



Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military



Presented to the Members of the
Defense Advisory Committee on
Women in the Services (DACOWITS)
22-23 September, 2011



Structure of Presentation



- Research Questions
- Method of Investigation: Focus Groups and Mini-Survey
- Results
 - Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment in the Military
 - Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Programs
 - Reporting Procedures for Victims
 - Impact of Sexual Assault and Harassment on Unit Readiness
- Summary



Research Questions



- DACOWITS explored four primary research questions related to sexual assault (SA) and harassment (SH):
 - What is the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in the military?
 - How effective are DoD policies and programs in addressing sexual assault and harassment?
 - How effective are the reporting procedures for victims of sexual assault and harassment, and how aware are Service members of these procedures?
 - What is the impact of sexual assault and harassment on unit readiness?



Method of Investigation



- Focus groups
 - 23 focus groups in seven locations
 - 226 total focus group participants
 - 12 women-only groups, 10 men-only groups, 1 mixed-gender group
 - Army (22%), Navy (20%), Air Force (19%), Coast Guard (16%), Marine Corps (9%), Reserves – Army and Air Force (8%), Army NG (7%)
 - Included administration of a “mini survey” and focus group discussions
- Method of data collection
 - Generation of transcripts from each focus group
 - Identify major themes and subthemes
 - Enter resulting findings into a sample-wide database for analysis
 - Determine salient comments throughout focus group sessions



Sample Demographics



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%



Results: Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment



- Prevalence of Sexual Assault
 - Participants – across all branches, ranks, and gender – regularly expressed that sexual assault is common in the military
 - Senior Service members occasionally stressed the role of alcohol in sexual assault:
 - “Saturday night, people get together, start drinking. Doesn’t get reported, but it happens. You introduce alcohol and things happen.” – Senior male
- Prevalence of Sexual Harassment
 - Many participants expressed that sexual harassment occurs frequently in the military
 - Women participants occasionally discussed struggles with being able to clearly define 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 female



Results: Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment



- Change in prevalence of SA and SH in the military over time:
 - Sexual assault:
 - Many participants said that SA's prevalence had not changed over time
 - Some said that lowered recruiting standards have contributed to an increase in sexual assaults
 - Sexual assault as a reason for junior women wanting to leave the military
 - Sexual harassment
 - Most participants said SH persists; little change in prevalence over time
 - Some participants felt that SH has increased over time. Noted reasons for this:
 - Flagging commitment of leadership
 - Longer deployments
 - Some men said the climate is now less tolerant of SH
 - Junior Service members are more likely to be harassed and assaulted; some said this is due to low-self esteem



Results: Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Harassment



- Overall effectiveness of DoD policies and programs in...
 - ...addressing the needs of victims:
 - Men frequently gave DoD high marks...
 - “[I’d give DoD an] ‘A.’ They have so many resources [for sexual assault and harassment victims] – it’s good.” – Senior male
 - ...while women more frequently expressed negative views of the effectiveness of DoD policies and programs
 - “Yeah, we have the programs, but past the company levels, getting to exercise our rights... execution – yeah, I’d give them an ‘F.’” – Junior female
 - ...ensuring offenders are appropriately punished:
 - Men gave varying marks to DoD on this point; women generally gave DoD low marks
 - “I think to make a better grade, the punishment needs to be more severe [so] that it can screw up [offenders’] lives.” – Junior male
 - “I give the DoD an ‘A’ for doing what they need to do. As far as prosecuting, I give them a ‘Z.’” – Senior female



Results: Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Programs



- Awareness of SA and SH prevention training
 - Nearly all participants reported they had undergone some form of training
- Effectiveness of SA and SH prevention training
 - With some exceptions, most expressed that training has educated the military about SA and SH prevention, as well as providing victims and allies with the necessary reporting tools
 - “I don’t know so much if [sexual harassment] has gone down, but we have been trained better to deal with it.” – Senior female
 - “[The military] has 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 female
 - “I think [the number of sexual assaults] went down due to all the ‘death by PowerPoint’ and trainings.” – Junior male



