compare or contrast with another qualitative framework.

For instance, case studies have specific characteristics. Those include viewing data as a combination of participants or another element as sets, designated groupings, or clusters in some cases (Augustine et al., 2019). Also, case studies have strong associations with medicine and psychology (Donnelly et al., 2013; McLeod, 2019). Similarly, narrative inquiry is another unique approach. For instance, narrative data sources can include documents, journals, essays, books, and even social media forums (Fitzgerald & Douglas, 2020; Given, 2008; Hakanurmi, 2021). In the same realm, researchers may organize their study in the “observer-as-participant” vantage point where the researcher investigates the lived experiences of individuals from a more internal-to-the-situation perspective (K.R. Chermack, personal communication, September 13, 2021). Sources for these embedded or participatory action research approaches may include interviews, focus groups, and fieldwork (Müller 2019; Ritter, 2021). Overall, generic inquiry, case studies, participant-observer, and narrative inquiry are more generalized than other approaches but were still not useable for this particular study.

More so, the second set of qualitative approaches were almost too unique to compare. For instance, grounded theory is not a theory to be used as the basis for explaining phenomena; rather, it denotes the pathway researchers intend to take to build a new theory or model (Barelle et al., 2015; Gerlach & Cenfetelli, 2020). Moreso,

grounded theory is more of a process over a defined theory like agenda-setting theory is explicitly defined. Specifically, grounded theory is utilized when a researcher does not have a preformed hypothesis or theory to draw from (Byrne, 2022). According to Byrne, the most important facet of grounded theory for the researcher is focusing on comparable social incidents. Of which, this study has none. Under that same structure of having to exist within a particular definition, phenomenological studies must only involve the daily or lived experiences surrounding a person or group (Patton, 2015). Finally, ethnography and autoethnography involve studies surrounding "culture," "norms," "values," or others like "sociocultural" phenomena (Belkhir et al., 2019). However, noting that the difference between ethnography and autoethnography is a matter of researcher positioning relative to the study population. That is, ethnography involves a group of people external to the researcher (Patton, 2015; Ritter, 2021). Alternatively, the same focus on culture is applied with autoethnography but from the perspective that the researcher or the research group are the participants (Belkhir et al., 2019). In all, the approaches mentioned above are distinctive and vary from other qualitative design traditions, and specifically, the generic design approach used for this study.

Summary

This qualitative generic design study explored publicly accessible mainstream media or other government content previously uploaded to the internet. Web sourced news stories or government documents associated with MDV were analyzed using thematic content analysis to answer the two research questions. This section provided a background on the specific generic design, addressed the role of the researcher,

trustworthiness, data collection specifics, and ethical considerations. In summary, the plan for this study was to use specific key word phraseology to find narratives/videos/broadcasts about U.S. MDV on the internet. After all the articles/documents/videos were collected, three reliability sites were utilized to determine the credibility of news media/some U.S. government sources. Any articles published by credible sources were uploaded into the NVivo qualitative data analysis program for analysis. Linguistics-minded thematic content analysis was then applied to identify any themes, patterns, language, and possible bias leading to media or a government agenda. In the following section, Chapter 4, these processes are outlined more in-depth and data was analyzed according to Walden IRB-approved study parameters. In the final parts of the next chapter, more evidence of trustworthiness and results are outlined.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this qualitative generic design study, I explored how mainstream media and accessible government content located on the internet depicted U.S. MDV victimization, focusing on whether those narratives/videos provide insight into victim-survivor support, raise awareness, or serve other agendas. Using a thematic content-based approach, I analyzed 193 publicly accessible press accounts and government documents or videos to understand the media and DoD's portrayal of support for MDV survivors, uncovering themes within the boundaries of the following two research questions:

RQ1: Since 1999, excluding anything uploaded to social media sites, how do mainstream media narratives or government documents like news articles or other reputable news agency broadcasts found on the internet depict survivors and support related to United States military-affiliated domestic violence?

RQ2: How does the use of journalistic language or other jargon derived from internet-based mainstream media narratives or government documents involving United States military domestic violence depict a pattern of communication that suggests an agenda or lack thereof?

This chapter includes an outline of the study data collection process, data analysis procedures, and provides exploratory evidentiary support related to different trustworthiness factors and overall study results. In turn, main thematic outcomes included the following with four themes affiliated with RQ1, and two themes associated with RQ2 respectively:

- Theme 1: Systemic/institutional barriers to MDV victim-survivor support exist.
- Theme 2: Media sources serve as public platforms for MDV victim-survivors to share their stories.
- Theme 3: Media sources highlight that current MDV training is inadequate.
- Theme 4: Time delays with military processes/mandates of DV exist.
- Theme 5: U.S. government narratives/videos and media stories/broadcasts related to DV contain jargon-laden language.
- Theme 6: Conflicts related to MDV investigations are commonplace.

Data Collection

The study's ethics governing body, the Walden IRB, granted data collection approval on October 11, 2023 (approval number 10-11-23-1054252). The data collection process for this study was time-intensive and spanned 4 months to gather extant, secondary data from various internet search engines. Data collection was an intuitive process, adapting to new considerations while maintaining the stepwise approach outlined in Chapter 3, whereby each data source document or video was located, reviewed multiple times, and recorded in the designated Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and NVivo QDA software database, with memos for eventual analysis, as suggested by Hamilton (2024). After performing initial keyword tests with several variations or combinations, less information in the search fields produced applicable results for this study. Because so many results containing news and government documents were

initially available during these test searches, one standard keyword was utilized to search within all search engines to locate all 488 raw data source narratives or videos. The single, succinct search phrase used was *United States military domestic violence*.

Data Recording and Source Tracking

All data sources underwent the vetting process outlined in Chapter 3 and were tracked/stored using Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, and NVivo for organization, coding, and subsequent analysis. To ensure their usability, mainstream media sources (and some U.S. government sources) received some credibility rating from at least one of the three reliability sites identified in Chapter 3: RAND, Pew, or the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart. Any media source found on a reliability site was enough to be classified as internet-based mainstream media for this study. Of the initial 488 sources, 193 were ultimately selected for inclusion in NVivo. These included 66 transcribed news media and U.S. government videos that totaled about 39 hours of run time. Each data source document or resulting transcript was assigned a numbered identifier for tracking throughout the data collection process, and any duplicate data sources were removed during a subsequent sorting phase. An additional measure included creating plain text versions of narratives and verifying the accuracy of video/broadcast transcriptions multiple times, which ensured that all data-source-derived words and phrases retained the integrity of information found in the original narrative/video. NVivo was used to organize each data source with a corresponding classification and to identify patterns, codes, categories, or other data-driven relationships, which led to study themes. As approved by the Walden University IRB, peer mentors reviewed processes and resulting

datasets/outcomes to ensure these actions aligned with the study parameters set in Chapter 3.

Variations from the Initial Data Collection Plan

Minor deviations from the data collection plan outlined in Chapter 3 were encountered and addressed with dissertation committee members. For instance, Chapter 3 proposed using the news tab function and the word *news* as a part of the keyword chain used to search within each search engine. However, each search engines' news tab function did not yield study-relevant results. A shift to general keyword searches without the term news produced inclusive research question-driven outcomes for U.S. government data source documents, memorandums, narratives, or affiliated videos. In some instances, the search engine did correct the original keyword parameters request and provided alternative options for related searches. Regardless, these variations ensured that the study search engine parameters remained flexible yet generalized enough to locate source documents for both mainstream news media and U.S. government sources while maintaining the rigor of the data collection process.

Another deviation from the initial plan outlined in Chapter 3 had to do with one of the three reliability sites used to vet internet-based news media sources, the Pew Research Center website. The Pew Research Center had conducted research on media bias since 2014; however, that bias was attributed to politics, the COVID-19 pandemic, and recently, social media news (Mitchell et al., 2017; Wang & Forman-Katz, 2024). Specifically, Mitchel et al. (2017) evaluated political news viewership of popular news agencies using stories covering the U.S. President, former President Dondald Trump. In

evaluating agencies like Fox News, Cable News Network, and Microsoft/National Broadcasting Service, the researchers were not trying to determine the fairness and accuracy of reporting; instead, Pew Research Center study data outlined that a demographic or appeal related to viewership/listeners existed (Mitchell et al., 2017). In all, the Pew Research Center website did not provide sufficient media bias ratings for news or government data sources. This led to the sole reliance on other sites like the RAND Corporation and Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart for this study's data source vetting.

Finally, four classifications not originally considered for this study were created in NVivo to categorize and organize potential sources for analysis: alternate media not considered mainstream, mainstream media, non-news and non-social media sites or publications, and U.S. government official publications. Under the umbrella of these classifications, each data source was evaluated for its relevance to the study's research questions, with two additional reviews conducted to guarantee study suitability. While the initial data collection plan outlined in Chapter 3 involved gathering documents from five separate search engines and annotating all results, given the newfound need to create and apply data source classifications as a direct result of a diverse set of 488 initial data source results, a variation occurred, requiring adjustments in the selection criteria. Such a change generated a more aligned selection of mainstream media and U.S. government data sources included for data analysis more specific to this study.

