

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-266](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Non-disability mental conditions, such as personality disorders, can render a servicemember unsuitable for military service and can lead to an administrative separation. GAO was mandated to report on non-disability mental condition separations. This report examines the extent to which (1) DOD and the military services are able to identify the number of enlisted servicemembers separated for non-disability mental conditions, and (2) the military services are complying with DOD requirements when separating enlisted servicemembers for non-disability mental conditions, including personality disorders, and how DOD and the military services oversee such separations. GAO analyzed DOD and the military services' separation policies, policies related to tracking separations, reports the military services submitted to DOD regarding compliance with separation requirements, and interviewed DOD and military service officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD and the military services develop a method to identify the number of servicemembers separated for non-disability mental conditions and take a number of actions to ensure that their policies and processes can ensure that servicemembers are appropriately separated for non-disability mental conditions in accordance with DOD's separation requirements. DOD generally concurred with GAO's recommendations, but did not provide information on how or when it plans to implement the recommendations.

View [GAO-15-266](#). For more information, contact Randall B. Williamson at (202) 512-7114 or williamsonr@gao.gov.

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DEFENSE HEALTH CARE

Better Tracking and Oversight Needed of Servicemember Separations for Non-Disability Mental Conditions

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) and three of the four military services—Army, Navy, and Marine Corps—cannot identify the number of enlisted servicemembers separated for non-disability mental conditions—mental conditions that are not considered service-related disabilities. For most non-disability mental condition separations, these services use the broad separation code, “condition, not a disability,” which mixes non-disability mental conditions with non-disability physical conditions, such as obesity, making it difficult to distinguish one type of condition from the other. In contrast, the Air Force is able to identify such servicemembers because it uses all five of the separation codes specific to non-disability mental conditions. DOD policy requires the military services to use a separation code so that DOD can track and analyze separations. Moreover, federal standards for internal control state that all transactions need to be clearly and accurately documented and readily available for examination when needed. The three services had varying reasons as to why they use the broad separation code. For example, Army officials believed that stating in servicemembers' discharge papers that they were discharged for non-disability mental conditions might stigmatize them with future employers. However, DOD stated that there are ways to protect servicemembers in this regard by providing them with discharge papers that are more general and that do not disclose specific reasons for discharge. By not systematically identifying or periodically evaluating the number of separations for non-disability mental conditions, DOD and the services cannot assess how well the separation policy and process are working or inform key stakeholders, including the Congress, about separation frequency, trends, and other data.

The military services lack separation policies that address all of DOD's eight requirements for separating servicemembers with non-disability mental conditions; both DOD and the services also lack oversight over such separations. From fiscal years 2008 through 2012, DOD required the services to report on their compliance with DOD requirements for personality disorder separations, one of the non-disability mental conditions. Most of the services reported by fiscal year 2012 that they were not compliant with all eight requirements and many of the 20 reports contained incomplete and inconsistent information. For example, 19 reports were missing information on reserve members. DOD discontinued these reports and did not institute any other oversight, which is inconsistent with the internal control standard for monitoring. GAO also found, based on a review of the services' separation policies, that the services have not updated their policies to meet all DOD requirements for non-disability mental condition separations. For example, Navy officials stated that they were unaware that DOD separation policies had changed since 2008 until GAO's review. DOD officials stated that the military services are responsible for conducting oversight of their separation processes; however, GAO found that the military services do not have processes to oversee non-disability mental condition separations. Without up-to-date and consistent policies and oversight processes, DOD and the military services cannot ensure that servicemembers separated for non-disability mental conditions have been afforded the protections intended by DOD's separation requirements and that servicemembers have been appropriately separated for such conditions.