

Military recruiting violations rise: GAO

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/14/AR2006081400591.html>

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Allegations of wrongdoing by U.S. military recruiters jumped by 50 percent from 2004 to 2005, and criminal violations such as sexual harassment and falsifying documents more than doubled, a congressional agency said on Monday.

The Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative agency, said the full extent of violations by military recruiters is unknown because the Defense Department does not have an oversight system.

While the GAO said available information likely underestimated the problem, it showed that allegations of recruiter wrongdoing increased to 6,600 cases in fiscal year 2005 from 4,400 a year earlier.

Substantiated cases rose to almost 630 cases from 400, and criminal violations jumped to 70 from about 30, it said.

The report said the military's roughly 20,000 recruiters have been under pressure to meet recruiting goals while a fairly strong economy has sustained a competitive job market and the death toll in the Iraq war has been rising.

"Determined to find ways to succeed in a challenging recruiting environment, some recruiters reportedly have resorted to overly aggressive tactics, such as coercion and harassment," the GAO report said.

That can hurt recruiting by damaging relationships with parents, teachers, coaches and others who have influence on potential applicants, the report said. It also can waste tax dollars if ineligible applicants are recruited and begin basic training, but do not enter military service, it said.

The report faulted the Defense Department for not establishing an "oversight framework" that requires reports on recruiter violations and sets criteria for characterizing the irregularities.

It also said the Army, Navy and Air Force measure recruiter performance primarily by the number of recruits who enlist and report to basic training, rather than the number who complete basic training.

The Marine Corps uses basic training attrition rates to evaluate recruiters, which the GAO said may deter its recruiters from committing violations.