

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT THE FAMILY ADVOCACY PROGRAM
DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM AND CENTRAL REGISTRY

Q: How much child abuse and spouse abuse occurs in military families?

A: We cannot provide an answer to that question. The Department of Defense keeps track of how many incidents of child abuse and spouse abuse are reported to the Family Advocacy Program. In addition, the Services have been implementing a law enforcement database, the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System (DIBRS), that counts reports of child abuse and domestic abuse in military families that were made to military law enforcement agencies. Thus, we will be able to state how much abuse is reported. We do not, and will not, know what amount of abuse goes unreported.

Q: How does the Department of Defense count child abuse and spouse abuse incidents?

A: Since 1997, we have counted separately each incident of suspected family violence that has been reported to the Family Advocacy Program at each installation. Prior to 1997, we counted cases of suspected family violence reported to the installations' Family Advocacy Programs. Each case could include more than one incident of suspected abuse.

Q: Why did DoD change to an incident-based system?

A: A "case" could include several incidents that happened to the same victim within a short period of time, even if the abuse was of different types. With an incident-based system, we can calculate how many victims within military families experience repeated abuse.

Q: What is the difference between "substantiated reports" and "total reports?"

A: Each reported incident is accompanied by the results of the medical evaluation, mental health and social assessments of the victim and alleged abuser, and law enforcement investigation that were conducted. All this information is reviewed by a Family Advocacy Case Review Committee at the installation, and compared to the Family Advocacy Program definitions of abuse. If the committee believes that the information in the incident meets these definitions and that Family Advocacy Program services should be provided to the victim and victim's family, the incident is classified, for FAP purposes, as substantiated.

Q: Does a “substantiated report” mean that there is sufficient evidence to take legal action?

A: Not necessarily. Some forms of abuse addressed by the Family Advocacy Program are not crimes under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, federal law or state law. The Case Review Committee is not a legal board and is not required to consider whether the information is admissible in legal proceedings. Accordingly, it makes its determination according to the standards of the Family Advocacy Program. Its determination is a clinical judgment about the incident, not a legal one.

Q: How is the data collected from the Services?

A: Each installation Family Advocacy Program enters the data in the Family Advocacy Program central registry of its Service. The Services maintain the data in their Family Advocacy Program management information systems and submit the data to the DoD central registry of incidents of child and spouse abuse every quarter.

Q: Does the DoD central registry have data about what command actions or legal actions were taken in response to the report?

A: No. It only contains information pertaining to the incident and the action of the Case Review Committee.

Q: What happens if a substantiated incident is later proven to be untrue in a legal proceeding?

A: The Services each have procedures to reclassify the incident as unsubstantiated.

Q: Is the data in the DoD central registry accessible to the public under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)?

A: The database is available, but information that could identify individuals, such as names, social security numbers, and dates of birth are withheld under provisions of the Privacy Act to assure the privacy of the affected individuals.

PREPARED BY: Mr. David W. Lloyd, Family Advocacy Program, (703) 602-4990.