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## UDP Focus: Serving Those Who Serve

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# Serving those who serve:

## Stith's research on intimate partner violence helps military address issue

By Taylor Manges

Kansas State University distinguished professor Sandra Stith personifies the College of Human Ecology's motto: "In a world focused on things, we focus first on people."

The professor of marriage and family therapy is developing programs and tools to understand and treat intimate partner violence.

Working with the Department of Defense, Stith and her colleagues have developed a 15-item Intimate Partner Physical Injury risk assessment tool to assess the likelihood that an individual who has had an alleged incident of intimate partner violence will have a subsequent incident.

They tested a 56-item tool that included factors that increase partner violence risk among civilians and factors commonly experienced by military personnel — including deployment, post-traumatic stress disorder, frequent moves or isolation — to identify 15 items that most significantly predicted a subsequent incident.

Results of their research indicate that the 15-item tool is highly accurate in predicting a subsequent incident. The tool is currently being disseminated and mandated across all branches of service to enhance intimate partner risk assessment and management within the military.

The project's second phase is examining if different treatment programs help lower an individual's risk of a subsequent incident, which also may help determine what kind of treatment or what length of treatment is most beneficial in reducing risk.

"Currently, some bases design their own treatment programs," Stith said. "We might have some data to help decide if providers should be using a more standardized approach."

Stith credits the strong university-community relationship for providing opportunities for her to volunteer and make a difference while obtaining her master's degree and doctorate at Kansas State University.



"In a world focused on things, we focus first on people."

*College of Human Ecology motto*



These experiences inspired Stith to continue working in the community when she returned to Manhattan to join the K-State faculty. She serves as a board member at the Manhattan Regional Crisis Center.

"I am personally excited to serve at the Crisis Center, where I once volunteered, because I feel like it got me started," Stith said. "I was studying domestic violence in an office with data, but going out to work with victims and leading support groups for victims of violence gave me so much insight and credibility."

Stith uses her research, scholarly achievements and travels abroad to engage students in the marriage and family therapy program.

"The research we are doing and the evidence-based practice we are teaching affects the kind of clinical work our students do," Stith said. "Our students receive cutting-edge training about models of therapy they will use to help families." 