

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Air Force

Characteristics Associated with Incidents of Family Maltreatment Among United States Air Force Families

Travis, W., Collins, P., McCarthy, R., Rabenhorst, M., & Milner, J. (2014). Characteristics associated with incidents of family maltreatment among United States Air Force families. *Military Medicine*, 179(11), 1244-1249. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-13-00544

SUMMARY: U.S. Air Force Family Advocacy Program (FAP) data were used to determine how victim and offender characteristics (i.e., gender, military status, and substance use) and abuse characteristics (i.e., type and severity) influenced maltreatment determinations for child and spouse abuse after revisions to the determination process were implemented. In general, victim and perpetrator characteristics were not associated with maltreatment determinations but abuse characteristics did influence maltreatment determinations.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall, characteristics of the perpetrator or victim were not associated with an incident being founded; however, suspected incidents were slightly more likely to be founded if the offender was a civilian rather than a military member and the child was from a family of an enlisted Service member rather than a commissioned officer.
- Suspected child and spouse maltreatment incidents that were more severe in nature were more likely to be founded than less severe forms of maltreatment.
- Compared to incidents that occurred when an offender was not under the influence of a substance, incidents of suspected child and spouse maltreatment were more likely to be founded if the offender was under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Engage Service members and their families in classes aimed at increasing communication and conflict-resolution skills as a way to reduce spouse and child maltreatment
- Disseminate information regarding the risks associated with substance use and child and spouse maltreatment
- Continue to disseminate information to military personnel and community service providers working with military families regarding reporting requirements for child and spouse maltreatment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend integrating parenting education into existing programs and services for Service members and their families
- Continue to support the implementation of the revised maltreatment criteria in all military service branches
- Continue to provide support for programs that are responsible for the identification and prevention of child and spouse maltreatment in military families

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METHODS

- Air Force FAP reports for spouse and child maltreatment from January 2008 to July 2011 were examined.
- Incidents of spouse and child maltreatment included incidents of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, or a combination of maltreatment types and coded as mild, moderate, or severe.
- Offender and abuse characteristics prior to and after implementation of the revised process were compared to assess whether the revised criteria increased the reliability of determination decisions.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included a total of 8,230 suspected incidents of child maltreatment and 11,828 suspected incidents of spouse maltreatment occurring within Air Force families over a 3 year period.
- Among the suspected incidents, 42% (n = 3,454) of child maltreatment reports were founded and 51% (n = 5,891) of spouse maltreatment reports were founded.
- The majority of suspected child victims (59%), spouse victims (56%), and offenders (64% child and 54% spouse) were White.
- The average age of suspected child victims was 6 years (SD = 4.77) and 26 years (SD = 6.41) for spouse victims; offenders of child abuse tended to be slightly older (M = 29.99 years) than offenders of spouse abuse (26.48 years).

LIMITATIONS

- This sample only included FAP reports for the Air Force, therefore results may not generalize to other military branches.
- Only maltreatment reports identified in the Air Force FAP database were included; therefore, incidents that went unreported or were reported to civilian CPS agencies are not included.
- Data were from suspected incidents of maltreatment occurring between 2008 and 2011 and therefore, may not accurately capture current characteristics of child and spouse maltreatment incidents.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore whether the revised FAP process results in more accurate and reliable maltreatment determinations
- Explore the link between substance use and maltreatment in military families and ways to reduce this risk factor
- Examine the relationship between military status and rates of founded incidents to determine if there is a slight bias towards favoring military members

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