

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE MILITARY

WHY IT MATTERS

There are approximately 3.3 million active duty service members and their family members stationed in the U.S. and abroad. Among this population are victims and survivors of domestic violence including men, women and children who live daily with the realities of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Certain characteristics of military life and culture can make some families especially vulnerable to domestic violence. Furthermore, many victims of domestic violence in the military community do not report incidents of abuse for fear that it will impact their spouse's position.¹

DID YOU KNOW?

- In 2001, there were more than 18,000 incidents of spousal abuse reported to the Department of Defense's Family Advocacy Program.²
- 84% of the spousal abuse incidents reported involved physical abuse.³
- Domestic violence homicides in the military community from 1995-2001 include: 54 in the Navy or Marine Corps; 131 in the Army; 32 in the Air Force.⁴
- Domestic violence victims in military communities are most likely to be women (66% of cases identified female victims)⁵ and the civilian spouses of active duty personnel (62% of abusers are on active military duty).⁶
- Among active duty military women, 30% reported an adult lifetime prevalence of intimate partner abuse, while 22% reported intimate partner violence during military service.⁷
- Although data is hard to obtain, it is apparent that relatively few military personnel are prosecuted or administratively sanctioned on charges stemming from domestic violence.⁸

CULTURAL ISSUES

- A high percentage of military personnel have prior histories of domestic violence. Among Navy recruits, 54% of men and 40% of women have witnessed parental abuse prior to enlistment.⁹
- Constant relocation of military families from place to place, often with different culture and values, isolates victims by severing ties with family and loved ones.¹⁰

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

- The only military personnel granted confidentiality in their communications are chaplains. Victim advocates, social workers, therapists and physicians cannot keep information confidential.¹¹
- All military personnel (except chaplains) are required to report any suspected domestic violence, regardless of how the suspicion arises or whether the victim wants this information to be communicated to the command and others.¹²
- In the military community, the person notified of the domestic violence allegation is the perpetrator's boss. Therefore, victims are reluctant to report incidents of abuse for fear of negative career consequences.¹³

SEVERITY OF ABUSE

- The Department of Defense (DOD) divides the severity of abuse into three categories: severe physical abuse, moderate physical abuse, and mild physical abuse. The DoD severity definitions are inconsistent with commonly held "characterizations" of domestic violence. A DoD prerequisite to be categorized as severe physical abuse is major physical injury requiring inpatient medical treatment or causing temporary or permanent disability or disfigurement. A strangulation case in the civilian community is considered very dangerous, whereas in the Department of Defense, it might be defined to be mild or moderate abuse. As a result 69% of domestic violence cases reported in FY99 were mild and only 6% were classified as severe.¹⁴

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Every Home A Safe Home

The Public Policy Office of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a national leader in the effort to create and influence Federal legislation that positively affects the lives of domestic violence victims and children. We work closely with advocates at the local, state and national level to identify the issues facing domestic violence victims, their children and the people who serve them and to develop a legislative agenda to address these issues. NCADV welcomes you to join us in our effort to end domestic violence.

IF YOU NEED HELP

- If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship and needs assistance, contact your installation Family Advocacy Program (FAP). The FAP may be contacted through the medical treatment facility, Family Support Program, or installation security.
- Another option is to call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE or to visit www.ndvh.org.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Encourage partnerships between local victim advocacy agencies and military installations in your community.
- Volunteer with state, local, national and international advocacy agencies that work to address domestic violence and sexual assault in the US military.
- Write letters to the Department of Defense asking US military leaders to change policies, adopt new laws and provide funding to better service military families that experience violence.
- Lobby Congress to pass federal laws that protect victims' confidentiality and set-aside DOD funds to address domestic violence and sexual assault in the military.
- Write letters to the editor and local media to draw attention to domestic violence and sexual assault in the US Military.

SOURCES

¹ Beals, Judith E, "The Military Response to Victims of Domestic Violence." Battered Women's Justice Project.<http://www.bwjp.org/documents/BWJPMIL.pdf>.

^{2,3} U.S. Department of Defense, Family Advocacy Program Report: "Child and Spouse Abuse Data," (FY97-01).

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, Family Advocacy Program Data, FY02.

⁶ "Child and Spouse Abuse Data," (FY97-01).

⁷ Campbell, Garza, et al., Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse Among Active Duty Military Women, Violence Against Women, 2003.

⁸ Initial Report of the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence, U.S. Department of Defense, 2001.

^{9, 10, 11, 12, 13} Beals, Judith E, "The Military Response to Victims of Domestic Violence." Battered Women's Justice Project.<http://www.bwjp.org/documents/BWJPMIL.pdf>.

¹⁴ "Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence, 2003 Third Year Report," U.S. Department of Defense, February 2003.