

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Domestic Violence in the Military: Women's Policy Preferences and Beliefs Concerning Routine Screening and Mandatory Reporting

Carlson Gielen, A., Campbell, J., Garza, M. A., O'Campo, P., Dienemann, J., Kub, J., ... Lloyd, D. W. (2006). Domestic violence in the military: Women's policy preferences and beliefs concerning routine screening and mandatory reporting. *Military Medicine*, 171(8), 729-735. doi:10.7205/MILMED.171.8.729

SUMMARY: Reporting of domestic violence (DV) in the military can be complicated by the lack of confidentiality. Beliefs about routine screening and mandatory reporting of DV by healthcare professionals were described and compared between abused and non-abused female Active Duty Service members. Women expressed the complex concerns, and sometimes competing goals, surrounding DV reporting, and abused women tended to be more opposed to reporting requirements than non-abused women.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Although the majority of participants thought women would be offended or embarrassed by routine DV screening (56%), most also supported routine screening at healthcare visits (57%).
- Fewer abused women than non-abused women agreed with reporting abuse to the police (54% vs. 58%) or command (35% vs. 53%); more disagreed with mandated reporting (47% vs. 30%).
- Most abused women thought routine screening and mandated reporting, respectively, would make it easier for victims to get help (74%, 83%), but would make disclosure less likely (77%, 62%), increase risk of physical harm (74%, 63%), and hurt partners' careers (77%, 92%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer programs with confidential support and resources for women considering reporting DV
- Educate military women about DV risks, such as quick relationship progression, and reduce the stigma associated with reporting DV
- Provide female Service members with statistics regarding outcomes and consequences of reporting DV in order to help them make an informed decision about whether to report

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Ensure female Service members who report DV victimization do not suffer career repercussions
- Encourage an anti-stigma campaign to make it easier for female Service members to discuss DV
- Recommend education for all military members about how to prevent and report DV, as well as how to support a friend or family member who is struggling with the decision to report

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METHODS

- Female Active Duty Service members from 1998-2000 in Washington D. C. were recruited from the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System database via mailed letter.
- Only 4% of the 154,000 female Service members recruited participated and completed interviews.
- Relationships between self-reported demographic information, experiences of DV, and beliefs and preferences about routine screening and mandatory reporting of DV were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 616 female Active Duty Service members.
- The majority of women were White (78%), married (72%), less than 40 years old (56%), and college-educated (68%).
- Service members were 43% enlisted.

LIMITATIONS

- Only 4% of recruited women participated, and those who participated may differ from those who did not on DV experiences, DV screening and reporting preferences, or other factors.
- Participants had to consent to allow their commanding officers access to their surveys in order to participate, which may have biased who participated or how they answered questions.
- DV was narrowly defined as physical or sexual abuse by a partner, limiting generalizability of results to those who have experienced other types of DV.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Compare concerns about reporting DV among male and female military victims
- Investigate the effects of DV education and reporting training on rates of military DV reported
- Examine other factors of DV (e.g., abuse severity, past or present abuse, co-occurring child abuse) that may impact preferences about reporting policies and likelihood to report

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