Data Analysis

The coding process began after the 193 source documents, transcripts, and narratives were imported into NVivo, following a systematic, step-by-step method based on the guidance of Kaefer et al. (2015) and Braun and Clarke (2012). Preliminary coding was conducted using a three-level approach: first level, second level, and third level coding. Using NVivo, the first round of initial coding involved identifying basic patterns like word frequencies or repetitive phrases. The second level of coding refined the initial codes by grouping similar concepts, eventually contributing to category builds in Excel. The final level involved more in-depth coding per data source to gather applicable quotes/evidence for thematic analysis. Overall, a multilevel approach provided for a more thorough data review to ensure that no significant codes (words or phrases) were overlooked.

Once codes were established, the next step was to create categories by grouping related codes based on patterns observed in the NVivo code listings and cross-referenced with preliminary code groups in Excel. Categories emerged from commonalities among codes, such as synonyms or variations of terms like SA versus sexual abuse and DV versus domestic abuse. The top 20 codes derived from NVivo were initially used as a reference point, highlighting frequently occurring terms across each similar data set. NVivo's organization of 11,014 codes and 84,253 references enabled a systematic classification process, which sorted the data into broader groupings. Those groupings, now categories, were derived from over 3,884 codes per narrative or within each transcript in some cases. All category groupings allowed for a more structured data

analysis pathway, providing a foundation for identifying overarching themes. Some of the categories that emerged from the coded data included the following:

- High-level awareness of MDV,
- Government accountability audits,
- Identified internal/external support,
- Reporting pathways/outcomes,
- System/institution,
- Barriers to support,
- Use of specific language/words.

I delved into creating thematic content from the categorized data only after familiarizing myself with the data with multiple reviews, identifying preliminary themes, auditing initial associations, checking any bias, and changing raw themes into definitive constructs. Themes were derived from patterns identified in the categories, reflecting recurrent concepts related to the study's research questions. Eventually, top themes were cross-referenced with the analysis of agenda-setting theory, resulting in a deeper understanding of how media and U.S. government sources portrayed MDV support and victim-survivors themselves. In turn, following Braun and Clarke's (2012) guidance on thematic analysis, I ensured that the final outcome of six themes provided a meaningful interpretation of the data and offered the correct level of insight into the mainstream media and U.S. government data source results obtained from internet searches. Thematic outcomes included the following six points, as derived from the data:

- Theme 1: Systemic/institutional barriers to MDV victim-survivor support exist.

- Theme 2: Media sources serve as public platforms for MDV victim-survivors to share their stories.
- Theme 3: Media sources highlight that current MDV training is inadequate.
- Theme 4: Time delays with military processes/mandates of DV exist.
- Theme 5: U.S. government narratives/videos and media stories/broadcasts related to DV contain jargon-laden language.
- Theme 6: Conflicts related to MDV investigations are commonplace.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness measures for this study encompassed four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each standard was applied to this study's results phase, and some were built upon due to certain unknowns prior to data collection.

Credibility

The credibility of this study's results was ensured through multiple measures to maintain the accuracy, honesty, and trustworthiness of study findings and to align them with the ethical principles of qualitative research, as Nassaji (2020) suggested. Because credibility in qualitative research is not tied to the researcher's credentials but rather to the transparency and consistency of the research process, to this end, every data source in the study was handled consistently, and redundancy measures were implemented throughout data collection and analysis processes, as suggested by Golafshani (2003). These measures included multiple reviews of each data source and added multilevel review indicators, such as changing the font size in Microsoft Word to mark each review

cycle. Additionally, every transcribed source was saved as a PDF screen print so as to maintain the integrity of the original content. Printed copies of original U.S. government or mainstream media data sources were subsequently compared to copied-over, transcribed, or retyped Microsoft Word transcriptions for further accuracy. Finally, for ease of access, because NVivo requires paid subscription permissions, as a complete reference for study auditors, and for overall data integrity, demographic and source information for all 488 initial data sources were recorded separately in a master Excel workbook.

I ensured credibility further through external reliability sites to assess the quality of news-based data sources. Specifically, initial data sources were compared to data/information derived from the RAND Corporation's Media Bias/Fact Check platform and the Ad Fontes Media Interactive Media Bias Chart websites. Each website retained its suitability for the study's focus through the data collection phase as months passed between the initial proposal evaluation and Walden IRB data collection approval. These reevaluations helped ensure that only sources with predetermined reliability levels were included and that reinforcing the study's overall trustworthiness and addressing potential biases or innate agendas in the selected media narratives was still paramount.

Transferability

As Baumgart et al. (2021) imparted, study findings are transferable if they can be replicated in similar research contexts. This study's transferability markers can be derived from the detailed process of reviewing media stories, broadcast transcripts, and U.S. government documents or videos. That identical process can be applied to similar topics

or studies. Although the subject matter might vary due to the dynamic nature of the internet as a data mining source, the systematic approach outlined in Chapter 3 and executed in Chapter 4 can be adapted to different research areas. Namely, my actions followed the structured guide that Kaefer et al. (2015) provided for selecting and learning research software, prepping and importing accurate/complete data into the NVivo QDA software platform, actioning multilevel coding phases, and presenting thematic findings using direct quotes or data source inclusion volume-based support. Additionally, I adhered to the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2012) for conducting thematic analysis for this study, which included avoiding common pitfalls like not double-checking transcriptions throughout the data collection process. Overall, methodologically rooted actions initially outlined in Chapter 3 and applied to this study made these study processes adaptable, allowing other researchers to apply similar techniques in comparable research scenarios.

Dependability

Dependability for this research endeavor involved adapting to changes and anomalies that naturally arose during the implementation phase, as suggested by Singh et al. (2021). For this study, dependability was relevant to the nature of web-based data source-derived databases. As noted by Narayanan and De Cremer (2022), search engine algorithms used by Bing, YouTube, Yahoo, and Google produced different data source results that influenced the type and scope of data sources retrieved for this study because search engines can shape users' beliefs and perceptions; conducting searches using neutral and plain language and one succinct search phrase was necessary to minimize

search engine bias, as noted by Gao and Shah (2020). This approach helped me to ensure that the search results reflected a broad, balanced, and study-relevant set of sources.

Managing duplicate data sources and irrelevant results was integral to maintaining dependability throughout the study. By the numbers and among the initial 488 data sources collected, 60 (approximately 12%) were duplicates, and only 182 sources, or 37% of the original data set, appeared within other search engine results. Given such, a much more careful cross-section type of review resulted in removing redundant data sources that refined the paired-down raw data pool to 248 unique sources that could be further assessed for study applicability. This adjustment in the data collection process contributed to overall study dependability. Documenting any process/Chapter 3 adjustments ensured that study methods remained transparent in order to achieve the required level of dependability overall.

Confirmability

Audit trails and practices addressing potential researcher bias ensure study conformability (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). I used NVivo software as a means to help minimize researcher bias, as it allowed for systematic data coding without the subjective influence that can occur with manual coding, as suggested by González Canché (2023). According to González Canché, software-assisted analysis enhances the objectivity of the process. Moreover, NVivo is vital for handling large amounts of textual data that would have been challenging and excessively time-consuming to process manually. I used Kaefer et al.'s (2015) structured guide and approach to software-assisted thematic content analysis to support the ultimate objective coding of data with the parameters of the study

research questions. Using a preestablished framework also helped me to ensure that the initial coding process was free from researcher bias.

Reflexive journaling, member checks, and peer debriefings contributed to study conformability. As approved by the Walden IRB, I asked two PhD peer reviewers to provide feedback throughout the research process as a means to enhance study transparency proactively. Additionally, I used detailed audit documentation surrounding the data collection process that included a raw data matrix organized in a Microsoft Excel workbook with various tabs to track progress, such as search engine outcomes, source lists, removed duplicate/nonapplicable data sources, and other coding details. Audit documents included comprehensive records like screenshots of each step in the data collection process copied into Excel tabs showing each data mining or coding result. Doing so ensured that the data source origination (traceability) and process transparency that aligned with the parameters set in Chapter 3. By maintaining a clear record of all procedures implemented throughout this study, I presented the research findings so that others could review and verify to meet the conformability standard.

Results

Themes for Research Question 1

Theme 1: Systemic/Institutional Barriers to MDV Victim-Survivor Support Exist

The theme of systemic/institutional barriers to MDV survivor support emerged as a significant finding in this study. For example, one media report noted that survivors are “cautiously optimistic, but they are experiencing retaliation in real-time” (Barrón-López, 2023, para. 22). This was further highlighted by stories of survivors who faced career

repercussions for reporting MDV, with one individual stating, “I was threatened directly with my career” (WUSA 9, 2017, para. 4). In addition, high-level military officials stated that they wanted to build upon a culture of dignity and respect; however, media stories included information outlining that the continuation of a culture of silence and sexism directly impact MDV (Robin, 2022). Specifically, the persistence of MDV was reported to be “symptomatic of ingrained sexist attitudes in military culture” (Robin, 2022, para. 42). In turn, media and victim-survivor messaging in media reports seemed clear in that individuals impacted by MDV did not feel supported due to systemic/institutionally-engrained root causes like retaliation and sexist attitudes.

