

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Military Family Advocacy in the U.S. Army: Program Service Outcomes and Family Participation

Aronson, K. R., Perkins, D. F., Morgan, N. R., Cox, A., & Robichaux, R. (2017). Military family advocacy in the U.S. Army: Program service outcomes and family participation. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. doi:10.1007/s10826-017-0864-8

SUMMARY: The U.S. military has implemented many programs to improve family well-being, including the Family Advocacy Program (FAP), which has a presence at all Army bases where families are stationed. This study examined the quality and consistency of the FAP's implementation. Program adherence and delivery quality were strengths of the implementation, while there was a need for improvement in referral variety and Soldier and family engagement in referral programs.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The FAP implementation had excellent program adherence on critical components, including: evaluation of victim and perpetrator by qualified staff (100%), completion of comprehensive family assessments (100%), inter-agency communication (99%), and severity of abuse indicated in case file for safety planning (100%).
- Program delivery quality was high: staff efficiently made contact upon receiving a referral, engaged relevant supports and resources for families in the required time period, and focused on victim safety as primary concern. An average of 32 contacts (range = 26-76) were made over the course of FAP involvement.
- Families were offered about five referrals on average. Referrals were mostly made to Army Community Services, despite other military family support programs or civilian providers being available and relevant. In addition, 10% of the time commanders were not briefed on cases.
- Soldiers engaged in referrals 72-79% of the time, and family members engaged in referrals 33-48% of the time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Regularly disseminate information regarding military programs that prevent or address family violence in various contexts and through various means of communication to increase awareness
- Engage military families in focus groups regarding lack of engagement in support programs and in attempts to reduce barriers to engagement (e.g., stigma, fear of career damage)
- Offer partner and child abuse prevention programs that utilize motivational interviewing to increase engagement

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to encourage inter-agency communication regarding cases of partner and child abuse in military families, specifically engaging Service members' command structures to increase service engagement and completion
- Encourage implementation of family conflict resolution programs which has been shown to reduce military family violence and violent behavior in men
- Engage in deeper and more regular collaboration with community-based service providers and develop a protocol for engaging them in service delivery for military families encountering partner or child abuse

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METHODS

- Data were gathered from Army bases that were selected at random after being stratified into small, medium, and large bases.
- Researchers developed a coding scheme which they validated through a pilot study, then visited the selected Army bases to review the case files.
- The FAP has four implementation and service dimensions which were assessed: program adherence, quality of program delivery, receipt of referrals and support, and participation in service and support referrals.

PARTICIPANTS

- Two hundred and twenty-six case files of families that received services through the FAP were reviewed and coded.
- The case files were from 11 Army bases: two large (50%), three medium (35%), and six small (15%).
- Seventy-nine (35%) families reported domestic abuse only, 79 (35%) reported child abuse only, and 68 (30%) reported both domestic and child abuse.
- No demographic data were provided regarding the participants.

LIMITATIONS

- The coding protocol was not sufficiently described to be replicated.
- Not all treatment attendance data was obtained, and may have been underreported.
- In families with multiple child abuse victims, only the oldest child's data were coded. There may have been abuse towards younger children which would have influenced the conclusions of the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine rates of participant engagement when provided community-based provider referrals compared with military-based provider referrals
- Evaluate the efficacy of military programs in reducing family violence
- Compare service outcomes (adherence to FAP protocol) to client outcomes (reduction in family violence)

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