In 2021, RAND Arroyo Center was asked to help the U.S. Army better understand the characteristics of sexual harassment and sexual assault experiences among active-duty soldiers, with a focus on identifying differences across several demographic and military characteristics. The research team used data from the Department of Defense’s (DoD’s) 2016 and 2018 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members (WGRA) to produce descriptions of the circumstances surrounding descriptions of the circumstances surrounding sexual harassment and sexual assault over the year prior to survey administration. For sexual harassment and gender discrimination, the research team focused on differences between men and women and across high- and non-high-risk installations, defined according to an installation’s overall risk for sexual harassment. For sexual assault, the team focused on differences between men and women, by sexual orientation, and across high- and non-high-risk installations, defined according to an installation’s overall risk for sexual assault.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

- **Most common behaviors for sexual harassment:** to attempt to establish an unwanted relationship, upsetting discussions about sex, offensive sexual jokes, repeated sexual comments about appearance, and gender discrimination (i.e., making fun, insulting, or ignored because of gender and told either that women should not have their jobs or that men are better at their jobs).
- **Sexual harassment behaviors commonly co-occur:** on average, women experience 3.2 behaviors at one time.
- **Frequency and perpetrator characteristics:**
  - Frequency: occurred more than once
  - Number: more than one perpetrator
  - Gender: all men
  - Military status: at least one perpetrator in the military
  - Rank relative to respondent: military peer, supervisor, or in chain of command

**SEXUAL ASSAULT**

**Policy Implications**

Prevention efforts should emphasize the most common behaviors and scenarios experienced by soldiers.

- For sexual harassment, these include gender discrimination; personal or offensive discussion and jokes about sex; repeated attempts to establish an unwanted romantic or sexual relationship; and insults related to men’s masculinity, sexual orientation, or gender expression.
- For sexual assault, training should be aligned with victim experiences and emphasize common scenarios across all victims.
- There is a need for gender representation of men, sexual minorities, and other soldiers’ experiences.
- For both sexual harassment and sexual assault, there is a need to tailor content for high-risk installations.

Limits on data collection about sexual orientation are intended to protect privacy—but may limit the Army’s ability to prevent sexual assault. Pursuing opportunities to change DoD policies would allow detailed data collection on sexual minority soldiers’ experiences with sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination to inform prevention efforts.

**Limitations**

- **Respondents** may or may not have officially reported their experiences.
- If investigated, these experiences may or may not meet the Military Equal Opportunity definition of sexual harassment and gender discrimination or the Uniform Code of Military Justice definition of sexual assault.
- The focus is on the most serious event as defined by respondents, not all sexual harassment, gender discrimination, or sexual assault experiences.