



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON DC



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

5 Sep 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR AF/A1PT

FROM: SAF/MRQ

SUBJECT: Impacts of Social Media and Online Sexual Harassment on Service Members - DACOWITS RFI #9

In 2015, DACOWITS began a new line of study, the impact of social media on Service Members. The study was prompted by the Committee's 2014 installation visits and from concerns surrounding social media use and online bullying and harassment.

1. **Statement:** The services should revise their definition of sexual harassment and any regulations pertaining to the use of social media to clarify that conduct or speech that takes place wholly online can itself constitute sexual harassment.

**Response:** Currently the following Air Force (AF) directives/guidance address sexual harassment and social media: AFI 36-2706, *Equal Opportunity Programs, Military and Civilian*, and AFI 35-107, *Public Web and Social Communication*. The information in AFI 35-107 goes on to state what is not permitted to post to official AF social media sites, such as profanity, sexually disparaging remarks, hateful or abusive language or images, offensive terms that discriminate against specific ethnic, national or racial groups.

The information in AFI 36-2706 outlines the process for preventing, reporting, and responding to sexual harassment allegations. It goes on to say that sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature particularly when submission to such conduct is made directly or indirectly as a term or condition of employment.

The Air Force provides Sexual Harassment Awareness Education to all military members and DoD civilian employees. In addition, since the Air Force has full-time trained Equal Opportunity (EO) Professionals. Commanders and Leaders

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can call upon EO Professionals to provide adhoc training, targeted training, focus group discussions, etc at any time. Airmen or Civilian employees who participate in or condone misconduct, whether offline or online, may be subject to disciplinary, and/or administrative action.

2. **Statement:** The Services should revise and implement sexual harassment training that addresses online harassment, anonymity, and the consequences of online behavior on and off duty.

**Response:** Air Force military and civilians receive one hour of Equal Opportunity First duty Station Training upon their first duty assignment. The courses are taught using professionally trained and skilled full-time EO Professionals. Topics include sexual harassment, online harassment, discrimination and covers in detail the consequences of inappropriate behavior whether online or not.

In addition, Air Force requires all personnel to attend Newcomers Orientation class upon second and all subsequent assignments. Again, the course is taught by trained full-time Professionals. The course revisits all of the topics within the EO realm – sexual harassment, discrimination, hostile work environment, sexism, etc. Both courses are standardized across the Air Force yet can be locally modified for unique circumstances, or issues at a particular location.

3. **Statement:** The Service Secretaries and Joint Chiefs of Staff should communicate a united, passionate, and powerful message to the Armed Forces that sexual harassment and sexual assault are not part of our military culture.

**Response:** Jan 2016, the Secretary of the Air Force (SecAF) published an Air Force wide Policy Memorandum indicating unlawful discrimination, sexual harassment, or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated or condoned by anyone. Additionally it stated that sexual harassment may include sexual jokes and comments, sexual propositions, comments about a person's body parts, uninvited physical contact, and any sexual picture or statement communicated through computer systems, telephones, and/or social media.

The memo goes on to say that Commanders and Leaders at all organizational levels will be held accountable for creating a workplace free of sexual

harassment or harassment of any kind. Air Force Senior Leader Policies are posted at every installation in all well-traveled areas.

4. **Statement:** The Service Chiefs should send verbal and written communications to Service Members emphasizing that sexual harassment and sexual assault are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The message should embrace aggressive accountability of sexual harassment and sexual assault offenders, and those who were knowledgeable of the attacks and did nothing.

**Response:** The Air Force Senior Leadership communicates their stance against sexual assault, and sexual harassment, through policy or other electronic means. They interact with Airmen and spread the message that sexual harassment and sexual assault are not tolerated, condoned, or ignored. They stress the importance of working together to sustain an inclusive work environment free of discrimination and harassment. All airmen are expected to maintain the highest standards of personal and professional conduct at work, home, abroad, and on social media.

5. **Statement:** The Services should provide the same attention to preventing and responding to sexual harassment as they do to preventing and responding to sexual assault.

**Response:** The Air Force agrees completely with this statement. The Air Force has trained EO Professionals that attend rigorous initial skills training in the areas of sexual harassment prevention and response. The Air Force employs full-time EO Professionals (not collateral duty) Specialist to provide prevention and response services and support to both military and civilians.

Prevention is the best tool to eliminate sexual harassment. The Air Force promotes and takes steps to prevent sexual harassment from occurring; clearly communicating to employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated; provide sexual harassment training to all employees; establish or insure an effective complaint or grievance process is available; take immediate action to investigate and resolve all employee harassment complaints; and take appropriate action when a complaint is confirmed or substantiated.

It is Air Force policy to ensure that every Airman enjoys a non-hostile work environment free of unlawful discrimination or unlawful harassment of any kind. Air Force policy is simple: unlawful discrimination and unlawful harassment, including sexual harassment, will not be tolerated or condoned by anyone.

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