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## Report Information from ProQuest

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## Military wives afraid to report abuse: researchers

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**Abstract (Abstract):** "The military at some point will have to come to the realization that they contribute to the problem and accept some responsibility for that," said Gaila Friars, a New Brunswick social worker who has dealt with cases from Canadian Forces Base Gagetown in New Brunswick.

Deborah Harrison, who leads a University of New Brunswick team studying the problem, said military wives realize a discharge can hurt a family's financial future.

The Defence Department is also conducting a study, which found the number of cases, including spousal-abuse cases, handled by military social workers has declined over the last few years, McLellan said.

**Full text:** Halifax - The Canadian military's zero-tolerance policy on spousal abuse could be frightening some women away from reporting problems at home, say family violence researchers.

"The military at some point will have to come to the realization that they contribute to the problem and accept some responsibility for that," said Gaila Friars, a New Brunswick social worker who has dealt with cases from Canadian Forces Base Gagetown in New Brunswick.

"There is sometimes a lack of understanding about the impact (the policy has) on the entire family."

Friars cited the example of one battered woman who went to military police for help in the middle of the night after a violent argument with her husband.

The officers suggested she go home and sort out the problem, saying her husband could be booted out of the military if the abuse became public.

"If this happened, and I have no doubt that it did, it was clearly wrong and inappropriate," said Lt.-Col. Rick McLellan, who's in charge of military social workers across the country.

"That is not a caring way of dealing with this issue. That should not happen. It only speaks to the old way of doing things. People get hurt in those kinds of situations, and hurt badly."

Those caught abusing their families in the Forces are given counselling, including anger management. But the help comes with a warning: Repeat offenders are discharged.

"We simply say, 'Look, this is sick behavior,'" said McLellan. "We have an obligation to help you get better. If you decide not to get better, then we would rather not have you work for us."

### Financial future

Deborah Harrison, who leads a University of New Brunswick team studying the problem, said military wives realize a discharge can hurt a family's financial future.

Isolated bases, frequent transfers and few job prospects for women often mean that the man is the sole breadwinner in a Forces family. Simply packing up and leaving an abusive relationship is made even harder.

"Many of the women we've interviewed know if they were to leave, it would mean an enormous drop in standard of living for their children and themselves," said Harrison.

The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton recently embarked on a three-year study of domestic violence in military families.

The Defence Department is also conducting a study, which found the number of cases, including spousal-abuse cases, handled by military social workers has declined over the last few years, McLellan said.

Harrison's team has received calls from abusers who blame the military for their actions, claiming the strict, regimented life often makes a bad situation worse.

"The whole business of the military is control, period," said Harrison. "There is an ethos in the military, perhaps it's part of the informal culture, (that) if you can't control your wife, how do you expect us to believe that you can control your men?"

The idea that warriors trained to kill cannot control themselves at home is flatly rejected by the Forces. "I kind of react with a few hairs coming up on my back when people say, 'You guys are all violent,' " said McLellan.

Researchers plan to travel to Halifax in the fall to talk to navy families.

Counsellors ensure anonymity for victims, who are asked to call a toll-free number. The number is 1-800-393-8833.

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