Specific programs exist to support MDV victim-survivors. Initiatives like the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) and the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act of 2021 were cited in data source documents as efforts to address matters of MDV (Congress, 2021). However, media agents in data sources suggested that such programs have been ineffective, even after significant financial investment. For instance, one report included information that government funding had been redirected to programming focused on interpersonal crime, whereby “the Pentagon has spent \$1 billion on a program for domestic abuse victims since 2015. Survivors say they couldn’t get help” (O’Donnell et al., 2021d, Headline). Newsagents in mainstream media data source stories illustrated that a gap exists between the military’s stated objectives and the reality experienced by survivors, who often encountered disbelief, a lack of confidentiality, and a “boys club” culture that discouraged reporting and “forces many not to report rape because it is a blemish and can ruin your career” (Al

Jazeera English, 2022, para. 1). In all, statements related to the institutional implications of MDV and embedded in news sources were unambiguous and abundant in media source data-derived narratives.

Media data included perpetrator accountability as an MDV challenge. Newsagents revealed that, despite having established support programs like SAPRO, there was a widespread perception that the military failed to take action in MDV cases. As one former military attorney explained, the MDV crisis requires “drastic” changes as current systems fail to provide adequate accountability (CBS Evening News, 2021a). In another media data source, a former military attorney confirmed that no law enforcement investigation ever existed to support victims in getting crimes through the military justice system (special counsel; PBS NewsHour; 2023). Even when action was taken to correct or address DV, it was often insufficient, with one report stating that perpetrators received only a paper statement warning not to do the act(s) again, and a number of individuals continued in their careers without lasting consequences (CBS Evening News, 2023a). Mainstream media source findings indicated that there is an existing need to align the right level of action with MDV support programs/procedures.

In conjunction with matters of accountability, the media’s portrayal of systemic barriers outlined other impacts on MDV victim-survivor trust within the military system. Stories described a common practice of “silent acceptance” whereby survivors faced retaliation and a lack of support. Survivors spoke of feeling “dehumanized and treated with ultimate cruelty and being part of an elite organization that values brotherhood, integrity, and faithfulness made it hard to come forward when seeking help” (Al Jazeera

English, 2022, para. 1). This lack of trust was further supported by data showing that military support members failed to assign special victim prosecutors in MDV cases that left survivors without legal support related to intimate partner/family violence crimes (CBS Evening News, 2021a). First-hand victim-survivor accounts derived from news stories revealed that systemic issues like retaliation against those who spoke up rather than remain silent might be contributing to the ongoing perpetuation of MDV.

Theme 2: Media Sources Serve as Public Platforms for MDV Victim-Survivors to Share Their Stories

As evidenced by study data, MDV victim-survivors have overtly shared their experiences as they pertained to DV in the U.S. military. An analysis of 108 news stories containing MDV victim-survivor statements over the past 20 years revealed that survivor testimonies highlighted the realities of military support systems whereby mainstream media newsagents emphasized that survivors were the main actors in efforts to identify military support disparities by sharing their direct experiences through these public forums. Every media data source from the internet supporting this study contained a reference to a victim-survivor or a direct quote from an individual impacted by U.S. MDV. As also illustrated by statements from survivors in Theme 1, in auditing these stories, this distinct population of persons experiencing MDV have emphasized that there is a reluctance to report MDV. In the context of one media data source-derived MDV victim-survivor statement, one individual explained the following:

I was paralyzed with fear. I was in disbelief [and] shame when I reported it to the commander. He said it was better for me to deal with it after being discharged.

Nobody helped me, not even the Chaplain. My experience left me torn apart physically, mentally, and spiritually. I was dehumanized and treated with ultimate cruelty and being part of an elite organization that values brotherhood, integrity, and faithfulness made it hard to come forward. Through the gossip mill, we would hear of women who had reported being raped. No confidentiality was maintained. Nor any protection given to victims. The boys club culture is strong. That forces many not to report rape because it is a blemish and can ruin your career. (Al Jazeera English, 2022, para. 1)

As a result of statements like that above, media investigations have accentuated the perceived shortcomings of military responses to MDV through the first-hand accounts of the individuals directly impacted by these events.

As evidenced by study data, victim-survivors openly shared the intricacies of their experiences as it pertained to MDV. For instance, CBS News agents conducted a 2-year independent review of MDV cases and interviewed 40 survivors, and every one of those individuals reported that they did not feel protected by the military (O'Donnell et al., 2021b; O'Donnell et al., 2021c). In some cases, investigations uncovered situations where multiple victims had reported abuse by the same perpetrator; yet, military inaction persisted in each instance (O'Donnell et al., 2023b). In response to victim-survivor testimony, military representatives argued that independent reviews confirmed that allegations of MDV abuse were handled appropriately (O'Donnell et al., 2023b). Victim-survivors and newsagents countered these statements and were able to make further claims that some action was often only taken in severe cases like incidents resulting in a

victim's death (CBS Evening News, 2020a; Horton, 2020). In some instances, and even when extreme MDV outcomes occurred, newsagents wrote or stated that the military refrained from providing direct comments or any statements about extreme cases or other MDV matters (O'Donnell et al., 2020). These findings suggested that significant challenges remain in translating institutional changes into tangible support for MDV victim-survivors.

The evaluation of mainstream media data sources revealed that media coverage of MDV habitually focused on specific branches (the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard). In some cases, data revealed differences in how each branch addressed these issues. The U.S. Army was the focus of 22 stories, while the Marine Corps and Air Force each had eight, whereas the Navy was mentioned in three news reports. A military duty subset, a National Guardsman, was mentioned in one instance (WBIR Channel 10, 2023). Zero stories attributed MDV incidents to members of the Space Force, Coast Guard, or Reserve Forces/Reservist members. However, 17 data sources involved female veterans' experiences. Media reporters did not explicitly address or acknowledge an uneven focus across different military branches. By the numbers, 41 of the 108 media data sources specifically connected failures in supporting MDV victim-survivors to a particular military branch over overall service status (e.g., active, guard, or reserve) or, generically, an individual's military affiliation.

Theme 3: Media Sources Highlight That Current MDV Training is Inadequate

Data pulls for this study identified 37 sources that discussed training as a potential solution to MDV. Data source agents in both the U.S. government and mainstream media

revealed that domestic abuse training had been developed. For example, a United States Government Accountability Office (2021) report highlighted that “the military services have developed domestic abuse training for key personnel that meets Department of Defense requirements” (p. 1, para. 2). However, one internal U.S. government recommendation reported in a news data source was that “additional guidance or sample training materials for installation-level commander and senior enlisted adviser domestic abuse training” should be provided (Jowers, 2021, para. 25). These statements are fragments of information without confirmation of implementation, action, or resolve in the case of MDV training; however, they provided exploratory insight into foundational educational matters from a mainstream media data source perspective.

Criticisms from MDV program support members from within the military have also pointed to inconsistencies in MDV training and support roles, particularly within the FAP. According to one U.S. government internal FAP representative, training for MDV support personnel is not standardized, and employees working under the umbrella of the FAP are allowed to choose which training courses they would or would not like to take, and these individuals dictate their own training schedules (Kippert, 2019). The same source noted that FAP’s focus is often on “treating the offender instead of the victim,” causing dissatisfaction among victim-survivors (Kippert, 2019, para. 15). Other impacted individuals reported that their “abuse was downplayed” and that they were discouraged from formally reporting incidents to agencies like the FAP to protect the careers of their abusers (Kippert, 2019, para. 3). Internal support-related personnel issues such as

voluntary FAP training may be an underlying indication of why the problem of MDV continues.

Data outcomes revealed a connection between location-specific training and MDV. Data revealed that some military training sites have been associated with higher risks for MDV amongst some military groups—particularly among young, unmarried, and lower-ranking personnel (Vanden Brook, 2023). A 2018 report included in a media data source contained information that certain groups, like women, were at a greater risk of being sexually assaulted at training bases, leading to calls for more targeted support initiatives for identifiable demographic groups (Vanden Brook, 2023). A different news agency reported that, in response to MDV victim-survivor subpopulation concerns, the Department of the Air Force committed to hiring new nonmilitary civilian staff as a means to enhance education and training efforts to support MDV victim-survivors (O'Donnell et al., 2023). Enhancements to MDV training initiatives may aid in providing targeted support to victim-survivor subgroups like women or lower ranking personnel at certain training sites.

Theme 4: Time Delays With Military Processes/Mandates of DV Exist

Study data revealed that delays in holding individuals accountable when deployed, at home base locations, or by removing individuals in remote environments impacted the way that support was provided to MDV victim-survivors. Specifically, newsagents and U.S. Government House Armed Services Subcommittee members chastised military leaders for the slow pace at which MDV cases are handled (Martinez, 2021; Mcelhiney, 2023). For example, a CBS News investigation documented the case of

a U.S. Army Private who, after experiencing multiple SAs from multiple individuals in South Korea, faced an 82-day delay in being transferred for their safety (O'Donnell et al., 2020). It was relayed in the story that the Army's response was limited to acting against a single individual, resulting in an *other-than-honorable discharge*, a form of administrative punishment primarily affecting postservice benefits (Reid & Sims, 2024). After the Army Private MDV victim-survivor was moved to a new location, that individual took their own life by suicide (O'Donnell et al., 2020). The instance of the Army Private is only one example of how time delays have impacted victim-survivors.

Other examples of MDV victim-survivor impacts involve multiple case reviews simultaneously. That is, further evidence of delays emerged from a 2021 postmedia investigation into allegations of DV within the Air Force, where it took 2 years for the service to initiate a 90-day review of multiple victim-survivors' claims (Yilek, 2021). The resulting report from the DoD was not made public until 2023. The 90-day review report from the military did not substantiate any of the claims made by victim-survivors in news stories; instead, military inspectors attributed the failure to support/address MDV claims to an erosion of trust between support personnel like police investigators and victim-survivors (United States Department of Defense, 2023a). Despite official statements from the highest levels of personnel in the armed forces who emphasized that "domestic violence has no place in our Air and Space Forces," the time taken to address MDV victim-survivor allegations underscored the slow pace at which issues related to support are acknowledged (Watson, 2023, para. 5). Mainstream media data sources have

provided information as to how military leader statements do not match up with the time it takes for the armed services to make changes regarding U.S. MDV.

While high-level legislative actions have been taken to address MDV, such as the 2023 executive order transferring prosecutorial power away from military commanders, delays remain a concern. The executive order signed by the President in July 2023 did not take effect until the last month of 2023, explicitly excluding cases that arose before the December effective date (The White House, 2023b). Between 2020 and 2021, U.S. government audit reports contained statistics that there was a 13% rise in SA cases across all military branches, prompting the House Armed Services Subcommittee to express dissatisfaction with the military's reliance on "PowerPoint presentations" rather than substantive actions (13News Now, 2022). Assurances found in data source narratives were provided by high-ranking individuals within the DoD who promised that MDV reforms would be fully implemented by 2028 (Vanden Brook, 2023). Such long intervals in the MDV program and policy change reflect a multiyear delay in possibly delivering comprehensive support to victim-survivors.

Study data also illustrated that handling MDV cases within the military justice system reflected a lack of consistency, which further delayed providing support. For example, a DoD News (2023) data source contained information that certain crimes like SA would be subject to new prosecution rules starting in late 2023. However, that same data source report also showed that changes for prosecuting certain MDV subsets, like sexual harassment, would not take effect until January 2025 (DoD News, 2023). Explicitly, the White House press release read that "beginning January 1, 2025, special

trial counsel prosecutorial authority will expand to include sexual harassment cases,” noting that similar reform actions are already in place and were effective as of December 2023 (The White House, 2023b, para 12). Earlier letters regarding calls to action included a 2021 directive from the Secretary of Defense that publicly pled for congressional action to amend the UCMJ to include provisions for sexual harassment and DV cases (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2023). In this instance, it will take 4 years from the date of the Secretary of Defense letter to change the UCMJ. These delays are significant because internal, high-level personnel are making calls for action without foreseeable changes occurring on the horizon with regard to MDV, and as verified by future dates found in data source narratives.

The exact future year targets found within U.S. government-based data revealed that MDV reform will take years. This lag contrasted with media portrayals of military leaders claiming “quick” actions to address MDV within the ranks (O’Donnell et al., 2021c). In 2021, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, in part, penned the following statement and provided it to CBS News:

President Biden has placed an unprecedented priority on tackling this problem, and we've moved out quickly and deliberately to address it. I believe that bold action, commitment, and accountability are required, and that is exactly what we have, and will continue, to do. This is not a short-term problem and will not be solved by short-term strategies. (O’Donnell et al, 2021b, para. 13)

Study data illustrated that disparities related to timeliness currently exist between calls for mandate changes and military-wide implementation/change goals. These

intervals or gaps in time highlight another challenge in delivering timely and updated policy-backed support to U.S. MDV victim-survivors.

Themes for Research Question 2

Theme 5: U.S. Government Narratives/Videos and Media Stories/Broadcasts Related to DV Contain Jargon-Laden Language

According to study data, a precise language format or linguistic formula existed within certain instances of mainstream news media and military communications found on the internet. For example, media agents referenced “the Pentagon” in their narratives or video broadcasts. One journalist reported that “the Pentagon promised [victims] personally that they would take action” (CBS New York, 2023, para. 12). Other newsagent narratives included statements like “the Pentagon shouldn’t be allowed to police itself” (CBS Evening News, 2020, para. 12). The personification of the Pentagon was a common practice as the word appeared in 32 additional mainstream media data sources. Other data source agents made references to the Defense Secretary, Air Force or Navy Secretaries, and under or deputy secretaries; yet, the roles of these individuals were not defined, and where these individuals fell within the military hierarchy was not explained (Beck, 2016; C-SPAN, 2021; Forbes Breaking News, 2021). Similarly, media reports mentioned the DoD and the UCMJ without attributing any function or significance to either the DoD as a governing body or the UCMJ as a code of law.

As a result of emphasizing SA over other forms of DV, both media and government narratives displayed inconsistencies in how they referred to or addressed DV or instances thereof. The analysis of coded data revealed that terms such as “sexual

violence,” “relationship abuse,” “intimate partner violence,” and “domestic abuse” were used variably across a majority of data sources. For instance, a Department of Veterans Affairs data source defined IPV to include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2023). Media data source narratives/broadcasts did not contain explanations or definitions of variable DV terms. With regard to this study, defining MDV and associated subsets was more frequent in U.S. government data sources. For example, this frequency was evidenced by U.S. government data-coded outcomes that included 445 references to physical abuse and 38 related to psychological abuse in narratives/transcripts in one instance. As such, some categories had more codes; however, other minor code references like psychological abuse were still relevant to the thematic discussion.

Headlines at the forefront of data source news stories did not always match the content of the narratives. For example, despite producing 4,964 codes related to DV specifically and 3,140 codes unambiguously about SA, headlines often used the words SA as the draw-in focal point over broader terms like *domestic violence*. One story titled *Pentagon Chief supports removing chain-of-command from sexual assault cases* included main body narrative content and information pertaining to DV and other crimes like murder that the newsagent did not capture within the headline (Martinez, 2021). Similarly, a video titled *Domestic Violence PRO HD_Army Ver* uploaded to YouTube by the Blanchfield Army Community Hospital (2011b) was geared towards MDV training. Nevertheless, the headline did not convey that military personnel training was the goal of the video. These inconsistencies were also found in government communications like a

DoD press release titled *Sexual Assault Now Tried Outside Military Chain-of-Command*, which included a broader discussion of other serious crimes and inclusive of DV (Department of Defense News, 2023, Headline). Despite a difference in the number of study codes related to DV, misalignment between headlines and content was prevalent with media and government sources that skewed the public-facing narrative pertaining to MDV and affiliated subsets like SA. Also, since these stories were published on the internet, headlines could have possibly been more inclusive since print media is known to contain a character count limitation.

Theme 6: Conflicts Related to MDV Investigations are Commonplace

Study data revealed gaps in the military's response to formally reporting MDV, particularly in the actions taken by military police or designated internal investigators. According to data sources, victim-survivors often lacked awareness that military law enforcement was not required to engage in what are understood to be standard investigative procedures such as collecting evidence, conducting interviews, or taking photographs (Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, 2019, para. 15). A 2019 U.S. government internal audit and data source review of 219 MDV cases showed that 91% of investigations did not adhere to evidentiary standards that could have assisted in prosecuting alleged perpetrators, and military investigators did not justify process omissions (Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, 2019). Despite internal findings, military representatives, including the Deputy Director of Security Forces (military police leadership), maintained that investigative actions are not formally mandated by the DoD (within DoD Instruction 6400.06); as such, they are not required to

be undertaken by armed forces personnel (Jowers, 2019). The variance between what MDV victim-survivors expect to happen when they make reports to military law enforcement and what actually happens during the investigative process based on written, governing directives is an important contrast to note as it relates to ongoing questions surrounding military-based DV action.

In a similar arena, data showed that investigator actions contradicted existing guidelines outlining military officials' responsibilities. For example, JAs assigned to prosecute DV cases are instructed to coordinate with law enforcement at the alleged crime scene during the investigative and evidence-gathering phases; however, there is not a requirement to collect evidence (Department of Defense Instruction Number 6400.03, 2023, p. 50, para. 5). Despite the existence of published/public directives, a data source internal audit uploaded to the internet reported widespread noncompliance within the DoD inclusive of failures to process 28% of crime scenes, a failure to report 22% of MDV incidents to FAP personnel, and criminal data were not delivered to external agencies like the FBI in 82% of cases (Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, 2019). In response to degraded compliance numbers, DoD leadership planned to issue a supplemental letter encouraging adherence to DoDI 6400.06 instead of making official updates to the mandates outlining mandatory personnel actions (Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, 2019). Thus, when published directives do exist outlining mandatory personnel actions for those support members directly involved with MDV cases, data sources suggested that required actions are still not followed.

Other data sources cited that deficient investigative protocols may have implications for MDV victim-survivors and in the public realm as it related to the safety of external civilian communities. A media data source report by Yilek (2022) highlighted concerns about how the military's handling of SA and harassment affected national security. Also, according to Jowers (2019), things such as failed fingerprint data submissions for FBI database record retention have allowed MDV perpetrators to leave military service and legally purchase firearms that a documented DV criminal designation would otherwise preclude them from owning. Furthermore, data sources indicated that these failures undermine trust in the military's ability to support victim-survivors, as reflected in the reports of delays and refusals to cooperate/agree with external criminal investigations conducted by civilian authorities (Alvarez & Sontag, 2008). One of the highest in the military rank structure and a top military official, the Army's Secretary, did not directly address the concerns found in media data sources; instead, the Secretary emphasized efforts to rebuild trust between soldiers and the military hierarchy of supervisors known as the chain-of-command (Yilek, 2022). Specifically, Army Secretary Wormuth responded that efforts have been made "to show our soldiers that they can trust the chain-of-command to look out for them" (Yilek, 2022, para. 8). Because military leaders would not directly comment on data source press accounts, it is unknown whether concerns raised by media agents or victim-survivors are substantive.

