

III. SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT IN THE MILITARY

For 2011, DACOWITS sought to gain insight into the perceptions that Service members hold regarding the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment of women in uniform, DoD's progress in addressing the issue since the 2004 DACOWITS report was released, and the effectiveness of current prevention programs and reporting systems. To gather and analyze the experiences and implications of sexual assault and harassment of women in the military, the Committee and its research contractor, ICF International, developed two focus group protocols – one for enlisted members and one for officers – to capture the views of men and women Service members on these important topics. Consistent with previous DACOWITS reports, DACOWITS also examined existing DoD survey data and other relevant literature and studies on sexual assault and sexual harassment. This chapter highlights the findings from the mini-survey and focus group data collected by DACOWITS during its site visits in 2011.

The chapter begins with a description of the 2011 focus group participants and the qualitative analysis methodology used in the report. The remainder of the chapter highlights specific findings concerning the following domains:

- Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment in the Military
- Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Programs
- Reporting Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault and Harassment
- Impact of Sexual Assault and Harassment on Unit Readiness

A. CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Understanding the demographic and background characteristics of the focus group participants provides context for the overall themes and individual comments that emerged during the sessions. During summer 2011, DACOWITS conducted a total of 23 focus group sessions on the topic of sexual assault and harassment of women in the military. Focus groups were held at eight locations. A total of 226 participants attended the focus groups, with an average of 10 participants per session, representing the entire Active component (AC) Services and some elements of the Reserve component (RC). The overall demographic characteristics of the focus group participants are presented in Exhibit III-1.

**Exhibit III-1:
Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military
Demographic Profile of Focus Group Participants (N=226)**

| Variable | N | Percent* |
|--|------------|-----------------|
| Gender: | | |
| Female | 127 | 56% |
| Male | 99 | 44% |
| Total | 226 | 100% |
| Service: | | |
| Army | 50 | 22% |
| Navy | 44 | 20% |
| Air Force | 42 | 19% |
| Coast Guard | 37 | 16% |
| Marine Corps | 20 | 9% |
| Reserve (Army and Air Force) | 17 | 8% |
| Army National Guard | 16 | 7% |
| Total | 226 | 100% |
| Pay Grade: | | |
| E1-E4 | 42 | 19% |
| E5-E6 | 61 | 27% |
| E7-E9 | 51 | 23% |
| O1-O3 (including Warrant and Chief Warrant Officers) | 39 | 17% |
| O4-O6 | 33 | 15% |
| Total | 226 | 100% |
| Race and Ethnicity: | | |
| Non-Hispanic White | 104 | 46% |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 64 | 28% |
| Hispanic | 26 | 11% |
| Other (Non-Hispanic) | 26 | 11% |
| Missing | 6 | 3% |
| Total | 226 | 100% |
| Marital Status: | | |
| Married | 139 | 62% |
| Single, but with a significant other | 32 | 14% |
| Single, with no significant other | 28 | 12% |
| Divorced or legally separated | 25 | 11% |
| Widowed | 2 | 1% |
| Total | 226 | 100% |

| Exhibit III-1: Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military Demographic Profile of Focus Group Participants (N=226) | | |
|--|------------|-------------|
| Length of Military Service: | | |
| Under 3 years | 21 | 9% |
| 3-5 years | 35 | 15% |
| 6-10 years | 47 | 21% |
| 11-15 years | 46 | 20% |
| 16-20 years | 41 | 18% |
| More than 20 years | 36 | 16% |
| Total | 226 | 100% |

*Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As Exhibit III-1 shows, slightly more than half of participants were women (56%). Almost half of study participants were non-Hispanic White (48%), just over a quarter were non-Hispanic Black (28%), and just over ten percent were Hispanic (11%). The Army was the most represented Service, with just under a quarter of participants (22%), and the Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard were more or less equally represented, each comprising between 16 and 20 percent of the study participants. The Marines, Reserves and Army National Guard were also represented, each comprising slightly fewer than ten percent of the study participants. Half of participants were junior or senior Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) (E5-E9) (50%), and almost a third were officers (O1-O6, and including Warrant and Chief Warrant Officers) (32%), and over half of study participants had served more than 10 years in the military (54%). The majority of participants were married (62%). For a complete summary of the demographic characteristics of these focus group participants, see Appendix TBD.

B. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to identify salient themes was consistent with the approach the Committee has employed in the nine previous years under its revised charter. Specifically, the Committee, in partnership ICF social scientists, first develop focus group and survey instruments tailored to address the research questions of interest to DACOWITS. ICF staff also serve as scribes, accompanying the Committee members/facilitators to each focus group and generating a written transcript from the session. Each individual focus group transcript is then content-analyzed to identify major themes and sub-themes. The purpose of the sample-wide analysis is to determine the most salient comments throughout the focus group sessions, i.e., themes that appear most frequently within and across focus group sessions. These themes are presented in the relevant sections of this chapter, and participant ideas or comments that emerge too infrequently to be regarded as themes, but which are nevertheless noteworthy, are also presented.

C. PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT IN THE MILITARY

In 2004, when DACOWITS last studied the topic of sexual assault and harassment, the Committee found that Service members were generally aware of the extent of the problem of sexual assault, with the large majority of focus groups containing participants who were aware of incidents of sexual assault that had occurred at the unit, on the installation, or on deployment. In 2011, the Committee again sought to understand Service members' perception of the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, but also explored their views about if and how the prevalence of assault and harassment had changed over time and the impact of DoD policies designed to address these problems. Additional questions addressed their views about the impact future military policy changes (e.g., the end of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*) may have. This section presents focus group finding on the following sub-topics:

- Prevalence of Sexual Assault in the Military
- Prevalence of Sexual Harassment in the Military
- Changes in Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment Over Time
- Effectiveness of DoD Policies on Sexual Assault and Harassment
- Looking to the Future: Potential Impact of Military Policy on Sexual Assault and Harassment

Prevalence of Sexual Assault in the Military

DACOWITS asked focus group participants, “Do you think that sexual assault is common in the military these days? In your opinion, does it happen frequently, occasionally, or rarely?” Regularly, focus group participants from each branch, rank group, and gender expressed that sexual assault is common.

“It [sexual assault] does happen a lot in the combat area.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I think it happens frequently, and you hear about it all the time.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“It happens more than we know. A soldier [assaulted] his spouse just a few weeks ago.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Less frequently, participants reported that sexual assault is not common in the military today.

“All the years I’ve been in [the military], I’ve never run into sexual assault or harassment.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I don’t think that it is common in the working environment – in the day-to-day work it is frowned upon. In private times outside of working hours there is potential for it, yeah. But in uniform? No.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Role of Alcohol on Sexual Assault

Occasionally, senior Service members reported that alcohol plays a role in increasing the prevalence of sexual assault.

“Saturday night people get together, start drinking. Doesn’t get reported but it happens. You introduce alcohol and things happen.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“In my last deployment...I was exposed to at least three cases with sexual harassment/assault and there was alcohol involved.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“It’s alcohol and young girls and old guys who take advantage of [sexually harass] the weak... and I guess innocent too.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Prevalence of Sexual Harassment in the Military

DACOWITS also asked focus group participants “Do you think that sexual harassment is common in the military these days? In your opinion, does it happen frequently, occasionally, or rarely?” Many focus group participants expressed that sexual harassment occurs regularly in the military.

“I think that we are prepared to have higher tolerance levels. I came in; all these grunts and junior and senior NCOs are making these comments all day, and that tolerance level gets to a certain point, and you kind of become numb on that [sexual harassment].”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“In the work center a lot of people tell jokes, and some of them are off-color. Some people do get offended by that, and you gotta say ‘Cool it.’”
—Junior Man Service Member

“I had it [sexual harassment] happen in Afghanistan. This one guy told me that he will come at me, and I was like, ‘You are crazy.’ I’m like, ‘Dude, step off,’ and every day he would follow me, and I’m like, ‘Are you serious?’”
—Senior Woman Service Member

“When you’re working with certain people and your personalities mesh, you don’t think about it, but when a new person comes in, you have to tone it down because they may take it differently.”
—Junior Man Service Member

“Frequently (*several participants agree*). I always joke that it is part of your billet description.”
—Junior Woman Service Member

Occasionally, women participants discussed struggles with clearly identifying what constitutes sexual harassment.

“Harassment is...what it is to one person is not the same [thing] to another person. There is [sic]...gray areas in between...”
—Junior Woman Service Member

“When I came in, I didn’t even know what would be considered harassment. I look back and I’m like, ‘Damn, that was harassment. She didn’t just not like him, she was uncomfortable around him.’”
—Junior Woman Service Member

Less frequently, men Service members expressed that sexual harassment is not prevalent in the military.

“What I’ve seen over the years, it’s mostly a lot of flirting [, not sexual harassment].”
—Junior Man Service Member

A few men focus group participants stated that sexual harassment wasn’t an issue in the military and was instead a form of hazing.

“..there’s hazing involved..to some extent. It’s taken on as a joke, but there’s always a group that doesn’t want to be involved...”
—Junior Man Service Member

Changes in Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military over Time

Changes in sexual assault prevalence

In most of the focus groups, there were participants who believed the prevalence of sexual assault in the military has stayed the same over time.

“It is hard to say because a lot of people don’t report it. I would say that it [prevalence of sexual assault] is about the same.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“As we increase the awareness and training the reporting has gone up which would say that crime has gone up, but I don’t think that’s true...as we train more, the reporting goes up. On the other side of the coin, the prosecution of the crime has been woeful – it’s a he said-she said in a court of law. So I think the occurrence may not have changed over time, but the reporting over time has.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“ We had this training this one month, and then we still had an incident later that month. I don’t see the numbers going down or up because we’re talking about it more often. It is an action that people take because of alcohol or depression and you can’t just change those things.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I think that it depends on where you are stationed. You see different things from base to base.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

A few groups contained senior men Service members who stated that sexual assaults have increased over time due to a change in the “type” of men joining the military today.

“I think it has risen up based on the quality of soldiers that are coming into the military. With respect to that, it used to be harder to get into the military. Nowadays, you get infantry soldiers. They work around men a lot. Then they come and work around women. And they don’t know how to communicate.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“After 9/11, you have all walks of life coming in.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Less frequently but of note, some senior women Service members explained that sexual assault was a reason that junior women Service members’ desire to leave the military.

“I had one who was sexually assaulted...and he did not get kicked out, and she just wants to get out now.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Changes in sexual harassment prevalence

With respect to harassment, Service members frequently stated that sexual harassment persists in the military, and there has been no change in its prevalence over time.

