

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE MILITARY

- In 2002, there were more than 18,000 incidents of spousal abuse reported to the Department of Defense's Family Advocacy Program.¹ 84% of these incidents involved physical abuse.²
- Domestic violence victims in military communities are most likely to be women (66% of cases identified female victims)³ and the civilian spouses of active duty personnel (62% of abusers are on active military duty).⁴
- Among active duty military women, 30% reported an adult lifetime prevalence of intimate partner abuse, while 22% reported intimate partner violence during military service.⁵
- 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.⁶
- In 2002, 24% of women surveyed by the Defense Department reported experiencing sexual harassment in the forms of crude/offensive behavior, unwanted sexual attention, and/or sexual coercion.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
- 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 "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.⁹

- In a 2001 Department of Defense memo on the subject of domestic violence, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz declared, “domestic violence will not be tolerated in the Department of Defense.” He made clear that “commanders at every level have a duty to take appropriate steps to prevent domestic violence, protect victims and hold those who commit it accountable.”¹⁰ In spite of this memo, the rates of moderate and severe spousal abuse have increased between FY 1997-2001 (23% to 36% for moderate, 2% to 7% for severe). Mild spousal abuse, on the other hand, has decreased (72% to 57%).¹¹
- According to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, “Domestic violence is a pervasive problem that transcends all ethnic, racial, gender and socioeconomic boundaries, and it will not be tolerated in the Department of Defense. Domestic violence destroys individuals, ruins families and weakens our communities.”¹²

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Family Advocacy Program Report: “Child and Spouse Abuse Data,” (FY97-01).

² Ibid.

³ U.S. Department of Defense, Family Advocacy Program Data, FY02.

⁴ “Child and Spouse Abuse Data,” (FY97-01).

⁵ Campbell, Garza, et al., Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse Among Active Duty Military Women, Violence Against Women, 2003.

⁶ Initial Report of the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence, U.S. Department of Defense, 2001.

⁷ Armed Forces 2002 Sexual Harassment Survey, U.S. Department of Defense, 2001.

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

⁹ “Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence, 2003 Third Year Report,” U.S. Department of Defense, February 2003.

¹⁰ Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Department of Defense Memo, November 19, 2001.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Family Advocacy Program Report: “Child and Spouse Abuse Data,” (FY97-01).

¹² Department of Defense Memo, April 2001 in response to the Initial Report of the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence.