Evaluating Nonmedical Counseling Programs
Information for Military & Family Life Counseling Program staff

What is the purpose of this study? Military & Family Life Counseling (MFLC) Program has been used widely across the military community. Despite our informal methods of analysis of how the program serves military families, a formal study gathering empirical data on MFLC services effectiveness has not been conducted. This study was then instituted to measure the resulting problem resolution, use of other health services or improved military and family well-being. This study will address these questions.

Who is conducting this study? The study is sponsored by the Office of Military Community and Family Policy within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and will be conducted by the RAND Corporation. RAND is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that studies issues related to military health and well-being.

MFLCs will:
(1) Provide information and invite eligible individuals to take part in the study
   • An eligible individual is someone with an adult individual or couple non-medical counseling visit that lasts 30 minutes or longer.
     o Civilian staff who are seeking help for a service member’s problem (a third party) are not eligible to participate and should not be given a card.
     o People who are not seeking non-medical counselling may hear about the study and express interest in taking the survey to give their opinions about the program. These individuals are not eligible to participate.
   • Use the following language when introducing the study:
     o We want to know how well this program is working for you so that we can improve it. To help us, the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research organization, is conducting an independent study of the MFLC program. They would like to send you more information about their study. This study will also help to highlight the importance of these services for you and your family.
(2) Ask individuals if they would be interested in receiving more information. After introducing the study to the individual, ask him or her to if they are willing to have RAND contact them about the study. This is not a consent to participate in the survey or to release any confidential information to RAND, but a consent to be contacted with further information. Email information is necessary for future contact, but listing a name is optional.
   • Hand the individual a card:
     o Please fill out this card. If you are interested in learning more, fill out your contact information and RAND will send you more information. Checking ‘yes’ now does not mean that you agree to participate. You will decide that after you get more information. I will not know if you decide to participate or not—it is your choice. And your responses will not be shared with me or the MFLC program
   • Every 30 minutes or longer session with an adult(s) should result in an individual filling out a card. If a session is with a couple, hand card to one member (alternate between Service member and spouse).
   • RAND will provide every MFLC with pre-printed cards and envelopes and pre-paid envelopes to return the cards to RAND on a bi-weekly basis.
   • Participants only need to be invited once. If you know that an individual has already sent in a card, you do not need to offer it again. However, if you are not sure, please introduce the study and ask them to fill out a card. RAND will ensure they get invited only once.
(3) Record the RAND ID on the activity form.
   • Record the number printed on each person’s card onto the person’s activity form at a time that works for you, but before handing the card to the participant. This will be the only way for RAND to link survey responses with data from the activity form that preserves confidentiality of the individual and the integrity of the MFLC program. No names or unique identifiers will be on the activity form and the MFLC program will not have access to the postcards linking the User ID with the participant contact information.
What will individuals be asked to do? Individuals with a visit of 30 minutes or longer in an individual or couple will be asked to fill out a card indicating their willingness to receive more information about the study.

- He or she fills out the card, seals it in the envelope, and hands it back to you or place in Fed Ex envelope.
- We would like a card from each session, whether or not the participant says ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ This will allow RAND to track the number of individuals who are not interested in the study.
- If the person says they are not interested, and does not wish to fill out the card, we ask that the MFLC circle “No” on the card and place it in the envelope so we have documentation for that refusal. If they ask you to fill out the card for them, that is fine.
- If the participant indicates on the card that they are interested in the study, they will receive an email from RAND inviting them to take the survey.
- Emails will come from the address ‘militarycounselingsurvey@rand.org’ and look like this:

  **Military Counseling Survey**
  MilitaryCounselingSurvey <militarycounselingsurvey@rand.org>
  Sat, 9/15/2015 1:47 PM
  Subject: [Participant email address]

  Dear Participant:

  Don’t miss this opportunity to let your voice be heard -
  take the MFLC survey today!

  You recently indicated that you are interested in telling us about your experiences with the Military Family Life Counseling program.
  We want to know how this program is working and how it could be changed to work better. The survey only takes about 10 minutes. Please go to:
  https://survey.rand.org/research/hosting/mflc
  and enter your unique passcode:

  - Emails will contain a link to the online survey, along with a confidential passcode assigned to each participant
  - Interested participants will receive the invitation email within a week of RAND’s receipt of the card, so it is important to mail or FedEx the completed cards to RAND on a regular basis.

What counts as an eligible visit?

- We are only including sessions with adult individuals or couples that are 30 minutes or more in length. If a session includes two 30 minute sessions, the individual can only receive one card
  - **Couple sessions are included.** Provide a card to one person in the couple; alternate each time which member of the couple receives a card (first couple give card to the Service Member, next couple give card to the spouse, and so on)

Do people have to participate in this study? This study is completely voluntary. Individuals should be assured that their participation in this study will not affect the services they receive from MFLC. Individuals can withdraw from the study at any point. Remind individuals that sending in the card for more information does not mean they have agreed to participate. They will receive more information from RAND and will consent at that time.

How will people’s confidentiality be preserved? Confidentiality is extremely important to RAND and to the MFLC program. RAND will follow strict procedures to ensure that individuals’ use of MFLC services, survey participation, activity form information, and survey data will be kept in strict confidence. Individuals’ survey data and contact sheet information will only be linked to RAND ID numbers and will never be directly linked to names or email addresses. Individuals’ names and email addresses are only used to contact them, invite them to
participate in the survey, and to detect whether a person took the survey more than once. Individual survey responses will be combined with the responses of others and reported as a group, never by individual, and individual-level data will not be shared with anyone outside of the RAND project team.

How long is the study going to last? The study team will invite participants starting in Fall 2014 and lasting eighteen months to ensure an adequate sample size. Participants will be asked to complete two short surveys (primarily via web). One survey will be completed immediately when the participant agrees to engage in the study. The other survey will be completed three months later.

What information does the survey collect? Survey topics include: nature and severity of the current concern, use of services, readiness, and family and individual well-being

What are the benefits of the survey? You may get asked about why this study is being conducted. Please note that this study is important for two reasons:

- It will help MFLC improve services for service members and their families by highlighting what is working well and what could be changed.
- It will provide information on the effectiveness of the program for helping individuals resolve problems. For the first time, we have a survey that asks about problem resolution directly from participants.

For more information or to request more cards:
Email MFLCsurvey@rand.org for a response the next business day.