“I can’t say if it’s gotten better or worse. It’s never been directed towards me, and if they are just talking and it’s not including me I won’t take offense to it.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“Yeah, it’s [sexual harassment] still there. It was more prevalent earlier, but maybe as I’ve gotten more senior I’ve stopped [seeing it]. I felt it coming up in rank.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Less common was the opinion that the prevalence of sexual harassment has increased over time. Some participants who held this view attributed the increase to today’s longer deployments, and others felt it was due to a flagging commitment of leadership to prevent harassment.

“Before we had good leadership, and now people just forget and say things they shouldn’t.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I think it has [increased] – especially the 15 month deployments. Because you separate the soldiers (*pause*)...the males from their families. Some soldiers tend to get complacent and they will say or do things that they know they aren’t supposed to.”

—Senior Man Service Member

There were some men Service members in the focus groups who expressed that the climate has become less tolerant of sexual harassment of women in the military.

“I think based on 30 years ago; we’ve come a long way. Back then there weren’t many women... The overall climate has changed in regards to education and enforcement compared to 30 years ago.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Sexual assault and harassment and junior Service members

Occasionally, focus group participants discussed the role rank plays in sexual assault and harassment, sharing that junior Service members are more likely to be sexually harassed or assaulted than senior Service members.

“It happens between the lower pay ranks (*all participants agree with this*), O3 on down, and E5 on down. Maybe the supervisors need a different sort of training to look out for those things.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“You’ll see – as a junior Marine – oh yeah. You’ll see it a lot - the higher ones harassing the lower ones.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

A few senior women attributed this disparity to issues of low self-esteem among today’s junior women Service members. They voiced the possibility that today’s junior women Service members enter the service with lower self-esteem than previous generations of women and that a lack of confidence may play a role in sexual assault and harassment of younger women personnel.

“And it [issues that may lead to increased sexual assault or harassment] also has to do with self-esteem as well. There isn’t a woman in this room who had low self-esteem when they came in, but these women who come in now do have low self-esteem, and when you see a guy giving them a little bit of attention, they don’t know what to do with that, and when he takes it a little too far...”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I don’t know if we need to instill more confidence in our younger members; confidence is a huge part of prevention, they might not feel there’s anybody they can go to. There’s guys showing them attention and that might not be the guy that they want. There might need to be a separate training for younger members.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Effectiveness of DoD Policies on Sexual Assault and Harassment

Focus group participants discussed the effectiveness of DoD policies and programs in addressing the needs of victims and ensuring offenders are appropriately punished.

Meeting the needs of victims

DACOWITS members first covered the needs of victims, asking “What grade would you give DoD for addressing the needs of victims of both sexual assault and sexual harassment?” Frequently, men Service members gave DoD high marks for providing ample resources to victims, while women Service members were divided on the effectiveness of DoD policies.

“A for effort. But implementation depends on the ranks...it’s all waivers and favors. Everything in the military is that way.”
—Senior Man Service Member

“A. They [sexual assault and harassment victims] have so many resources – it’s good.”
—Junior Man Service Member

“A. The support structure is there.”
—Junior Man Service Member

“It’s changing everyday as we do training; I think we are doing good things. I’d have a hard time giving a grade. Could we do better? Probably.”
—Senior Man Service Member

In contrast to men Service members’ generally positive impression of the effectiveness of DoD policies, women study participants occasionally gave DoD low marks for the resources and support provided to victims of sexual harassment and assault.

“Yeah, we have the programs, but past the company levels, getting to exercise our rights... execution - yeah I’d give them an ‘F.’”
—Junior Woman Service Member

“To be honest, I’m not too sure. I’d go with ‘C.’”
—Junior Woman Service Member

Less frequently, women focus group participants expressed that the DoD policies were effective in assisting victims of sexual assault.

“I would go with an ‘A.’ As far as (the local hospital), they stay with these cases a lot; they get them the counseling they need and they do have some good programs for them.”
—Senior Woman Service Member

“As far as victims, a ‘B,’ only because I know all the programs and service that are out there for the victims.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Ensuring offenders are appropriately punished

DACOWITS members next asked focus group participants to discuss the effectiveness of DoD policies and programs in ensuring offenders are appropriately punished. DACOWITS members asked, “What grade (e.g., A, B, C) would you give DoD on current policies and programs to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to punish offenders in the case of both sexual assault and sexual harassment?”

Men Service members gave varying marks to the DoD for effectively punishing offenders.

“I think that I’ll give it an A because it [sexual assault and harassment reporting] goes right up [to the necessary supervisor].”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I think to make a better grade, the punishment needs to be more severe and that it can screw up their lives.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Some women Service members gave the DoD relatively low marks for ensuring that offenders are appropriately prosecuted.

“I give the DoD an ‘A’ for doing what they need to do. As far as prosecuting, I give them a ‘Z’”.

—Senior Woman Service Member

“In my personal opinion, as far as offenders go, [I’d give DoD] a ‘C.’”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“My personal experience - with my command, I would give it an ‘A.’ They did all the steps, but if you look at the stats overall, I would give it a ‘C.’”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Looking to the Future: Potential Impact of Military Policy on Sexual Assault and Harassment

Impact of the repeal of “Don’t ask, Don’t tell”

DACOWITS members asked, “Will the repeal of ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell policy’ have an impact on sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military? In what ways?” Frequently, Service members discussed the impact of *Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell* (DADT) on man-on-man harassment. Occasionally, Service members discussed the impact of DADT on woman-on-woman and man-on-woman harassment. In all cases, Service members indicated that any initial increase would be followed by an eventual decline in sexual assault and harassment.