Results: Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Programs



- Effective practices in SA and SH prevention training
 - Participants frequently mentioned skits, in-person presentations and small group discussions as effective
 - “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 male
 - “This (i.e., the focus group) is better than sitting and going through a PowerPoint.” – Junior female
- Ineffective practices in SA and SH prevention training
 - Large group training was frequently mentioned as the least effective method
 - “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...” – Senior male
 - Some found the repetitive nature of the trainings to be increasingly less effective
 - “The [sexual assault and harassment prevention] trainings are all the same, just change a few words.” – Junior male



Results: Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention Programs



- Leadership plays an influential role in preventing SA and SH
 - Leadership needs to actively participate in SA and SH prevention training
 - “When the chain of command doesn’t tackle [sexual assault and harassment], that’s why things happen.” – Senior female
 - “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 core come into play – it’s great.” – Senior male
 - Leadership needs to serve as positive role models and create a zero-tolerance environment
 - “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 female
 - “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 female



Results: Reporting Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault and Harassment



- Awareness of SA and SH Reporting Procedures
 - Participants were frequently able to identify resources available to victims, but knowledge gaps were still prevalent:
 - Uncertainty about who to contact to submit a report, especially for restricted reports
 - “I wouldn’t know who to report [sexual assault] to at this command, and I don’t think everyone knows who to report it to other than your immediate supervisor.” -- Senior female
 - “You have [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 female
 - Uncertainty over how to report SA or SH when serving with foreign troops, especially for Reservists
 - “For the Reserves, we’ve had incidents overseas; we have very few Reservists overseas, and we don’t really know what to do...” – Senior male



Results: Reporting Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault and Harassment



- Effectiveness of SA and SH Reporting Procedures
 - Participants occasionally noted that victims have become more comfortable submitting reports as awareness of reporting options has increased, however...
 - ...participants also listed a number of barriers to reporting when prompted:
 - Lack of trust in the reporting system
 - “There is no confidentiality.” – Senior female
 - Fear of stigma
 - “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 female
 - Fear of reprimand for underage drinking
 - “...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 female
 - Victims’ conflicted feelings toward attackers
 - “Might be that the female really liked the guy. She doesn’t want to not have contact with him.” – Senior male



Results: Reporting Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault and Harassment



- Safeguards to protect those that report from retaliation
 - Some participants expressed that the safeguards in place do not work
 - “Vigilante justice does happen. We’re all soldiers but we’re also humans.” – Senior male
 - “Yeah, [retaliation] could happen in your evaluation. There are ways to do it that are not so direct.” – Junior female
- Perceived Justice
 - Participants frequently expressed a lack of understanding of the military’s stance on offender punishment
 - Some men suggested that offender punishment could be used as a prevention tool
 - Participants felt offender punishments were inconsistent
 - “Good old boys club” leads to preferential treatment



Results: Impact of Sexual Assault and Harassment on Unit Readiness



- Most Service members expressed that SA and SH negatively impacted 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 female
 - "...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 female
 - "You take a squad full of seven males and one female and she's been assaulted – the trust is gone. It affects everyone." – Junior male



Results: Additional Findings

- Looking to the Future
 - Impact of the DADT repeal on SA and SH
 - Participants occasionally mentioned that same-sex harassment, especially male-on-male harassment, would increase with the repeal. Opinions were divided on this matter, however.
 - In all cases, participants indicated that any initial increase in SA or SH would be followed by an eventual decline in those behaviors
 - “Yes, 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 female
 - Impact of women in ground combat on SA and SH
 - Participants, men in particular, frequently felt that SA and SH would increase if the ground combat restrictions were abolished.
 - “When I was on my IA, 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 male



Summary



- What is the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in the military?
 - Little change in the prevalence of SA and SH over time
 - Alcohol plays a role
 - Junior female Service members at greater risk of SA and SH
- How effective are DoD policies and programs in addressing sexual assault and harassment?
 - Divided opinions of the effectiveness of DoD policies and programs; women generally hold more negative views
 - Skits, in-person presentations, and small group discussions are effective
 - Leadership plays a crucial role



Summary



- How effective are the reporting procedures for victims of sexual assault and harassment, and how aware are Service members of these procedures?
 - Uncertainty about reporting procedures
 - Lack of confidence in safeguards against retaliation
 - Barriers to reporting
 - Inconsistent and unclear punishments for offenders
- What is the impact of sexual assault and harassment on unit readiness?
 - Most Service members express that SA and SH negatively impact readiness

DACOWITS 2011 WELLNESS FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

WARM-UP/INTRODUCTIONS

Before we get started with our discussion of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military, let's go around the room and please tell us:

1. Your branch of Service (e.g., AC Marine Corps, Army Reserve).
2. How many years you've served in the military.
3. Your career field or MOS.

