



Abstract

To address targeted violence at military installations, the Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) developed a targeted violence prevention program plan and corresponding evaluation plan. The program plan uses existing installation resources (e.g., clinicians, chaplains, financial staff, and social workers) and resources in the local civilian community. It allows installations to adapt or add activities to existing local procedures and practices. The evaluation plan guides the installation as it assesses the program plan's implementation and effectiveness. This research note describes the development of the program plan and corresponding evaluation plan.

Development of a Local-Level Targeted Violence Prevention Program Plan and Evaluation Plan

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Introduction

In 2016, just 3 days after he received an Article 15 other-than-honorable discharge, Army Technical Sergeant (Tech. Sgt.) Steven Bellino attacked and killed his Commander at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland. This is just one of many examples of targeted violence on military installations in recent years (e.g., Fort Hood, Pensacola, Pearl Harbor, and Washington Navy Yard). Targeted violence is premeditated and directed at a particular individual, group, or pre-selected location (Fein et al., 1995; Vossekul et al., 2015); it does not include violence that is impulsive, random, or spontaneous. Targeted violence can have profound impacts on victims, those who witness the violence, and those who learn about the violence.

To address targeted violence at military installations, PERSEREC, a division of the Office of People Analytics (OPA), developed a targeted violence prevention program plan and evaluation plan. The goal of the program plan is to promote primary prevention of targeted violence using existing installation resources (e.g., clinicians, chaplains, financial staff, and social workers) and resources available in the local civilian community. The evaluation plan provides a guide to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the program plan. This research note describes the methods used to develop the program plan and evaluation plan.

Method

To inform the development of the program plan, we conducted a literature review and interviewed stakeholders and subject matter experts (SMEs). First, we collected and documented information on targeted violence, grievances, evidence-based violence prevention programs, and existing military programs that address violence prevention. We gathered this information from peer-reviewed journals, government publications, and informational guides.

Next, we obtained stakeholder input regarding the targeted violence prevention needs of the DoD community and resources available to address targeted violence. From November 2022 to March 2023, we interviewed the U.S. Army Insider Threat Program Management Office and Hub, the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency's Defense Insider Threat Management and Analysis Center (DITMAC), the DoD Military-Civilian Transition Office, and DoD Office of Force Resiliency's (OFR's) Violence

Prevention Cell. We asked these offices to (a) share their definition(s) of targeted violence; (b) identify current efforts within DoD to address targeted violence and other types of violence; and (c) provide input about programmatic objectives, resourcing, and current military culture we should consider.

We then met with SMEs from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, DHS Science and Technology Directorate, and the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System. We asked these SMEs to (a) provide their organizations' definition(s) of targeted violence, (b) describe community resources that may help prevent targeted violence, (c) identify the extent to which community resources network amongst themselves and with military communities, and (d) provide input about critical targeted violence prevention program objectives and elements.

Using stakeholder input and information gathered from the literature review, we developed critical program plan objectives, activities, a logic model, and an evaluation plan. We developed the program plan and evaluation plan for the Services to coordinate implementation with an installation; the installation will identify a lead person responsible for implementation and coordination with stakeholders. To inform the Services' decisions about future implementation of the program plan, the evaluation plan is intended to measure the degree to which prevention activities are implemented, the extent to which risk and protective factors for targeted violence change at the installation, and whether these changes can be linked to the implementation of activities.

Personnel at the DITMAC, OFR's Violence Prevention Cell, and the Department of the Army's Antiterrorism Division participated in a review of a draft of the program plan during July and August 2023. In addition to general feedback, we asked these stakeholders to provide comments on comprehensiveness, implementation feasibility, and the practicality of the planned timeline. We revised the program plan to incorporate their feedback.

Results

In this section, we describe the program plan, logic model, and evaluation plan. Through our literature review and stakeholder interviews, we developed evidence-informed program plan activities, described implementation and effectiveness evaluation steps, and identified secondary and primary data collection sources.

Program Plan

The program plan's objectives are depicted in Table 1. This program plan includes low-cost activities; uses existing resources; primarily focuses on individual Service member beliefs, attitudes, and intentions; and complements the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (2022) and Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC, 2023) recommendations to help the implementing installation prioritize program plan activities. The program plan provides guidance for implementing each activity, allows for adaptation by an installation, and includes an 18-month implementation timeline to establish relationships and trust among installation stakeholders and partners.