Such gaps in internal support systems have led some victim-survivors to seek assistance outside military channels in the form of external civilian authorities like local

police officers. Despite assurances from military leaders, some victim-survivors reported that they chose to bypass military reporting altogether in favor of civilian police investigations due to a lack of confidence in military processes (KSAT 12, 2018). In some cases, victim-survivors' actions were not supported by military support members as there often existed conflicts between military police findings and civil investigations whereby the military investigative unit disputed the findings of external law enforcement, or they would not uphold outside civilian court orders like restraining orders (Alvarez & Sontag, 2008). In one instance for an MDV victim-survivor, "a one-paragraph summary of the [military] review seemed to discount the findings of the civilian police investigation" (Alvarez & Sontag, 2008, para. 1). Also, official guidance found in data sources for this study outlined that military authorities should

ensure that the person seeking the MPO shall be advised that the MPO is not enforceable by civilian authorities off base and that victims desiring protection off base are advised to seek a civilian protective order. (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program, DoD Directive (DoDD) 6495.01, 2021, p. 12, para. 1)

Data sources outlined the dynamics between two different judicial support systems, which study data showed were not in alignment with DV matters.

Summary

Study findings based on both media and U.S. government data sources were abundant. Overall, 193 data sources were selected for this study using purposeful sampling and by following Kaefer et al.'s (2015) guidance on using NVivo qualitative

data analysis software to mine data on the internet and found within the resulting news articles/broadcasts and U.S. government narratives/videos. Braun and Clarke's (2012) guidance on thematic analysis of internet-derived extant data, in the form of codes and categories, was used to answer both research questions and resulted in overarching themes. Six themes were identified, although public messaging differed between media and U.S. government data source narratives/transcripts. Those themes included existing institutional/systemic MDV victim-survivor support barriers, media data sources served as a public platform for survivors to share their stories, a mainstream media agent proclamation that current MDV training is inadequate, time delays exist with military processes/mandate changes, all data source narratives/transcripts included jargon-laden language, and various conflicts related to MDV investigations also exist. As illustrated in this chapter, codes, categories, and subsequent thematic findings related to victim-survivor support or portrayal and the use of jargon or other language in news stories/broadcasts and U.S. government documents/video transcripts answered both research questions for this study. Moreover, some of these findings align with agenda-setting theory, further discussed with study conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative generic design study, I explored mainstream media and accessible government content related to the depiction of U.S. MDV victimization to discover how public relations practitioners portrayed survivor support and whether those narratives/transcripts, at minimum, provided awareness or some other agenda. Study findings included the following six themes:

- Theme 1: Systemic/institutional barriers to MDV victim-survivor support exist.
- Theme 2: Media sources serve as public platforms for MDV victim-survivors to share their stories.
- Theme 3: Media sources highlight that current MDV training is inadequate.
- Theme 4: Time delays with military processes/mandates of DV exist.
- Theme 5: U.S. government narratives/videos and media stories/broadcasts related to DV contain jargon-laden language.
- Theme 6: Conflicts related to MDV investigations are commonplace.

In this chapter, I will explain how the themes do or do not align with the theoretical framework and the literature in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes discussion of limitations, recommendations for further research, and implications.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

Theme 1: Systemic/Institutional Barriers to MDV Victim-Survivor Support Exist

Theme 1-based data for this study partially aligned with the current literature. Systemic/institutional barriers derived from the data included retaliation in the form of career repercussions, a culture of silent acceptance, internal sexism, and ineffective program management of MDV programs funded at over \$1 billion since 2015 (O'Donnell et al., 2021d). Current literature focused on the specific types of abuses that MDV victim-survivors experienced, whereas study data sources were more focused on other outcomes like underlining sexual abuse and perpetrator accountability (Al Jazeera English, 2022, CBS Evening News, 2021a). Also, media data sources reported that some survivors sought compensation from the military based on different impacts like PTSD, issues with investigations, and promises made by high-level authorities leading to what is known as betrayal trauma or institutional betrayal (10 Tampa Bay, 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2023). Given some headlines however, media agents in data sources may exaggerate the nature of the abuse and inadequacies of program funding rather than focusing on addressing systematic and institutional barriers to survivor support.

The literature in Chapter 2 related to betrayal trauma and institutional betrayal aligned with the findings of this study. Researchers like Monteith et al. (2022) confirmed that faults in support from the institution eroded trust and caused actual harm for survivors of MDV. Similarly, suicide was also noted as an outcome in some media data sources for this study (Nieberg, 2024; O'Donnell et al., 2020; Veterans Health Administration, 2020). As such, this aligned with Gómez and Freyd's (2019) research showing that 20 suicide risk factors existed for female veterans experiencing betrayal trauma and who have also experienced IPV. Overall, some overlapping institutional

barriers in the form of health outcomes existed between the current literature and the data derived from the internet sources used for this study.

Data-driven thematic outcomes connected to Theme 1 aligned with an agenda-setting theory facet that involved political views. This supported Hügél et al.'s (1989) research that connected agenda-setting theory to political principles. Individuals within data sources supported that, at an organizational level, a status quo agenda that is the nature of military life existed due to a fixed hierarchical structure and cultural, institutionally ingrained beliefs that blurred the lines between work and home life. As embedded in media data source narratives and in direct support of Hügél et al.'s research, these representations politically marginalized the MDV victim-survivor population. For example, and within the boundaries of study data, one media agent reported that the Secretary of the Army ordered an investigation into what was identified as a *command culture* at the center of 12 months of increased suicides, deaths, and MSA complaints (Diaz et al., 2022). Another data source included information that MDV-related deaths were indicative of a culture that diminished and ignored SA/sexual harassment allegations whereby men pressured females to remain silent or face consequences that ranged from indifference to a hostile work environment (Horton, 2020). As verified by media data sources, military culture derived from systemic occurrences and institutional norms created a partisan marginalization agenda related to the military organization and individuals in the context of MDV.

Theme 2: Media Sources Serve as Public Platforms for MDV Survivors to Share Their Stories

Theme 2 aligned with the current literature in Chapter 2. Victim-survivor testimonies were present in a majority of mainstream media data source narratives/broadcasts. Individuals provided first-hand testimonials and ranged from former military members to intimate partners and spouses to other family members like parents of victim-survivors (Arizona's Family, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Inside Edition, 2020). Based on the different backgrounds of these individuals, study findings confirmed Femi-Ajao et al.'s (2020) research that certain minority groups, like some subsets of active duty members (those of a lower rank), military spouses, or intimate partners, are at a higher risk for abuse based on cultural, community, and other socio-economic factors (Vanden Brook, 2023). U.S. military data sources also included demographic information on those most impacted by MDV (women, young, unmarried, and lower-ranking personnel); however, Kolbe and Büttner (2020) claimed that DV is not a problem for just one gender or group of individuals. Only the gender facet of Kolbe and Büttner's research aligned with this study, as men were not often highlighted as victim-survivors over being MDV perpetrators (Couric, 2009; Haelle, 2019; Veterans Health Administration, 2020; WBIR Channel 10, 2023). Many MDV survivors, and individuals adjacent to the survivors, spoke about how perpetrators were mainly male.

Theme 2 was linked to agenda-setting theory whereby mainstream media agents did have an agenda to influence members of the military in some way. This is in direct support of Raga's (2013) research in which mass communication liaisons were found to have had influence over individuals or organizations in some way based on information released to the public. Specifically, mainstream media members interviewed MDV

victim-survivors and published quotes from those interviews in news stories or within broadcasts on the internet. Given the minutiae found within these stories, the media agenda seemed to be focused on influencing certain government actors to take notice of the intricacies of matters of MDV and act or respond somehow.

One data source published after interviewing dozens of individuals by Jeltsen et al. (2019) included a statement that victim-survivor stories had common themes; notably, the systemic nature of persisting MDV, members within the DoD not taking desired action or MDV allegations seriously, and MDV elimination policies dating back to 2007 that victim-survivors were saying are outdated/ineffective. Supplementary or following the publishing of government audit reports, news media data sources ejected certain facts from those assessments to use in news stories as a means to evoke a response. This agenda-setting theory facet was also supported by CBS News over the course of multiple years of stories whereby Yielk (2021) confirmed that following multiple news reports on MDV, the Air Force Secretary ordered an investigation into victim-survivor accounts within previous stories. Given there existed a contrast between victim-survivor stories found in news media data sources and DoD actions, mainstream media public avenues served as a platform for victim-survivors to share the specifics of their stories within the underlying media agenda of influencing government actors to take notice.

Theme 3: Media Sources Highlight That Current MDV Training is Inadequate

Theme 3 did not support information on training initiatives included in Chapter 2. As confirmed by current literature and data sources for this study, agencies, mandates, interventions, and trained individuals within the armed forces system do currently exist to

support SA victim-survivors. For example, Htun and Jensenius (2020) research revolved around one initiative known as bystander intervention training for military and employed members of the VA Administration. With this training and others, family members do not receive information on how to get MDV support and may not have access to these, or other resources typically located on restricted access military installations and this training may only be applicable to more overt situations occurring outside of the private home where DV typically occurs (Hodges et al., 2022; Relyea et al., 2020). Chapter 2 of this narrative did not include information pertaining to MDV training specifically, even so, with the limited information found in peer-reviewed journals, there was a mismatch with study data outcomes.