“I think that it will be more of a male issue than it would be for females.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“Yes (*1 other participant agrees*), in one way, harassment between males and males and females and females will increase if those individuals happen to come out. But as this generation filters out the next generation, I think it will be less of a big deal.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I think it will go up. There’s a dynamic culture change that will occur. I’ve read that it’s not an issue within the military, but in the short term I think there will be an increase with harassment claims, within the realm.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“Yes, with the DADT [repeal], I think that it will [lead to] more harassment.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Impact of women in ground combat

Focus group participants were asked “If women were allowed to serve in ground combat assignments, would this have an impact on sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military? In what ways?” Frequently, study participants expressed that the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment on women would increase if they served in combat, although not necessarily due to being in theatre.

“[Yes, sexual assault and harassment would increase.] I can only imagine how women overseas or in Iraq, the things going on, the stress and the time over there

– how bad it is with this.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I can see how it [women in combat] potentially heightens the threat. It’s a different story when someone's orders say ‘indefinite’ and you only see two females, I'm sure things can go wrong.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“When I was on my IA [Initial Assessment], when you brought a group to the base, certain behaviors changed because of [women coming in], and it will happen...just because [women] are simply present, they are going to be available to be sexually harassed – on subs, on detachment, anywhere.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“It [women in combat] could have a big impact on harassment and assault. Because we serve with Joes and we smoke and joke, now you put a women in there – that can now be considered harassment.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Summary: Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment in the Military

Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment today and over time

DACOWITS asked focus group participants a series of questions about the prevalence of sexual assault in the military. Regardless of Service branch, focus group participants reported that sexual assault is prevalent in the military, although several junior Service members stated that they did not feel sexual assault occurs on a regular basis. Focus group participants often expressed that the prevalence of sexual assault has remained the same over time. Several senior Service members cited alcohol and a perceived decline in the moral character or “quality” of those entering the Services as reasons why the prevalence of sexual assault has increased. Some participants reported that junior Service members are typically harassed more than senior Service members – by both their junior peers and higher-ranked superiors. A few senior women Service members questioned if low self-esteem may make some junior women Service members more susceptible to sexual assault. These women also discussed the significant role sexual harassment and assault can play on junior Service members' desire to leave the military.

DACOWITS asked focus group participants a series of questions about the prevalence of sexual harassment in the military. Most focus group participants stated that sexual harassment is prevalent in the military today, and most indicated that its prevalence had not changed over time. Several women focus group participants expressed difficulty discerning what constitutes sexual harassment, while a small number of men Service members shared they felt sexual harassment was not prevalent in the military and is instead a form of hazing. Several Service members expressed that the prevalence of sexual harassment may be declining due to increased prevention

training, while others felt the decline could instead be attributed to a shift toward a climate less tolerant of sexual harassment. Several Service members stated that sexual harassment prevalence has not declined because leadership has not taken a strong enough stance against sexual harassment.

Effectiveness of DoD policies and programs

When asked to rate the effectiveness of DoD policies and programs on addressing the needs of victims of sexual harassment and assault, responses differed widely and often by gender. The majority of men Service members gave the DoD high marks for providing ample resources to victims, while women Service members were divided on the effectiveness of DoD policies and programs, with the majority offering low grades. Men and women focus group participants were more evenly divided when asked to rate the effectiveness of DoD program and policies on punishing offenders, with the majority of both genders giving the DoD low marks for their handling of the punishment of offenders.

Potential impact of future military policy changes

When asked to consider the impact that the repeal of DADT will have on sexual assault and harassment, the majority of focus group participants discussed the impact the policy change will have on man-on-man harassment. Of the minority of Service members that discussed the impact the repeal will have on women, most felt that there would be an initial increase in sexual assault and harassment followed by an eventual decline.

DACOWITS asked focus group participants whether sexual assault and harassment would increase if women served in combat, and the majority of Service members from both genders felt that it was likely that sexual assault and harassment would be more prevalent, although not necessarily due to being in theatre. The majority also indicated that the initial increase in sexual misconduct would be followed by an eventual decline once women were integrated into ground combat roles.

D. SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

DACOWITS asked focus group participants to discuss their experiences with sexual assault and harassment prevention training programs and how effective these programs were in raising awareness and educating Service members about how to respond and where to seek help if necessary. This section discusses focus group findings concerning the following sub-topics:

- Awareness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Training
- Effectiveness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Training

- Role of Leadership in Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention

Awareness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Training

DACOWITS focus group participants discussed their awareness of sexual assault and harassment prevention training, and nearly all reported that they had undergone some form of training.

“[The training] is more frequent and structured.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“We all have the training we have to do.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“There’s much more awareness [of the impact of sexual assault and harassment] now.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“With SAPRO (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office), you have to repeat the training over and over again.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Effectiveness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Training

With some exceptions, Service members tended to believe that sexual assault and harassment prevention training has effectively educated the military about preventing sexual assault and harassment and also provided victims and allies with the necessary tools to report an assault or harassment.

“I don’t so much know if it has gone down, but we have been trained better to deal with it [sexual harassment].”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I think that now, it starts with the recruiting station; they will sit you down and talk about it. They [the military] have realized it is a problem... training and starting with prevention, but it also includes how to submit a report...If we change on all levels, from reporting to submitting, it will get better.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I think it [number of sexual assaults] went down due to all the ‘death by PowerPoint’ and trainings.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Effective aspects of sexual assault and harassment training

Focus group members were asked “Based on the training or educational programs designed to help prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment in which you have participated, what aspects of these programs did you find most effective?” Frequently, Service members discussed that they felt skits and in-person presentations were the most effective forms of sexual assault and harassment training, as well as small group discussions.