Table 1

Program Plan Critical Objectives

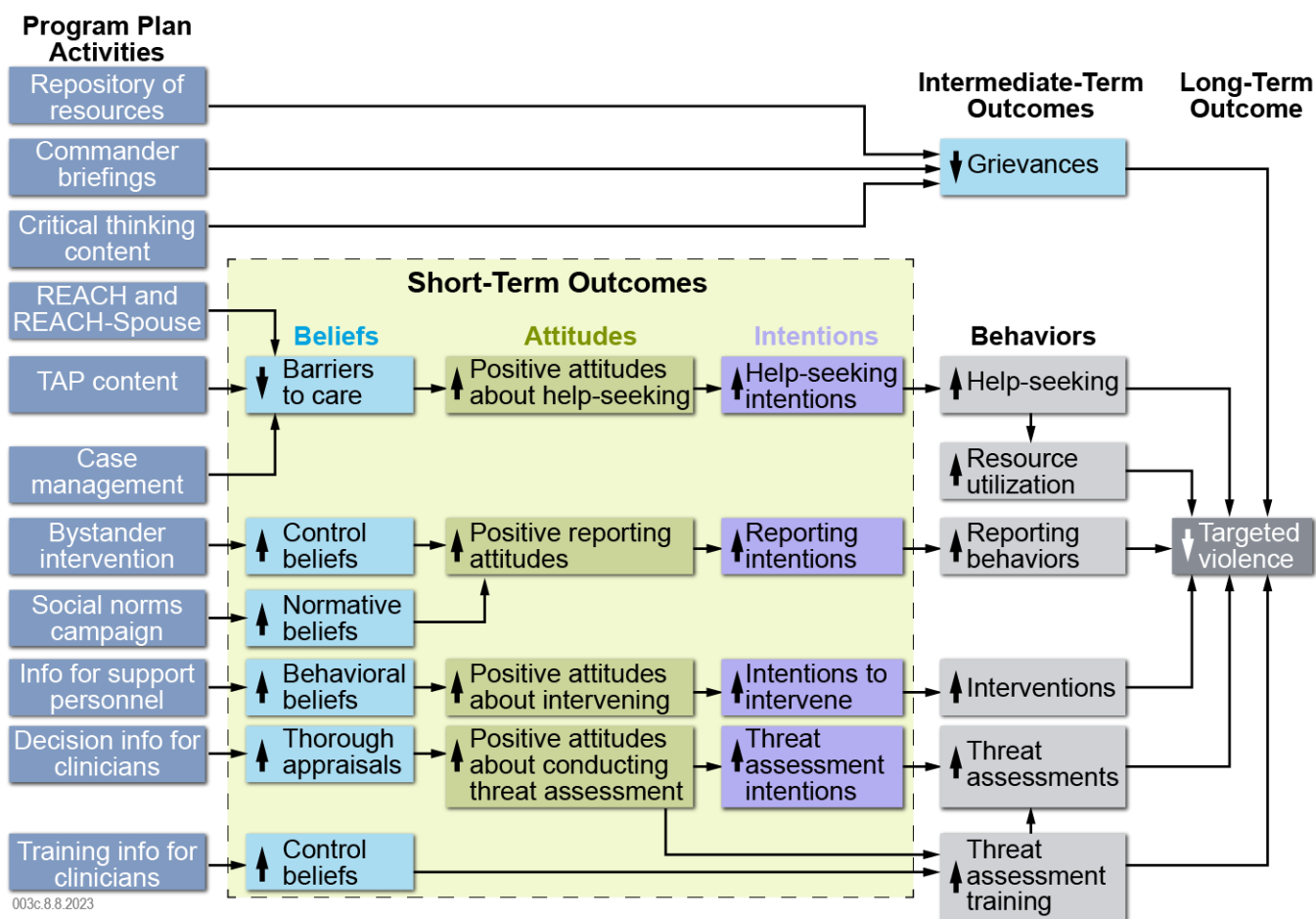
- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Prevent first occurrence of targeted violence 2: Normalize help-seeking 3: Increase Service members' reporting of concerning behaviors 4: Improve leaders' and support personnel's identification of and response to concerning behaviors 5: Enhance capacity decision-making among clinicians to conduct violence risk assessments |
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Logic Model

Figure 1 depicts the program plan logic model that identifies the connections between program activities, risk and protective factors for targeted violence, and intended outcomes. For example, providing a repository of resources to Service members is intended to ameliorate grievances among Service members. Research has shown that real or imagined grievances about unfair treatment of an individual or group often serve as the foundation for violent ideation, particularly when the perpetrator believes the grievance challenges a sacred value (e.g., Atran & Gómez, 2019). Other program plan activities are intended to reduce barriers to care, such as concerns about career impact and lack of knowledge of available resources, which influence Service members' perceptions of stigma and help-seeking attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Adler et al., 2015; Clary et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2018; Hom et al., 2017; Jensen & Bowen, 2022). Additional program plan activities are intended to improve Service members' control beliefs (beliefs that they have the opportunity, knowledge, ability, skill, and resources to report concerning behavior), as well as their normative beliefs (beliefs that peers approve of reporting concerning behaviors).