It was also noted in Chapter 2 that different military branches have different programs like the Air Force SAPR or the Army SHARP program. Researchers previously cited like Georgia Salivar et al.'s (2020) confirmed that, since initiatives vary by locality, their effectiveness could not be entirely evaluated. The latter supported media data source information whereby the FAP was the only program included in narratives/broadcasts and specialized MDV training for that program was found to be inadequate per an internal employee as well as statements made by MDV victim-survivors within media data sources (Kippert, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2021a; O'Donnell et al., 2021b; O'Donnell et al., 2021c; O'Donnell et al., 2023). Alternatively, a 2018 report included in a media data source contained information that certain groups, like women, were at a greater risk of being sexually assaulted at training bases, leading to calls for more targeted support initiatives for identifiable demographic groups (Vanden Brook, 2023). MDV training

initiatives do exist; however, as informed by mainstream media-based study data, there exists a mismatch between training initiatives identified in current literature and Theme 3.

Theme 3 did align with agenda-setting theory. Media data source agents and U.S. government data source representatives conveyed an underlying agenda focused on both individual influence and organization-wide change in terms of education, action, and awareness of MDV, but underlying messaging contrasted one another. This is in direct support of Julien's (2020) research whereby agenda-setting theory application confirmed that the mainstream media set the tone for what the public consumed informationally while other matters were ignored. In the media data source realm for this study, news stories included information that high-level military personnel have advocated for legislation to reform the military justice system as opposed to training, education, new system process/support programs, personnel accountability, audits, or other initiatives to combat MDV (CBS News 1999; CBS Evening News, 2021a; CBS Mornings, 2021; CBS New York, 2023). Calls for legislative action specifically related to statistics reported in internal audits whereby the Air Force lacked specialized prosecutors in 94% of cases; the Army/Navy failed to follow the letter of the law in 59% of cases, and the Marines did not adhere to published guidelines in 30% of reported cases of MDV (CBS Evening News, 2021a). Specific to training, there was a federal law in place when MDV crimes were reported between 2018 and 2020, but trained special victim prosecutors went unassigned in nearly two-thirds of all reported instances of MDV (CBS Evening News, 2021a). In one story, it was noted that the military would not comment on those statistics, but that

they would be taking some kind of action to tackle SA specifically within the ranks (CBS Evening News, 2021b). In general and in contrast to U.S. government data source information, derived media-based data was related to internal MDV faults individually within the ranks, specific military departments, and with organization-wide in programs like the FAP or the JA legal program over what US government agents promoted in terms of educating the force within their contrasting agenda-based communiqués.

Theme 4: Time Delays With Military Processes/Mandates of DV Exist

Study findings were partially in alignment with limited but current literature surrounding all-things timing-related to MDV. Media data sources for this study established that delays existed with the military hierarchy's acknowledgment of the issue and subsequent actions regarding MDV. Chapter 2 included research from Babut and Moraru (2021) that explained that the military sector is exempt from some health, law, and safety standards where the organization is allowed to make and abide by their own rules using the lawbook known as the UCMJ. Within the military code or exclusive set of laws, and despite study findings showing that a media-driven public MDV *discussion* on the internet had been occurring for over 20 years now and since 1999, DV became an official criminal offense as of 2018 (Shane, 2018). McCabe et al., 2020 research also confirmed that the SA subset of MDV was formally introduced as a crime in 2004. As such, there existed a 19-year gap for MDV to become a recognized crime and a 5-year lag after initial media reports were published for SA to become illegal for military members. Possibly, as a direct result of delayed military processing/engagement, media follow-up stories took 1 to 3 years to publish in some instances, and within those

subsequent narratives, newsagents or victim-survivors claimed that little to no U.S. government action had taken place regarding MDV (C. Todd Lopez, Karen Jowers, Mike Gooding, Rachel S. Cohen, Patricia Kime, Rachel S. Cohen, and Norah O'Donnell's Team; O'Donnell et al., 2023). Victim-survivor statements were in contrast to commentary from high-level U.S. government spokespersons stating that they or the DoD were taking criminal matters of MDV seriously and had acted promptly (O'Donnell et al., 2021c). As another example, President Biden made an official proclamation at the beginning of 2021 related to SA prevention and awareness; however, a presidential-level change to the UCMJ regarding the handling of MDV, SA, and other criminal offenses tried internally like murder did not go into effect until the December 2023 (The White House, 2021; The White House, 2023a). Given breaks in U.S. government action and linked media reports on MDV, this thematic element for this study does match some previously located current literature that confirmed it does take time for the military to act in some way.

Data used to support Theme 4 aligned with a multifaceted agenda-setting theory component. Specifically, Asogwa et al. (2020) outlined that a cornerstone of agenda-setting is that an agenda ignited public debate or action and influenced how/when the government prioritized, created, or implemented specific policies over others. Within data sources used for this study, it appeared that media agents specifically emphasized when members of the DoD claimed reform would happen relative to interpersonal crime happening within the U.S. military. As an example, initially, a U.S. government data source reported that prosecutorial provisions were already in existence and covered how

SA was prosecuted within the military (The White House, 2023a). Within mainstream media data sources, however, specific portions of that same White House press release were embedded in narratives/broadcasts seemingly purposely to show that U.S. government MDV-related actions had not been prioritized accordingly. Specifically, even with SA provisions in place and operational in real-time, data sources underscored the fact that sexual harassment is not being covered under existing processes until a much later date, January 1, 2025 (Al Jazeera, 2023; Copp, 2023; Nieberg, 2023; The White House, 2023a). As such, media agents made specific mentions of dates derived from the original U.S. government data source for a specific purpose—an agenda that showed how matters of MDV are prioritized.

Research Question 2

Theme 5: U.S. Government Narratives/Videos and Media Stories/Broadcasts Related to DV Contain Jargon-Laden Language

The literature review for this study did not include current literature specifically related to journalistic language or military jargon; however, certain connections can still be made. For instance, researchers like Kroon and van der Meer (2021) were cited in Chapter 2 as a means to illustrate the importance of language in the overall evaluation of external organizations like that of the military and their connection with mainstream media reporting. As described within Naser's (2020) research, the use of certain language techniques were important considerations for this study. Specifically, it was noted that U.S. government data source agents used acronyms not defined or commonly used by non-military individuals. For example, an individual within multiple public service

videos stated to contact the ACS FAP, but “ACS” and “FAP” were not defined within the videos (Blanchfield Army Community Hospital, 2011a; Blanchfield Army Community Hospital, 2011b). Additionally, media-based data source agents used terms like “Pentagon,” “Secretary,” and “DoD” interchangeably while attributing required action to matters of MDV, but again, those terms/military associations were not defined (Beck, 2016; C-SPAN, 2021; CBS Evening News, 2020b; CBS New York, 2023; Forbes Breaking News, 2021). As such, media and U.S. government data sources did confirm information related to the use of language and techniques like the use of acronyms and jargon within current literature.

Related to how jargon or other messaging was utilized, agenda setting appeared in study data in several formats. These occurrences supported Mercadal’s (2021) agenda-setting theory research that confirmed that some agencies sanctioned and sensationalized certain crimes while disregarding others, possibly leading to fear and public prejudice against individuals or entities. Specifically, and in addition to jargon and the disproportionate use of MDV terminology like SA in headlines, media data source agents did appear to dramatize MDV through the use of narrative techniques. In some cases, media agents changed how a U.S. government statement or press release was originally written and the implications of what was being conveyed. For example, within a story titled *The military is changing how it handles sexual assault cases. Will it be enough?*, the newsagent discussed certain facets of the previously reported President Biden’s executive order with some journalistic language/freedoms and stated that “this executive order creates a team of special prosecutors that are going to be called the Offices of the

Special Trial Counsel. It moves some authority over sexual assault, rape, and murder cases to this new team” (Barrón-López, 2023, para 6.). In contrast, the original White House Press narrative included the following statement: “The Executive Order transfers key decision-making authorities from commanders to specialized, independent military prosecutors in cases of sexual assault, domestic violence, murder, and other serious offenses by amending the Uniform Code of Military Justice” (The White House, 2023b, para. 1). As evidenced by narrative changes that deviated from original messaging and other headlines, there was a clear agenda whereby media agents focused on SA in headlines over all other forms of MDV or MDV overall.

Further use of specific language conflicts existed between what mainstream media data sources outlined as substantive issues surrounding MDV. For example, one story headline claimed that *100% of military sexual assault survivors feel ‘trapped,’ have suicidal ideations*; however, the narrative states;... “and because of the nature of military life, sexual assault is different than it is in civilian society, even though civilian victims also experience suicidal ideation at higher rates...” (Schifrin, 2021, para. 12). In all, and as evidenced by study data derived from mainstream media data sources, headlines did not match published narratives and instances of MDV were dramatized whereby newsagents did not substantiate claims made in headlines or within news stories. As such, freedoms with the use of exaggerative language over a more inclusive approach to certain public matters like MDV were found to be an agenda that could possibly lead to fear or prejudice against military individuals or the U.S. government.