“They had a...play. It was great. After every skit, they asked the audience if they felt like it was sexual assault or sexual harassment. It resulted in all kinds of feedback.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“People pay more attention when there are people talking about it [sexual assault and harassment prevention] in person.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“...you can say, ‘What are you going to do in this scenario? What do you think this person’s buddy should do?’ And walk them through it and show them what the right thing to do is. Otherwise, people will not be paying attention.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“They [the military] need to move away from the AKO (web-based) training. When they came into the gymnasium [for training], it stopped being so PC. It was so real.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“...a smaller group...that helps. The whole battalion of 1,000 people – they pack us all in at DHHB, and that soldier in the corner isn’t paying attention. He’s not interacting.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Rarely, junior women Service members expressed that small group discussions were not an effective form of training.

“...the [sexual assault and harassment prevention] discussions become a joke, and everyone makes jokes about it.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Ineffective aspects of sexual assault and harassment training

Focus group members were also asked: “Based on the training or educational programs designed to help prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment in which you have participated, what aspects of these programs did you find least effective?” Typically, Service members stated that large group training was the least effective method. Some participants mentioned that they found the repetitive nature of the trainings to be increasingly less effective.

“We’ve heard it so many times that we know it.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“The [sexual assault and harassment prevention] trainings are all the same, just change a few words.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“We watched videos when I went through from the early 90s and that doesn’t fit with our generation. That doesn’t fit with the digital age.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“If you teach en masse, you’re not going to reach people at the individual level. You’re not going to reach the people that really need it...mass education will not help the girl who is falling in love with the guy who raped her...”

—Senior Man Service Member

Occasionally, men Service members shared they felt training would not effectively prevent sexual assault and harassment.

“With all the training, the awareness is higher, but some people will just do it. With the awareness, you can stop a lot of people from doing it. [But] There will be people with those personalities and tendencies, and they will do it [regardless].”

—Junior Man Service Member

“If someone thinks that it is okay to sexually assault someone, the briefing is not going to change [their] mind – those classes are not going to stop it.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“It’s still going to happen regardless; there’s still going to be that one person [who commits sexual assault or harassment].”

—Junior Man Service Member

A few participants discussed preventive tools which they believed to be ineffective, either because the response was delayed or because the tool did not help to actually address the issue.

“They gave us a rape whistle and bells. They were helpful, but it was after the fact. I think they wait too long.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“...they definitely treat it as a crime, but they are not preventing the problem. So, in Iraq, there is an assault, and all the females have to have a battle buddy, but the males just walk around just fine.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Bystander intervention training

Of the eight focus groups that discussed bystander intervention training, seven groups had one or more Service members who reported participating in this specific form of prevention training. Among those who had participated, opinions about the training were mixed; with most reporting that bystander intervention training was effective.

“It [bystander intervention training] is like that commercial, someone steps in and steps up and pays it forward. It’s like, ‘You can’t do this,’ it’s like a constant thing.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Awareness is the first thing...I knew what to expect; as soon as you see it, you need to stop it.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I believe that with this [bystander awareness] training, people will actually look out for each other that they work with.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Less frequently, focus group participants indicated that they felt bystander intervention training did not help them feel more compelled to act to help prevent sexual harassment or assault.

“If you are out at a bar and see someone that you don’t know – some lady getting drunk – it is hard to come up to them. And if you see someone in the uniform, you’re more likely to help. But out in town, you’re not like, ‘She looks like a Marine. I’ll say something to them.’”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“[In bystander awareness training] I think that you learn that it’s easier to just walk away and say that you didn’t see it.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Role of Leadership in Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention

The influential role senior Service members play in sexual assault and harassment prevention was a dominant theme in the focus groups. Service members expressed a desire for leadership to actively participate in sexual assault and harassment prevention training and to “walk the walk” by serving as positive role models to create a zero-tolerance environment for sexual assault and harassment.

“It’s not just the video and training, it’s seeing General X sharing and talking about it. It’s an open door. From the leadership, to see that dynamic come into play – it’s great.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“When the chain of command doesn’t tackle it [sexual assault and harassment], that’s why things happen.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“No matter how good the training is, it’s up to the command. ...someone made a comment about [someone else’s] butt, and the supervisor took action right away, and I think that had a positive consequence in that he was serious about it.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“When you put someone in a command position, it needs to be instilled in them just the same as the warrior creed [is instilled in them]. We know it; it needs to be instilled in the command like it’s no joking matter. [The command] needs to be [held] accountable.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

A few senior Service members discussed the culture they must create as leaders to help combat sexual assault and harassment.

“The command has to provide the culture that is acceptable and a culture where it is safe to report, and where the person reporting has to feel that they are safe and are comfortable reporting it.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“It’s zero-tolerance, so it’s up to us to make the correction action in a case-by-case basis. If a case arises it’s up to us to implement the correct punishment based on the crime they have done.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Summary: Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Programs

This section summarizes the findings on Service member awareness and effectiveness of sexual assault and harassment prevention programs.

Awareness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Training

Most DACOWITS focus group participants reported that they have received some form of sexual assault and harassment prevention training. In focus groups that covered the topic of bystander intervention training, many of the participants were aware of that specific program.