Figure 1

Logic Model of Program Plan Activities, Risk and Protective Factors, and Intended Outcomes



Evaluation Plan

The DHS Science and Technology Directorate recommended that our evaluation plan include an evaluability assessment, a pre-evaluation activity to determine the readiness of the installation's program plan activities for a productive outcome evaluation (Trevisan & Walser, 2015). They also recommended that the evaluation plan focus on risk and protective factors instead of targeted violence outcomes, which may be rare.

Therefore, the evaluation plan includes information about the evaluation purpose and approach, evaluability assessment steps to ensure the implementing installation is ready for evaluation, approvals that may be needed to conduct evaluation activities, evaluation questions, outcomes, potential data sources for collecting evaluation data, and indicators to measure changes in risk and protective factors for targeted violence. The evaluation plan also includes information about evaluation stakeholders, their roles, and the evaluation timeline.

Evaluation activities focus on using existing sources of data, supplemented with primary data collection. For example, implementation evaluation of promotion of evidence-based Resources Exist, Asking Can Help (REACH) and REACH-Spouse (Military OneSource, 2023a,b) program delivery and attendance includes activities such as documenting the number of installation partners who assisted with promoting REACH and REACH-Spouse program delivery and attendance; receptivity among facilitators, partners, and Service members; the number, lengths, locations, dates, and times of REACH and REACH-Spouse sessions; the number and types of Service members and spouses attending sessions; and engagement of Service members and spouses during sessions. Effectiveness evaluation activities include analyzing Health Related Behavior Survey data (Meadows et al., 2021), analyzing Status of Forces Survey data (OPA, n.d.), or collecting web survey data about perceived barriers to care and help-seeking attitudes, intentions, and behaviors.

Discussion

To address the need for cost-effective targeted violence prevention at installations, we created a program plan that focuses on low-cost prevention activities that build on existing installation resources. The program plan presents these activities in a user-friendly format with adaptation guidance to address the implementing installation's culture and priorities. We created an evaluation plan to help the implementing installation evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of program plan activities.

Next Steps

The next step is to pilot test the program plan at an installation. To accomplish this, we will engage with relevant stakeholders and policy offices to introduce the program plan, discuss its potential implications and benefits, and identify an interested pilot test location. Next, we will develop Memorandums of Understanding with key stakeholders participating in the implementation of the program plan. Memorandums of Understanding will define roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each participating installation partner to ensure effective collaboration, data sharing, and optimal resource allocation. We will then conduct an 18-month pilot test of the program plan to assess its feasibility, acceptability, implementation, and effectiveness. Throughout the pilot test, we will provide technical assistance to the selected installation to ensure successful program plan implementation and evaluation. Finally, we will revise the program plan based on data and feedback from the pilot test.

Future Research

In addition to the next steps outlined above, we identified several promising areas for future research to address targeted violence prevention needs of installations. First, additional research regarding the prevalence and nature of targeted violence within DoD and DoD contractor organizations is needed. Combining and analyzing data from human resources, law enforcement, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration could help to address this need. Second, commanders need better guidance on how to effectively refer a Service member for a command directed behavioral health evaluation. Developing research-based guidance with examples and explanations could help to ensure that commanders write referrals that contain clear, specific information about concerning behaviors to help clinicians understand what to focus on. Third, installation staff may need to work with Transition Assistance Program facilitators and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff to facilitate a warm handoff to VA for mental health treatment and financial counseling wraparound care for Transitional Service Members (TSMs) separating

from military service. In the future, TSMs may benefit from a mobile app to easily enroll in VA services during Transition Assistance Program training. Such enrollment could connect TSMs to programs, initiatives, and supportive resources to help them transition out of the military and find mental healthcare professionals. The Integrated Disability Evaluation System is a joint DoD and VA disability evaluation process that helps DoD determine whether wounded, ill, or injured Service members are fit for continued military service and provide disability benefits to Service members and Veterans, if appropriate. The DoD/VA Joint Incentive Fund is a resource that may provide opportunities for future related research in this area. Finally, the program plan activities presented here may serve as a launch pad for future endeavors related to targeted violence prevention. These activities could be used by Prevention, Assistance, and Response coordinators or as job aids for commanders to learn how to identify and support troubled Service members to prevent targeted violence.

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