Theme 6: Conflicts Related to MDV Investigations are Commonplace

Theme 6 did not completely align with the literature or with agenda-setting theory. Since current literature on MDV was limited, restricted or unrestricted reporting channels were a major focal point in Chapter 2 of this narrative. Within data sources for this study, media agents did not state whether victim-survivors speaking out in news stories submitted a restricted or unrestricted report through military channels.

Nonetheless, media data sources confirmed that victim-survivors who *reported* or spoke up about MDV were shamed and retaliated against, their careers were impacted, and they were encouraged not to talk about MDV due to the military's culture of silence (Robin, 2022; WUSA9, 2017). On a different scale, Gibson-Fall (2021) research confirmed that other barriers to reporting may have included internal military politics like perpetrator seniority (real or perceived immunity for offenders at higher levels within the ranks), a mismatch or inconsistent blending of a civil-military response, capacity issues related to what the military system can handle, conflicts with the organization's mission, and other occurrences like the military's inability to adjust to quickly change or adapt to evolving public health matters such as DV.

In one smaller instance, however, data sources for this study did support Gibson-Fall's previous research in terms of conflicts between a civilian and military response to MDV in terms of how the military handles investigations and other things like training, process discrepancies, and restraining orders (Alvarez & Sontag, 2008; Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, 2019; Jowers, 2019; KSAT 12, 2018; Yilek, 2022).

Also, Jordan and Pritchard (2021) research confirmed in their external study that 63.6% of civilian DV victim-survivors surveyed would not report if *reporting* was mandatory. As such, given such a high number in the civil sector, perhaps MDV victim-survivors avoid mandated, the formal restricted or unrestricted reporting channels outlined in Chapter 2 altogether. For this particular theme and regarding agenda-setting theory, current literature and study data were not truly in alignment.

Limitations of the Study

As I have now confirmed in the data collection phase, the internet was a complicated and dynamic digital environment within which to mine extant data from U.S. government and media narratives/video transcripts (Farchi et al., 2019). After conducting research using five different search engines over the course of 4 months, limitations related to internet research on sensitive topics involving vulnerable populations can now also be expanded upon, and more information can be added to the limitations narrative portion of this study based on applied study practices. Specifically, some of the key challenges and limitations encountered in the final research process were significant enough to be outlined herein.

Study limitations occurred in the execution phase during data collection and analysis. These newfound limits included secondary, archival data reliability and validity. This was an important consideration given that online research relies on self-reported data, which can be biased or inaccurate, particularly with sensitive topics (Aguinis et al., 2019). With media stories especially, information was “data masked,” whereby confirming the identity of participants is more difficult online, increasing the risk of

fraudulent responses (Fronek & Briggs, 2018; Iufereva, 2023). Also, online samples taken by newsagents may not accurately represent the broader vulnerable population, leading to possibly skewed results (Parasidis, 2019). Moreover, vulnerable populations may have limited or no access to the internet (or newsagent contacts in this case), excluding them from public *conversation* in either the U.S. government or media realm (Benda et al., 2020). In all, these limitation additions were not considered prior to data collection; however, they all have now been appropriated for this study.

By extension, and with consideration for video broadcasts or uploaded videos, strictly narrative *interaction* with victim-survivors may have lacked certain contextual and nonverbal essential cues that might have aided in the understanding of the complex social problem that is MDV. For example, due to not having the ability to interact face-to-face with MDV victim-survivors, I found it challenging to ensure cultural sensitivity, build rapport, and apply the required qualitative interviewing appropriateness (Horsfall et al., 2021). Also, researching sensitive topics involving vulnerable populations over the internet required more considerations for ethical, methodological, and practical challenges (Araiza, 2019). That is, while online research offered the potential for collecting a vast amount of diverse data, these benefits lacked balance when thrust against a personal need to protect and respect the MDV victim-survivor population and their well-being—as seen with comments that included detailed accounts of MDV from community-based victim-survivors just below videos uploaded to YouTube. As such, I attempted to employ rigorous protocols with minor changes to my data collection strategy to ensure data integrity, data source collection, data import into NVivo, and ethical

compliance to combat some of these other limitations that were unknown prior to collecting data for this study.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on data points I obtained from mainstream media and U.S. government sources, a significant amount of information related to U.S. MDV existed on the internet; however, as of this writing, U.S. MDV still needs to be more widely researched. As such, recommendations for further research based on the study process application and overarching results should be considered. For one, I suggest a different qualitative approach, such as phenomenological research, where MDV victim-survivors are interviewed, and first-hand, lived experiences are evaluated. I am recommending this because media agents may or may not have interviewed a representative MDV victim-survivor population sample out of what one CBS news agent claimed in 2021 were over 100,000 reported cases of MDV since 2015 (O'Donnell et al., 2021; Ting et al., 2023). Alternatively, U.S. government agencies delegated authority to audit research agencies working under Congressional guidance and utilized in-house surveys or data involving different affiliated instances or subsets of DV in the U.S. military. Explanations of explicit processes undertaken by media agents or U.S. government agencies to interview or survey victim-survivors were not fully disclosed. As such, in the realm of qualitative research, a more deliberate sample-base, full disclosure of research-verified data collection strategies, and the application of specific qualitative interviewing techniques might be required to get complete information regarding what MDV victim-survivors experience.

To ensure the U.S. MDV victim-survivor population is represented fully, I would also suggest a quantitative study of a more inclusive range of persons not covered under the purview of current DoD policy or the UCMJ like intimate partners and significant others (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program, DoD Directive (DoDD) 6495.01, 2021; Military OneSource, n.d.; Olszewski, 2019). Doing so would be in direct support of comments that were posted directly below published media videos on YouTube that appeared to support messaging from victim-survivors in U.S. MDV-related stories; however, there was visibly no engagement from media representatives, U.S. government agents, or other support representatives like mental health professionals offered to these independent MDV victim-survivor commentators via a formal response or a message from an entity representative offering helping services. Additionally, as confirmed by current literature, as a distinct, vulnerable population, individuals are less likely to report MDV crimes—mainly while actively serving in or presently affiliated with the armed forces (Guttieri, 2021; Richard & Milloy, 2020). As such, I would recommend that the suggested future research interactions be conducted outside the confines of service ties or not close to/within the military environment.

Finally, researchers have extensively supported auditing DV processes and programming. For instance, in a meta-analysis involving the identical topic of U.S. MDV, secondary data-driven conclusions demonstrated that further research is needed to influence social change actions surrounding prevention, communication, and overall management of MDV support networks consisting of all types of persons and programs (Kwan et al., 2020). So, in direct support of Kwan et al.'s (2020) research and findings

for this study, a recommendation would be to survey victim-survivors to see if taking the commander away from the judicial process made any difference as a direct result of President Biden's executive order pertaining to U.S.-based MDV that was signed into law and enforceable as of December 2023. Given that many people have been impacted by MDV, even broadly, I did have the above-recommended additional pathways for the larger research community.

Implications

Study-based outcomes support implications for positive social change on different levels. In the individual and family realm, individuals and families could benefit from this research. Data supported that intimate partners such as significant others, boyfriends, girlfriends, or individuals within other dating/non-dating relationship designations coupling with military members may be missing from statistics and mandates related to MDV; hence, why the mainstream media internet platform may still be the best option for the victim-survivors to have their voices heard. As a limitation to support, these individuals generally do not have restricted base access that would grant them admission to dedicated, in-person support services for victim-survivors and their civilian/non-military status may prohibit them from being eligible for victim services such as the FAP like married spouses would. These individuals may also not be aware of all available resources as they often live and operate outside of the direct military environment. Based on U.S. MDV victim-survivor testimonies derived from mainstream media data sources for this study, expanding the definition of military family to include intimate partners, significant others, and life partners like media outlets located by this

study have done, could be imperative to making a difference for all manner of individuals connected to U.S. MDV. Furthermore, additional designations/person classifications may become increasingly important given the growing recognition of common-law marriages (Raković, 2022). Mainstream media data sources confirmed that more and more victim-survivors are speaking up about their MDV experiences and advocating for better support for everyone overall; however, not all individuals are being supported/recognized by the U.S. government, so testimony in news stories may still be needed/should be encouraged and based on the number of times a diverse group of MDV victim-survivors were cited within news data sources.

A select few U.S. government data sources included first-hand MDV victim-survivor accounts. C-SPAN (2018) broadcasted multiple House Armed Services Subcommittee on military personnel hearings on the issue of DV/child abuse, where survivors pushed for legal action against their abusers and advocated for more rigorous investigations and prosecutions (United States House Armed Services Committee, 2019; United States House Armed Services Committee, 2021). In such cases where more survivors shared their stories on these broadcasts, continued survivor efforts could lead to more significant legal precedents and more vigorous enforcement of existing laws because the information is being provided directly to legislators—senators, congressional representatives, and other government officials. Although not as abundant as news source interviewees, multiple individuals lobbied for legislative changes in this case. They also called for better support services, such as counseling, legal aid, and relocation support, to help victims recover and rebuild their lives. Continuing to highlight gaps in these services

could prompt the U.S. government and other support organizations to allocate more resources to these pivotal areas, and given that the current military program funding is upwards of \$1 billion, it has not solved the MDV problem. As seen in the data outcomes for this study, additional individuals coming forward to share their experiences through new/additional media narratives and videos could raise awareness, educate the public, drive systemic change, influence a more informed process, and possibly contribute to preventing future abuses.