Effectiveness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Training

DACOWITS explored the extent to which the current sexual assault and harassment prevention trainings are perceived as effective at addressing the needs of Service members. Within those focus groups that discussed prevention training, the majority of participants indicated that the training has effectively educated Service members about resources available to victims of sexual assault or harassment. Some participants said that prevention training is part of a larger culture shift, and that this training will contribute to an eventual decline in sexual assault and harassment. Of the eight focus groups that discussed the effectiveness of bystander intervention training, the majority of participants felt it was an effective form of sexual assault and harassment prevention training.

DACOWITS asked Service members what methods lead to effective program delivery. Most often, focus group participants felt that in-person presentations, small group discussions, and plays were the most effective forms of sexual assault and harassment prevention programming. A small number of women Service members instead expressed that small group discussions were seen as a joke by man Service members. Most often, Service members shared that large group presentations and online training were the least effective forms of sexual assault and harassment prevention. A small number of Service members discussed sexual assault and prevention tools that they perceived as ineffective, including rape whistles and women buddies. A few man Service members shared they did not feel any prevention training could successfully eradicate all sexual assault and harassment.

Role of Leadership in Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention

Focus group participants frequently discussed the important role leadership plays in preventing sexual assault and harassment. Service members expressed a desire for leaders to serve as role models by treating sexual assault and harassment prevention seriously – both in their daily lives and by participating in prevention trainings.

E. REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT

DACOWITS asked participants about awareness and effectiveness of reporting procedures for victims of sexual harassment and assault.

This section discusses focus group findings concerning the following sub-topics:

- Awareness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Reporting Procedures
- Effectiveness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Reporting Procedures
- Effectiveness of Safeguards to Protect Those Who Report from Retaliation
- Perceived Justice

Awareness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Reporting Procedures

DACOWITS members asked focus group participants: “If a friend experienced sexual assault or harassment, where would you refer that individual to get help or assistance?” Frequently, Service members were able to identify available resources for victims.

“...people know what to do. It’s everywhere – SAPRO is everywhere.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“You have a lot of options. Chaplin, Supervisor, SARC.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I would take them to the Chaplin, and take it from there, and if the Chaplin thinks that she should take it further...I haven’t been in a situation where this happened to me or to someone I know. I would tell them to talk to the Chaplin.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“Most commands have victim advocates. They are on duty 24/7, and someone will be on the phone all week. They have a duty SAVRON; resources are out there if something happens, no matter the time of day.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Less frequently, the groups contained women participant who were unclear about how to connect with available resources in the case of sexual assault or harassment.

“We just got back from deployment. I’m sure there is someone, but we just don’t know because we just got back.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I wouldn’t know who to report it [sexual assault] to at this command, and I don’t think everyone knows who to report it to other than your immediate supervisor.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I was thinking the chain of command? That’s the only place I can think [of].”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Awareness of restricted reporting option for victims of sexual assault

A few woman study participants discussed their awareness of restricted¹ reporting options for victims of sexual assault. Senior Woman Service members expressed uncertainty about whom to contact to correctly submit a restricted report.

“You have it [restricted reporting] in theory, but in practice it is not working right. You have posters all over, but there is no name about who to contact for more information.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I wouldn’t know who to report it to [sexual assault using restricted reporting] at this command, and I don’t think everyone knows who to report it to other than your immediate supervisor.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Awareness of reporting procedures for troops serving outside the United States

Occasionally, focus group participants expressed a lack of knowledge about how to report sexual harassment or assault when serving with foreign troops.

¹ Restricted reporting is an option for victims of sexual assault who prefer to confidentially disclose the crime via one of four reporting avenues (SARC [Sexual Assault Response Coordinator], VA [Victim Advocate], Health Care Provider, or Chaplin) without triggering the official investigative process.

“For the Reserves, we’ve had incidents overseas; we have very few Reservists overseas, and we don’t really know what to do...and there was no policy for dealing with that [were there to be an incident]. As a Reservist, I had no idea what to do if that were to happen. There’s a lack of info, especially as [Reservists] are there only a weekend or two a month.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I’ve seen it [sexual harassment] happen more openly and actively with the French and others [overseas troops] more openly than here.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“For the Reserves, we’ve had incidents overseas; we have very few Reservists overseas, and we don’t really know what to do...”

—Senior Man Service Member

Effectiveness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Reporting Procedures

Strengths of sexual assault and harassment reporting procedures

DACOWITS asked focus group participants for their views on the effectiveness of sexual assault and harassment reporting procedures. Occasionally, Service members expressed that as awareness of available reporting options has increased, victims have become more comfortable submitting reports of sexual assault and harassment.

“I think that as females become aware of reporting procedures, more are being reported and come to light, versus when there was less training.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I think we’ve done well and things are starting to be reported a bit more. Maybe at the start of my career, people wouldn’t report things but with the shift in attitude, they are more likely to report things now.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I also think that the reporting that goes on today is a lot easier than it was 20 years ago. It allows us to deal with harassment and assault.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Used to be if I tell on them [the victims], I’ll be prosecuted. Now it’s more likely that they can tell someone who will initiate the process for them.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Barriers to reporting

Focus group participants were asked, “Do barriers exist that might prevent your friend from being willing to report the incident or get help? If so, describe them.” Service members listed a number of barriers to reporting, including a lack of trust in the reporting system, fear of stigma, fear of reprimand for underage drinking, and conflicted feelings of victims toward attackers.

