

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-289](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Domestic abuse can result in devastating personal consequences and societal costs, and according to DOD, is incompatible with military values and reduces mission readiness. In fiscal year 2019, the military services recorded 8,055 incidents that met DOD's criteria for domestic abuse.

House Reports 116-120 and 116-333 included provisions for GAO to review the military services' efforts to prevent and respond to domestic abuse, including domestic violence. This report examines, among other objectives, the extent to which (1) DOD has met statutory requirements to collect and report complete data on reports of domestic abuse, and describes how many incidents were recorded by DOD in fiscal years 2015-2019; (2) DOD and the military services have implemented and overseen domestic abuse prevention and response activities in accordance with DOD policy; and (3) the military services have developed domestic abuse training for key personnel that meets DOD requirements. GAO analyzed program data, policies, and guidance; assessed documents from a nongeneralizable sample of 20 military installations; and interviewed 68 domestic abuse survivors as well as DOD, service, and civilian officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 32 recommendations, including that DOD improve its data collection and awareness efforts and that the military services improve monitoring of incident screening and provide guidance for training of key personnel. DOD concurred and described actions planned or underway, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-21-289](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

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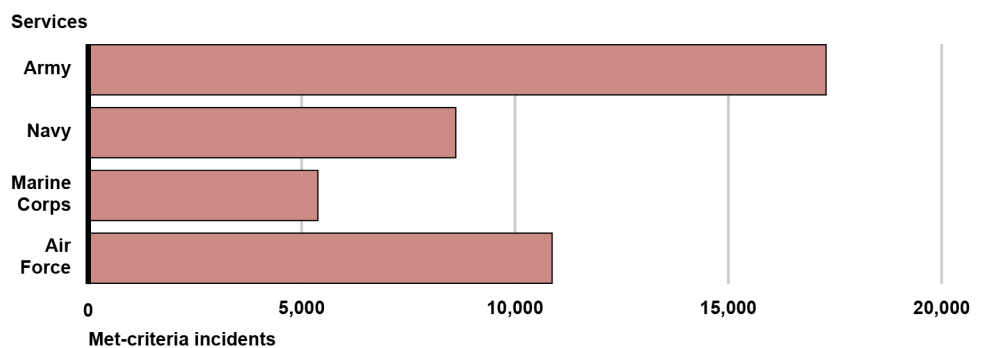
DOMESTIC ABUSE

Actions Needed to Enhance DOD's Prevention, Response, and Oversight

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) met a statutory requirement to collect and report data for incidents that it determined met its criteria for domestic abuse. In fiscal years 2015-2019, DOD determined that over 40,000 domestic abuse incidents met its criteria (see figure), of which 74 percent were physical abuse. However, DOD has not collected and reported accurate data for all domestic abuse allegations received, including those that did not meet DOD's criteria, as statutorily required. Thus, DOD is unable to assess the scope of alleged abuse and its rate of substantiation. In addition, despite a statutory requirement since 1999, DOD has not collected comprehensive data on the number of allegations of domestic violence—a subcategory of different types of domestic abuse that constitute offenses under the Uniform Code of Military Justice—and related actions taken by commanders. Improving collection of these data could enhance DOD's visibility over actions taken by commanders to address domestic violence.

Incidents That Met DOD Criteria for Domestic Abuse (Physical, Emotional, or Sexual Abuse, or Neglect), Fiscal Years 2015-2019



Source: GAO analysis of military service Family Advocacy Program data. | GAO-21-289

DOD and the military services have taken steps to implement and oversee domestic abuse prevention and response activities, but gaps exist in key areas. For example, the military services perform limited monitoring of installation incident-screening decisions and therefore lack reasonable assurance that all domestic abuse allegations are screened in accordance with DOD policy. In addition, while DOD and the military services have taken steps to promote awareness of reporting options and resources, DOD has not fully addressed challenges in reaching its audience, or developed metrics to assess the effectiveness of its awareness efforts. As a result, DOD and the military services may miss opportunities to provide available resources to victims.

The military services have developed domestic abuse prevention and response training for key personnel that meets some DOD requirements. For example, installation Family Advocacy Programs provide such training to commanders and senior enlisted advisors, but the training GAO assessed from a nongeneralizable sample of 20 installations did not consistently cover all DOD-required topics, and the services have not provided guidance to ensure that training addresses these requirements. As a result, commanders and senior enlisted advisors may not be aware of key responsibilities for domestic abuse prevention and response.