



ARMY RESILIENCE DIRECTORATE

RAND Study Examines Sexual Assault Experiences in the Active-Component Army

ARLINGTON, Va.—The RAND Arroyo Center today released the results of an Army-commissioned study, [“Sexual Assault Experiences in the Active-Component Army: Variation by Year, Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Installation Risk Level.”](#) This study provides information on the characteristics of victims’ self-identified most serious sexual assault experiences, including sexual assault behaviors, perpetrators (including number, military status, gender, relationship to victim), times and places, alcohol and drug involvement, and co-occurrence with hazing, bullying, sexual harassment, and/or stalking in the previous year.

Findings show that women and men experience different types of sexual assault behaviors, perpetrator intent, and methods of coercion. For both male and female victims, the typical perpetrator is a male enlisted member of the military, acting alone. RAND found similar gender-based patterns and sexual orientation-based patterns at both high-risk and non-high-risk installations, as well as over time, which are indicators of culture. See:

https://www.army.mil/article/247665/study_estimates_sexual_assault_and_sexual_harassment_risk_across_army_installations_units_and_occupational_specialties

RAND conducted analyses, at the request of the Army Resilience Directorate (ARD), as part of a larger research project that began in 2020; a companion report on sexual harassment and gender discrimination was released in August 2021. See: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1385-1.html. RAND used data from the 2016 and 2018 Workplace and Gender Relations Surveys of Active-Duty members (WGRA), which is the DoD’s official survey to estimate sexual assault prevalence in the military.


The intent of the study was to provide the Army with a data-driven understanding of where and how our prevention efforts should be targeted. In addition, the findings will help the Army focus prevention and training on the full range of sexual assault behaviors and scenarios that Soldiers experience.

The RAND study provides two policy implications. First, sexual assault prevention training materials should be aligned with Soldiers’ most common sexual assault experiences (as RAND also previously recommended for sexual harassment and gender discrimination) and should be expanded to incorporate the experiences of men, sexual minorities, and others whose sexual assault experiences differ from those of heterosexual women. Second, underscoring the crucial lack of data on the sexual assault experiences of sexual minorities in the Army, RAND recommended that sexual orientation be included as a sociodemographic variable in existing administrative data and future survey collections. This recommendation, which aligns with recommendations of the DoD Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military, would require a change in DoD-level policy.

“The results of this report are critical for the Army’s recent pivot to data-driven prevention,” said Dr. Jenna Newman, ARD’s social science advisor. “By clarifying how sexual assault is perpetrated against female Soldiers vs. male Soldiers, and against non-heterosexually identifying Soldiers vs. heterosexual Soldiers, these findings enable the Army to identify and more precisely target specific root causes, including climate-based and cultural contributors.”

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“This foundational prevention research is an example of the Army’s commitment to understanding the trends and patterns of harmful behaviors,” said Dr. James A. Helis, Director of the Army Resilience Directorate.

The Fort Hood Independent Review Committee and the DoD IRC are two efforts that have aided in driving change within the Army’s SHARP program and related policies. The Army recently announced the implementation of the Office of Special Trial Counsel, a monumental change to the Service’s military justice system.

The Army will soon publish its first standalone SHARP regulation, which consolidates various Army policies that have guided the program over the years and incorporates all DoD-directed requirements.

Also, the Army is currently implementing Phase 1 of the Integrated Prevention Advisory Group. The I-PAG will work with Army commanders to execute and evaluate evidence-based approaches to reduce harmful behaviors, including sexual harassment and assault, extremism, racism, and domestic violence.

“The Army is also continuing to sponsor foundational prevention research that examines the role of climate and culture in sexual assault, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination, as we work to build a data-driven understanding of the Army’s unique environments and most vulnerable populations,” said Newman.