PREVALENCE OF SA/SH IN MILITARY

So we are all talking about the same thing and can distinguish the two, I'd like to read you the DoD definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment:

Here is the definition of sexual assault:

Sexual assault is a crime. Sexual assault is defined as intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, physical threat or abuse of authority, or when the victim does not or cannot consent. Consent should not be deemed or construed to mean the failure by the victim to offer physical resistance. Additionally, consent is not given when a person uses force, threat of force, coercion or when the victim is asleep, incapacitated, or unconscious. Sexual assault includes rape, nonconsensual sodomy (oral or anal sex), indecent assault (e.g., unwanted and inappropriate sexual contact or fondling), or attempts to commit these acts. Sexual assault can occur without regard to gender, spousal relationship, or age of victim.

Sexual harassment is:

A form of sexual discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when: Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person's job, pay, career, or Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career or employment decisions affecting that person, or Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

[NOTE TO MODERATOR: If a participant asks for clarification, please note that one can be sexually assaulted by someone they've had sex with before or since willingly; one can be sexually assaulted by a woman as well as a man; and it counts as sexual assault even if you didn't resist or even if you had an orgasm.]

Please consider these definitions as we talk about sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. Let me know if you need me to re-read them at any point during our discussion.

4. What is your general sense of how well the military and your Service are doing in preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault? Is the problem getting better or worse?
5. Do you think current policies and training, and treatment programs are effective in helping both service members and their leaders understand what is and is not sexual harassment and sexual assault?

Probe: in other words, do these programs help service members understand when and how they might be at risk of being either a victim or a perpetrator of sexual harassment or sexual assault?

Probe: what policies and programs are you referring to, specifically?

6. Do you think these training programs have been effective in creating a climate in which sexual harassment is not tolerated?
7. Do you think these programs have been helpful in helping service members stand up for themselves in a situation that might lead to sexual harassment or sexual assault, or to help others to do so?
8. Are training delivery methods effective for reaching multi-generational service members?
9. How could these training programs be improved?
10. Are there other actions beyond training programs that you recommend be taken to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault? If so, what? Are there obstacles to your engaging in such efforts?

REPORTING OF AND RESPONSE TO SA/SH INCIDENTS

MODERATOR: Try to ask this next question in a way that is relevant to your audience – i.e., drop reference to types of duty that may not be relevant to your specific participants.

11. How easy or difficult is it for active duty, National Guard, or Reserve member to report a sexual assault or sexual harassment incident 24/7 regardless of location (stateside, deployed, or combat environment)?

Probe: If it is hard, what can be done to make reporting easier?

12. 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?
13. Are incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault underreported? Why or why not?
14. Does reporting an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault have an impact on the promotion, assignment and/or training of the individual who reports such an incident? In what ways?
15. Does having a claim of sexual harassment or sexual assault made against an individual have an impact on the promotion, assignment, and/or training of that individual? In what way?
16. Does 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?
17. Are sexual harassment and sexual assault being taken seriously in the military, including taking appropriate action against those accused of sexual harassment or sexual assault? Why or why not?

Probe: Considering your answer, what effect does this have on prevention of sexual harassment and sexual assault?

METRICS

18. How would you rate the adequacy of the current policies in decreasing incidences of sexual assault and sexual harassment?

Probe: To what extent do you think they can be adjusted to address changing trends when needed?

POLICIES

19. 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?
20. 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?

LEADERSHIP

21. What role should leaders play in sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention?

Please give specific examples.

22. In relation to leaders being accountable and responsible for the well-being of their troops; should prevention and response to sexual harassment or sexual assault be a performance factor in evaluations?

WRAP UP

23. Is there more you would like to add regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military?

24. We're also interested in hearing anything else you'd like to share with us about issues affecting women in the military. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us? We may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS study.