

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Air Force

## Suspected Child and Spouse Maltreatment Referral Sources: Who Reports Child and Spouse Maltreatment to the Air Force Family Advocacy Program?

Linkh, D. J., Besetsny, L. K., Collins, P. S., Thomsen, C. J., Rabenhorst, M. M., Rosenbaum, A., & Milner, J. S. (2008). Suspected child and spouse maltreatment referral sources: Who reports child and spouse maltreatment to the Air Force Family Advocacy Program? *Military Medicine*, 173(12), 1203-1209. doi:10.7205/MILMED.173.12.1203

**SUMMARY:** Suspected child and spouse maltreatment reports were evaluated to determine referral source for Air Force families. Suspected Air Force child maltreatment reports were then compared to U.S. national child maltreatment data to explore how referral source differed among the samples. The majority of child and spouse maltreatment reports were referred by military sources and child maltreatment reports were similar between the Air Force and U.S. families.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Commands, military law enforcement, and medical/psychological personnel had the highest percentage of referrals for both spouse and child maltreatment.
- Most Family Advocacy Program (FAP) referrals for both spouse and child maltreatment came from military or non-affiliated sources while civilian sources referred the least.
- Child and spouse maltreatment type (i.e., physical, emotional, sexual, neglect, or multiple types) influenced referral source, particularly for child maltreatment.
- Maltreatment referral sources in the Air Force and civilian population were similar, except offenders and victims in the Air Force population had more self-referrals.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Continue to educate military personnel regarding how to recognize and report suspected child and spouse maltreatment
- Disseminate information to civilian agencies that interact with military families regarding how to report child and spouse maltreatment to FAP
- Provide education to military Service members and their families to enhance the use of healthy coping to prevent child and spouse maltreatment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs designed to identify and prevent child and spouse maltreatment in military families
- Continue to encourage collaboration between FAP and civilian child protective service agencies
- Recommend education for service providers about the different types of abuse as this may influence referral source

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## METHODS

- Suspected child and spouse maltreatment reports that occurred between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2004 were obtained from the Air Force Family Advocacy System of Records Clinical Information System.
- Child maltreatment data from the U.S. Health and Human Services national registry was used to compare U.S. national child maltreatment data with Air Force child maltreatment data.
- Referral sources included military (e.g., law enforcement, Commands), nonmilitary (e.g., social services, clergy), and nonaffiliated (e.g., friends, alleged victim) sources.

## PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 42,389 Air Force maltreatment referrals occurred during the study period; 21,362 for suspected child maltreatment and 21,027 for suspected spouse maltreatment.
- Suspected reports of child and spouse maltreatment only included those reported to the Air Force FAP.
- No demographic data were provided.

## LIMITATIONS

- Results only included suspected child maltreatment reports made to the Air Force FAP and therefore do not account for reports made to civilian child protective agencies or unreported occurrences of family violence.
- Differences between child age and referral source were not examined and could provide meaningful information regarding which referral sources are most common for children of varying ages.
- This study only included Air Force suspected child and spouse maltreatment reports, limiting the generalizability to other service branches.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the potential barriers associated with reporting child and spouse maltreatment across civilian and military agencies
- Explore how maltreatment type and child age influence the rate of reporting by referral source
- Continue to examine differences in referral sources for child maltreatment among military and civilian populations to inform policy regarding mandated reporting for nonmilitary and military professionals

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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