Lack of trust in the reporting system

Frequently, Service members mentioned that a lack of trust in the reporting system served as a barrier to reporting sexual misconduct.

“...there is no confidentiality.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“...if they [sexual assault or harassment victims] don’t trust the advocate... what if the problem is the victim advocate, you know? It’s a big trust issue.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“People know what’s wrong, but there is not trust in the system for reporting. I had a woman who was having an issue, and instead of reporting it through [our] system, she filed a civil restraining order, both for the benefit of herself and the person on the other hand.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

This lack of trust in the reporting system leads some victims to seek resources off-base, as was occasionally discussed by focus group participants.

“I would imagine they go off, as a safer bet if you want to keep it confidential.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I would say that 90% of the time, the programs [to help victims of sexual harassment or assault] on-base are useless. I understand why they’re there, but they don’t work.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“[Victims of sexual assault go] off-base. Because they feel they have more confidentiality.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Some of the junior Service member focus groups discussed the effectiveness of the restricted reporting option for victims of sexual assault. Several participants within these groups expressed concern that although the restricted reporting process is supposed to be confidential it is still possible for victim information to leak out.

“... if you’re junior [Service member] and you don’t know all the options and she [the victim] says something to her supervisor because she trusts her, and now you can’t go restricted, and now everyone is going to know...”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“It can be a little harder to find out if it’s a restricted case, but even if it is, they [Officers] can use their rank to find out.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

[Moderator: There is restricted reporting that is meant for the victim without having to report ...Are people going to find out anyhow?]

“I think so – it depends on the connections and who people may tell.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Fear of stigma after reporting sexual assault and harassment

Occasionally, study participants discussed how the stigma of reporting, including the possibility of being “singled out” after making a report, may lead to underreporting.

“The stigma of reporting is still there. Some people are just lucky enough to have leadership to try to protect them from the stigma.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I would say the lack of reports [of sexual harassment] is [from] not wanting to cause problems or being seen as someone who people can’t talk and trust while they’re around. So barriers shift and that’s how you get into a group of people who end up talking about that [making comments that may be perceived as sexual harassment].”

—Junior Man Service Member

“No one wants to be that person who stands up when everyone else is not reporting these incidents.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Less frequently, focus group participants reported that the stigma of reporting sexual assault or harassment had declined.

“The stigma of reporting isn’t as bad as it used to be.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Fear of Reprimand for Underage Drinking

A few woman focus group participants discussed how victims of sexual assault or harassment that were engaged in underage drinking may be reluctant to report the incident due to fear of being reprimanded for illegal behavior.

“I think a lot of people are just scared. I hear about it in dorms, and people are scared because they have been drinking underage, and they are nervous to put themselves in trouble. So they won’t report because they don’t want to get in trouble.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“If you were involved with underage drinking, they don’t want the double jeopardy; they don’t want to get involved with that. They won’t report anything where they feel that they’ll find out that I was drinking and I’ll go to mast, and they’ll think I’m a dirtbag.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Conflicted feelings of victims toward attackers

Rarely, men Service members discussed how conflicted feelings of victims toward their attackers may serve as a barrier to reporting sexual assault.

“Might be that the female really liked the guy. She doesn’t want to not have contact with him.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Effectiveness of Safeguards to Protect Those that Report from Retaliation

Focus group participants were asked “Are the safeguards the Services have in place to protect members who report sexual harassment or sexual assault effective in preventing retaliation against those who complain of sexual harassment or sexual assault?” Although not discussed at

length in many groups, some women Service members expressed that safeguards in place did not prevent retaliation.

“I think it’s [underreporting of sexual misconduct] fear of repercussion. If I got into trouble with someone in my unit, there’s no way to separate us if I were to report him.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“Vigilante justice does happen – we’re all soldiers but we’re also humans.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“Yeah, it could happen in your evaluation. There are ways to do it that are not so direct.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Less frequently, participants expressed that safeguards that are in place were effective in preventing retaliation by offenders.

“I think so [that safeguards are effective], because with restricted or unrestricted [reporting], if something happens it is kept up, and the CO [Commanding Officer] handles it, and months pass and people transfer, and you don’t know that it happens.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Perceived Justice

Focus group participants frequently expressed a lack of clear understanding of the military’s stance on offender punishment, and they often stated they felt offender punishments were inconsistent.

“The variety of punishment is out of this world.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“The measures are there but are not being enforced or implemented.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“It’s devastating when a senior person doesn’t follow through on what policy is.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“We see all these videos on how it [punishment of offenders] happens, but it never shows the outcome after the fact.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“...it depends on who you know, and what you’re doing. So, if you’re accused of assaulting and you’re seen as being good, it’s going to be different than if you were already seen as a dirtbag...”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“Yeah, what happens to them after they are prosecuted?”

—Junior Man Service Member

Occasionally, men participants provided suggestions on how to use offender punishment as a prevention tool.

“Seeing actual results will make soldiers reflect on their actions more so than the threat of action.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“To help prevent [incidents]... showing what happens to the perpetrator in the end. They are separated by the command, and everything after that is hearsay, so that would help with deterrence.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“Use examples without using someone’s name. We get soldiers, 5 or 7 years and they can remember that joker who did X, Y, Z. That will keep people from violating policies.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Perception of punishment differences by rank

DACOWITS asked focus group participants, “Does the rank or position of an individual accused of sexual harassment or sexual assault make a difference in the action that is taken with respect to that accusation? In what way?” Junior and senior Service members expressed opposing views on punishment differences for sexual harassment and assault offenders by rank. Junior Service members expressed that higher ranked Service members are given more leniency than junior Service members. In contrast, senior Service members stated that higher ranked officers get stricter punishments, were more scrutinized, and more likely to lose their jobs than lower ranked officers.