Study data involving the specific language used/found in media stories, U.S. government narratives, or broadcasts could skew the public's understanding of the military's roles and capabilities. In the case of this study, the use of jargon or other language could specifically impact monetary/human resource allocation, policy decisions, and other efforts related to MDV. More specifically, in the realm of the media as an entity, highlighting the contributions of all branches and addressing a wider range of military issues could maybe provide a more comprehensive and balanced view of the military's functions and challenges related to MDV. The inconsistent use of military terminology, undefined attributions to the DoD or the Pentagon, the selective focus on certain branches (the Army mostly), or the promotion of extreme MDV cases (like murder) might lead to several adverse outcomes like public confusion on the matter and confusion as to who is responsible for various actions related to U.S. MDV.

Within the military realm, inconsistent language, such as the use of undefined/uncommon acronyms, may cause misunderstandings and errors in communication—mainly as different programs exist to help MDV victim-survivors in

each of the military departments (e.g., Army SHARP, Air Force SAPR). Based on study data, mainstream media agents seemed to hyper-focus on certain branches or issues like SA. Doing so may influence public and political support disproportionately, possibly leading to imbalanced resource distribution and policy decisions that do not reflect the needs of all military branches/MDV victim-survivors.

As an observation based on data outcomes after I conducted this study, military and mainstream media communicators should focus on maintaining clarity and precision regarding these matters in uploaded internet narratives/videos to mitigate these conflicts, specifically using standardized, consistent language/terminology and ensuring that all branches and issues receive appropriate attention in the public discourse. In conclusion, data source outcomes illustrated that the precise use of language in military communication and the media may be required for optimal public understanding of the complexities surrounding U.S. MDV. Addressing the conflicts arising from interchangeable terminology and selective focus might enhance transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making within the military and media—as well as highlight the positive influence both have on the broader society.

Freedom of the press is vital for ensuring that journalists can report on extreme abuse cases like MDV, resulting in death, without censorship or retaliation. Of note, zero media stories, narratives, or broadcasts preannounced that the subject was on DV and could be a trigger to sensitive populations or individuals impacted by DV. These warnings are often included in advocacy or educational settings outside of the journalism

arena. Researchers Udoakah et al. (2014) found in their study that press freedom came with specific responsibilities. Two of those responsibilities are outlined below:

Ethical Considerations: Journalists should adhere to ethical guidelines like obtaining consent from victims or their families before publishing sensitive information. They should also ensure accuracy and fairness in their reporting by only reporting the facts and quotes in context, verbatim, and per what was said by an interviewee.

Legal Protections: As is commonly understood, journalists are protected by laws like the U.S. Constitutional First Amendment that covers free press or free speech that safeguards their right to report on public interest issues, including extreme abuse cases. These protections are foundational in the possible pursuit of holding influential individuals and institutions like the U.S. government accountable.

Within the media field, there are several notable examples of how media agents have reported and should aim to report on sensitive topics based on the outcomes of this study. For example, in 2018, journalists reported on the Turpin family. Those reports detailed that 13 children were found living in horrific conditions (Karimi & Almasy, 2018). Media agents highlighted the severity of child abuse as a larger issue, and reporting led to a broader discussion on child welfare and the failures of social service entities. Media agents were careful to present the facts while respecting the privacy of the underaged victims, like blurring children's faces in press releases. In another instance, investigative journalism was pivotal in uncovering the widespread abuse perpetrated by former U.S.A. gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar. Detailed reporting by outlets like The Indianapolis Star brought the victims' stories to light, leading to Nassar's conviction and

significant reforms in sports organizations (Levenson, 2018). As seen in the previous two examples, influential and ethical journalism has been shown to profoundly impact society by spearheading awareness for a particular issue, forcing legal action, and fostering social change.

At the organizational level, and as evidenced in news media data sources, cultural changes are needed within the military realm. However, changing the military culture would be a complicated undertaking. Individuals promoting such changes would also alter deeply ingrained beliefs, behaviors, and norms within an institution that highly values tradition and structure that are rooted institutionally, individually, and systemically. Based on information from this study, several implications existed to change the culture to promote the lessening or eradication of MDV crimes altogether, including a top-down leadership approach with prescribed behavior changes throughout the chain-of-command. Other key strategies and steps might include ongoing education and training related to the desired culture of true “zero tolerance” for MDV criminal perpetrators, such as sensitivity training, leadership development at all levels, and an applied code of ethics related to these matters.

Finally, as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2020) prescribed, this study initiative may overarchingly support the specific social determinant of health (SDOH) under the pillar of providing a defined social and community context related to U.S. MDV. Support connections provided by media narratives/broadcasts and U.S. government messaging may or may not continue to fortify relationships between all actors in an individual’s life that impact overall health and well-being. Specifically, data

derived from this study supported the need for an awareness of military culture and the norms associated with the nature of military life that have impacted MDV victim-survivors. Data-derived awareness included an increased potential for victim-survivor isolation, cultural implications like silence, the lack of acknowledgment of individuals outside of lawful military spouses, and institutional/systemic processes that were found to have hindered support, such as the military chain-of-command. These considerations are based on supporting current SDOH research. For example, Shour et al. (2022) confirmed that context matters whereby deprivation indicators like those experienced given military affiliations and in this specific SDOH realm contributed to DV exposure and victimization. Girardi et al. (2023) considered women the foundation of any family's health. The researchers found that when individuals were exposed to chronic social and cultural stressors like military deployments or displacements, such factors negatively impacted SDOH health outcomes (Girardi et al., 2023). In all, this study may support the SDOH pillar by contributing to the defined context within which U.S. MDV victim-survivors live.

Conclusion

Narratives, documents, broadcasts, and videos as data sources found on the internet helped me explore the undertones of how specific themes and theory associations merged with study data that supported comparative or competing U.S. government and media agendas. In alignment with current literature and as illustrated throughout this study within U.S. government and media data sources, military life is inherently stressful, involves frequent relocations for things like training and potentially long deployments,

and includes exposure to combat, leading to mental health issues such as PTSD. Current research within the last 5 years has shown that these stressors and other military circumstances have been shown to exacerbate underlying issues and have contributed to MDV occurrences. Study data also supported these instances. Also, service members dealing with PTSD or other trauma-related conditions may struggle to disconnect from their *work self*, leading to violent behavior at home, thereby blurring the lines between the individual's work and home life.

As seen in study data outcomes and in statements from MDV victim-survivors, the hierarchical structure and patriarchal elements of military culture may have perpetuated the political power imbalances used to silence victims. The chain-of-command system has deterred victims from reporting abuse due to fear of retaliation or damaging their own or their partner's/MDV perpetrator's reputation/career. Additionally, the close-knit nature of military communities could lead to social ostracism of those who report DV to law enforcement or members of the chain-of-command through the restricted, unrestricted, military, or civilian reporting processes. The stigma associated with DV, particularly in the context of military masculinity and perceived weakness or lack of resilience, has prevented victim-survivors from seeking help; however, study data showed that some MDV victim-survivors are challenging those norms by telling their stories through public mainstream mass media channels. Regardless, MDV victim-survivor concerns about confidentiality, the MDV reporting process itself, and potential personal and professional repercussions have discouraged reporting according to data source-derived study outcomes.

As illustrated by study data, DV may be underreported in the military due to fear of retaliation or lack of trust in the chain-of-command, support processes, officials, or the institution—resulting in institutional betrayal or betrayal trauma. Alternatively, victim-survivors may worry about things like fear of not being believed or supported. Per what study data supported, the response to DV cases varied depending on supervisor initiatives and the support programs/resources/training available at different bases like the FAP, Air Force SAPR, or Army SHARP. These inconsistencies outlined in mainstream media data source narratives/broadcasts have possibly led to inadequate support and protection for victim-survivors, and in some cases, perpetrators may not be facing appropriate consequences for their roles in MDV according to what has been published on the internet by mainstream media agents.

Navigating the military justice system is not without complexity. Jurisdictional issues and differences in how evidence is or is not collected between military and civilian law enforcement have been shown to complicate investigations and prosecute U.S. MDV cases. Additionally, the military justice system supports members focused on maintaining discipline within a self-contained/self-applied legal code that is the UCMJ and, for the sake of the mission, can sometimes overshadow the needs of victims, possibly hindering accountability in these matters. According to data sources for this study, recent policy reforms and an executive order from President Biden aimed to enhance victims' protections and change legal processes in matters of MDV and other serious crimes. However, audits, surveys, or interviews on the one prosecutorial but presidential-level enhancement have yet to be conducted, and based on data source testimony from at least

50 MDV victim-survivors in media data sources, military programs like the FAP must continue to work to provide resources and support for families affected by DV.

Although still not as widely researched, DV in the military is a complex and pervasive issue that requires a multifaceted approach to address both a study-based and peer-reviewed literature confirmed social and research problem. The stress and trauma associated with military life, combined with the hierarchical and patriarchal culture, have been shown to contribute to the persistence of DV. Despite the challenges, both media and U.S. government data sources contained information related to ongoing efforts to overhaul policies, expand upon support services, increase training, and enhance reporting mechanisms as steps toward mitigating what has been labeled a silent epidemic. In all, findings derived from study data within mainstream media or U.S. government narratives/videos did support two research questions and agenda-setting theory, whereby media and U.S. government agents did embed an agenda within their narratives/videos and under the umbrella of six data-supported themes.

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