

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Air Force

Substantiation of Spouse and Child Maltreatment Reports as a Function of Referral Source and Maltreatment Type

Foster, R. E. , Stone, F. P., Linkh, D. J. , Besetsny, L. K., Collins, P. S., Saha, T., & Milner, J. S. (2010). Substantiation of spouse and child maltreatment reports as a function of referral source and maltreatment type. *Military Medicine*, 175(8), 560-566. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-10-00035

SUMMARY: Data from the Air Force Family Advocacy System of Records were obtained to examine the rate of substantiated spouse and child maltreatment reports, and explore whether maltreatment type or referral source influenced the rate of substantiation. Differences between maltreatment type and referral source were observed for both child and spouse maltreatment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- For spouses, reports were more likely to be substantiated if they involved alleged physical abuse or multiple forms of abuse; sexual abuse and neglect were the least likely to be substantiated.
- Child abuse reports alleging emotional abuse or neglect were most likely to be substantiated, while physical abuse allegations were the least likely to be substantiated.
- Referrals made by military professionals were more likely to be substantiated than those made by civilian professionals or nonprofessional.
- Referral sources such as law enforcement agencies, commands, military chaplains, and family advocacy program staff had the highest rates of substantiated maltreatment reports for both children and spouses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue to provide training to military providers on how to identify and report incidences of spouse and child maltreatment
- Provide education to military spouses and children regarding recognizing signs of abuse and identifying resources that support victims of abuse
- Provide education to Service members and their families to enhance resilience and the use of healthy coping mechanisms to prevent child and spouse maltreatment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that identify and prevent child and spouse maltreatment in military families
- Promote the use of a structured process for identifying and substantiating cases of child and spouse maltreatment
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based services that work with victims of maltreatment

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METHODS

- Alleged maltreatment records from January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2007 were obtained from the Air Force Family Advocacy System of Records.
- Alleged maltreatment reports from 77 Air Force bases were included in the records.
- There were 33,787 reports of alleged spouse maltreatment and 31,986 reports of alleged child maltreatment (n = 65,773).

PARTICIPANTS

- The majority of spouse maltreatment allegations involved allegations of physical (59%) or emotional abuse (27%).
- Neglect (40%), physical abuse (24%), and emotional abuse (20%) were the most common types of child maltreatment allegations.
- Demographic data for the sample were not provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Alleged maltreatment reports only included those reports made on Air Forces bases, limiting the applicability of results to other branches of the military.
- Data from the years of 2000-2007 were utilized and may not reflect current rates of substantiated maltreatment reports.
- A relatively low number of allegations for spouse sexual abuse and neglect were reported so results should be interpreted with caution.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the rate of substantiated maltreatment reports for military spouses and children within other branches of the military
- Explore why rates of substantiation for child maltreatment reports were lowest among civilian professionals (e.g., child care and school referrals) and highest for military professionals
- Explore why the rates of substantiated maltreatment reports have decreased over time for both the Air Force and general U.S. population

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