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## **Intimate Partner Violence Plagued Military Couples Even Before Quarantine**

*MFAN Survey Finds Military Families Overwhelmingly Aware of Domestic Violence in their Neighborhoods & Social Circles*

WASHINGTON — Quarantining at home through the stressors of COVID-19 has amplified issues in already problematic relationships, leading to a surge in domestic violence reporting nationwide. However, even before the pandemic, 81% of military community respondents to MFAN’s 2019 Military Family Support Programming Survey said they were aware of intimate partner violence in their neighborhoods and social circles.

“It’s really common. We’ve had multiple cases of domestic violence just in our neighborhood this year,” said the spouse of an Air Force active duty member.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as *...abuse or aggression that occurs in a close relationship*. According to the CDC, *intimate partner* refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners and includes four types of behavior: physical violence; sexual violence; stalking; and psychological aggression.

This is the first year MFAN’s support programming survey, presented by Cerner Government Services, has explored the issue, after recognizing a need for more information from military families.

“For years now, we have heard anecdotes from our Advisors and others in the community about Intimate Partner Violence,” said MFAN’s Executive Director Shannon Razzadin. “We felt it was critical that we collect data on this issue, so that leaders and policymakers will be able to make decisions that honor and protect the health and safety of everyone in the community.”

Respondents reported that intimate partner violence is overlooked and hidden in the military community. MFAN’s data also showed that those who sought assistance were more likely to:

- Range in rank from E4 to E6, if they were active duty family members
- Carry more debt
- Be concerned with their own or a family member's alcohol use
- Rate as more lonely on the UCLA Loneliness scale
- Have considered suicide in the past two years

“Reporting the abuse jeopardizes the service member's career, therefore jeopardizing the woman and her family's livelihood. A difficult choice to make: report abuse knowing your husband will lose his job or suffer to keep food on the table? There is no easy solution. That is awful,” said the spouse of a Navy active duty service member.

MFAN recommends that policymakers look for ways to increase communication with military and veteran families about available online and virtual resources; encourage connections with others, especially virtually, as isolation is a tactic of abusers; and reduce barriers for military spouses to seek financial or health care benefits if they or their children are experiencing abuse.

“I'm not by any means a violent person, but I have wanted to strike both of my wives after I came back from tours because I was so angry at the world,” a National Guard and Reserve member said. “I never did, but it was really disturbing how much I wanted to. That's what made me start counseling.”

More information about MFAN's survey methods and demographics can be found here: <https://militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org/survey-methods/>

In light of the pandemic and the upcoming National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) mark-up, MFAN expedited the release of the survey findings. Data related to food insecurity; finances and emergency savings; loneliness and community; and mental health and telehealth have already been released. Data on the stressors associated with military moves will be available June 17. The entire survey will be released during an online event on June 23, featuring expert panel discussions and video narratives from military family members who are personally impacted by each issue.

Cerner Government Services, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Cerner Corporation, sponsored the 2019 Survey, which provides the most rigorous, comprehensive understanding of the needs of military and veteran families in areas that are further impacted by the pandemic, such as financial readiness, mental health, food insecurity, moving and housing, utilization of telehealth options, and intimate partner violence.

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**About MFAN:** The Military Family Advisory Network is the authentic voice of the modern military family and the bridge that connects military families to the resources, people and information they depend on to successfully navigate all phases of military life. To learn more about MFAN, visit [www.militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org](http://www.militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org).