



Highlights of [GAO-06-540](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Due to concerns about domestic violence in the military and its adverse effect on mission readiness, Congress required the Department of Defense (DOD) to establish a task force to assess the services' response to domestic violence and recommend improvements. The task force issued three reports containing 194 recommendations. The Fiscal Year 2004 National Defense Authorization Act required GAO to review DOD's progress in implementing the recommendations. This report discusses (1) DOD's ability to report on domestic violence incidents and disciplinary actions, (2) the resources DOD has provided to implement the recommendations, and (3) DOD's specific actions to ensure victim confidentiality and the education of commanding officers, senior enlisted personnel, and chaplains. GAO also examined whether DOD has established an oversight framework to monitor implementation.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD take actions to address domestic violence data deficiencies, provide adequate personnel and a strategy for communicating its policy changes, maintain chaplain training data, and establish an oversight framework. DOD agreed with the thrust of our recommendations, with the exception of one that dealt with policy that DOD stated involved privacy concerns.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-540.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Valerie C. Melvin at (202) 512-6304 or melvinv@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Progress Made in Implementing Recommendations to Reduce Domestic Violence, but Further Management Action Needed

What GAO Found

DOD's ability to report on domestic violence incidents and disciplinary actions taken by commanders is hampered because the systems that the department uses to collect domestic violence information do not contain complete data. DOD's domestic violence database does not capture data from all law enforcement systems and, therefore, does not provide a complete accounting of reported incidents and actions taken by commanders. Notwithstanding the task force's recommendation to report on the number of domestic violence incidents, DOD and the services have not developed any plans to address the data limitations, which do not allow for visibility over domestic violence incidents. Without complete information on reported incidents of domestic violence and the steps taken by commanders to address these incidents, DOD will not know the size and nature of the problems or be able to assess the effectiveness of its actions.

DOD has provided about \$23 million to implement the recommendations and has made progress in this regard. Specifically, GAO identified 94 recommendations of varying potential importance as completed, 60 as pending further action, and 40 in which no action had been taken because DOD either disagreed with the recommendations or determined that they were not applicable to the department. Nonetheless, DOD faces challenges in completing the pending recommendations in a timely manner because of potential shortages of essential personnel in the office overseeing implementation. In addition, DOD's method of communicating its policy changes resulting from the recommendations has not ensured consistent practices and widespread understanding of the policies among DOD and the services.

While DOD is taking steps toward ensuring confidentiality for victims and to train its personnel on domestic violence issues, additional efforts are needed. To ensure victim confidentiality, DOD issued a policy, effective April 22, 2006, allowing victims to report domestic violence to specified people without notifying command. In addition, DOD issued guidance requiring training and is providing several educational options. However, data regarding which chaplains have completed training are not available because the department and the services do not track this training. Chaplains play a special role in assisting domestic violence victims and, without complete training data, DOD may be unable to determine if chaplains have been provided the needed resources to assist victims.

DOD has not established an oversight framework to monitor compliance with and evaluate implementation of the task force recommendations. While the task force recommended and DOD's draft domestic violence instruction requires monitoring and evaluation of domestic violence efforts, DOD has not established a process to do so. Without an overall management framework, DOD and Congress have limited visibility and oversight to evaluate DOD's implementation efforts and make needed improvements.