U.S. Military Non-Medical Counseling
Programs Demonstrate Benefits for Participants

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) provides short-term, confidential, solution-focused counseling for personal and family issues that do not require treatment through the military health system. These services, called non-medical counseling within DoD, address a breadth of problems, such as stress management, relationship tensions, grief, and deployment-related separation and reintegration. RAND evaluated whether non-medical counseling provided through the Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC) and Military OneSource programs was beneficial to participants and whether the benefits differed by problem type or client characteristics. The results from this study, though not causal, suggest that the programs are largely effective. The small but important proportion of participants who did not report improvement with counseling suggests that the program would benefit from providing additional support, guidance, and training for counselors, particularly for child-related concerns.

Method

- Program participants completed two online surveys between October 2014 and November 2016. One was completed by 2,585 MFLC and 2,892 Military OneSource participants two to three weeks after their initial session, while 614 MFLC and 878 Military OneSource participants completed the follow-up survey three months later.
- Service members and family members over age 18 who participated in at least one 30-minute, in-person counseling session were eligible for the study.
- Survey data were adjusted to be representative of the population of program users.
- Given the study design, causal conclusions about program effectiveness cannot be drawn.

Results

- More than 65 percent of people using non-medical counseling reported experiencing a reduction in problem severity after they initiated counseling. Most improvements were maintained three months later. The percentage of people rating their problem as very severe went from about one-third before counseling to around 4 percent over a three-month period.
- More than 70 percent of individuals reported a reduction in the frequency of feeling stressed or anxious after initiating counseling.
- More than 74 percent of people using non-medical counseling experienced a reduction in how much their problem interfered with daily life over a three-month period.
- Despite reported improvements, 20–30 percent of participants reported no change, and 1–5 percent reported increases in severity, stress, or interference with daily life. Participants who sought counseling for child-related concerns, on average, reported lower levels of problem resolution and lower satisfaction with continuity of care across counselors or sessions.
- About 90 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their counselor provided the services they needed to address their non-medical problems and related concerns.
- Over 90 percent of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the programs’ confidentiality.
- More than 91 percent said that they were likely or highly likely to use non-medical counseling again. About 95 percent said that they were likely or highly likely to recommend non-medical counseling to a friend.