“It happens. If you complain about a male, and they’re over you, most likely they’ll give you a bad review.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“..I think that they would be quicker to bust an enlisted soldier than an officer. They get more chances to screw up than a lower enlisted. We had a LT [Lieutenant] that screwed up three times and nothing happened – they just moved him.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“They say that they are getting away with it because of their rank, but that’s not the case. I think that they are dealt with severely.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“If a Sergeant Major does it he gets pushed into retirement, and a private does it, he’s kicked out.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“Lately, the military has been making strides. Years ago, it would be that a junior person got punished and the senior person got it swept under the rug. Now, you see them getting punished majorly. There [has been] major change.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Perceived impact of the “good old boys” club on offender punishment

Some participants discussed how preferential treatment— which they described as the “old boys club” or “old boys network”— plays a role in whether or not sexual assault and harassment offenders receive punishment.

“Even the crappy ones [Service men accused of sexual assault or harassment] will get away with it because it’s a good ol’ boys club.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“It’s not apparent a lot [the good ol’ boys network], but you’d be a fool to think it [preferential treatment] isn’t happening.

—Senior Man Service Member

“If it’s reportable [a sexual assault or harassment] – don’t get it twisted, it’s still the good ol’ boy’s system. If some people don’t like them, they will get rid of people, but you never know who they may know and it could be bad on the person who told on them.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Summary: Reporting Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault and Harassment

This section summarizes the findings on Service member awareness and effectiveness of sexual assault and harassment reporting procedures.

Awareness of reporting procedures for victims of sexual assault and harassment

DACOWITS focus group participants discussed a wide variety of reporting options available to victims of sexual assault and harassment. Popular resources noted by Service members included: SAPRO, the Chaplain, a SARC, a victim advocate, and one's supervisor. On occasion, junior women Service members expressed uncertainty about the resources available to them to report an incident of sexual assault or harassment. Rarely, men Service members expressed that they were uncertain about reporting procedures when serving overseas.

Effectiveness of Sexual Assault and Harassment Reporting Procedures

Service members expressed mixed views on this topic. Several participants expressed that the current sexual assault and harassment reporting procedures were effective, sharing that as reporting options have increased, victims have felt more comfortable submitting reports. The majority of participants, however, believed barriers to reporting sexual assault and harassment still remain. The most commonly expressed barrier leading to underreporting was a lack of trust in both the unrestricted and restricted reporting systems, which may lead victims to utilize resources off-base. Less frequently, Service members discussed fear of the stigma associated with reporting sexual misconduct, although several focus group members felt that the fear of stigma had declined over time. On occasion, men Service members discussed how a victim's conflicted feelings about her attacker may serve as a barrier to reporting sexual assault.

Effectiveness of safeguards to protect those that report from retaliation

The majority of focus group participants reported that current safeguards in place to prevent retaliation against those that report sexual assault or harassment are not effective, although a small number of Service members felt that the safeguards in place were sufficient.

Perceived Justice

Service members frequently expressed frustration about the lack of clear punishments for offenders of sexual assault and harassment, reporting that measures in place to punish offenders were not being enforced and that punishments vary widely. Several men Service members provided suggestions for how to use offender punishment as a tool to prevent future sexual assault and harassment. Suggestions included clearly publicizing what happens to offenders

after they are convicted and using offender experiences and punishments as examples during prevention training.

Perceptions of punishment differences by rank

Participants were asked about their views on the role an individual's rank plays when accused of sexual assault or harassment. Not surprisingly, opinions on this issue varied by the rank of participants. Frequently, junior Service members expressed that their peers were likely to be punished more severely than senior Service members when accused of sexual assault or harassment, and that senior Service members would more likely be encouraged to retire without severe punishment. In contrast, senior Service members expressed that their peers were likely to receive stricter punishment than junior Service members. Rarely, focus group participants felt both junior and senior Service member offenders are punished equally. Occasionally, Service members discussed the impact of the "good old boys" club on treatment of sexual assault and harassment offenders, sharing that those who are in the club are much more likely to receive preferential treatment when accused of sexual assault or harassment.

F. IMPACT OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT ON UNIT READINESS

To conclude the focus groups, DACOWITS asked focus group participants "Do you think sexual assault has an impact on a unit's readiness and its ability to perform its mission? If so, how?" Most Service members expressed that sexual assault and harassment has a negative impact on a unit's readiness and ability to perform its mission.

"...it's hard if there is someone there that makes me uncomfortable. It affects the whole picture, just passing them down the hallway and they give you a look. It affects your ability to impact the mission."

—Junior Woman Service Member

"...with harassment, there are days when I'm being told I'm being emotional...even harassment affects [unit readiness]. If I'm not wanting to be there, then my mind is someplace else."

—Junior Woman Service Member

"It [sexual assault] affects morale, it's a huge deal."

—Junior Man Service Member

“Why would you want to go to work with someone who is making perverted jokes? You don’t want to do good work if you know they are going to harass you all day – I wouldn’t want to do good work.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“You take a squad full of seven males and one female and she’s been assaulted – the trust is gone. It affects everyone.”

—Junior Man Service Member