



Air Force Sexual Assault Situations, Settings, and Offender Behaviors

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Preface

Recent high-profile reports and incidents have highlighted the ongoing problem of sexual assault within the U.S. military. A critical component of U.S. Air Force sexual assault prevention efforts is to better understand risk factors for the occurrence of sexual assault, including offender characteristics and behaviors and risky situations and settings. This report documents findings from RAND Project AIR FORCE research designed to examine offender characteristics and patterns of behavior through a case analysis of sexual assault suspects within the Air Force. The study had the unique opportunity to review Air Force Office of Special Investigations case files and Judge Advocate General's Corps court records on Air Force sexual assault suspects. The study team conducted a qualitative coding of these files to give insight into the demographic characteristics and behaviors of the suspects, characteristics of the victims, the events leading up to a sexual assault, the sexual assault itself, the setting of the sexual assault, and post-sexual assault actions and justifications. After providing frequencies for basic features of the coded sample, the report describes ways that key themes with policy implications emerged. Because this effort was a qualitative analysis of a subset of sexual violence incidents reported to Air Force authorities, it is not intended to provide quantitative estimates of the rate of occurrence of these themes in sexual assaults committed by airmen across the Air Force. However, the perceptions and behaviors highlighted here may suggest additional details that future U.S. Department of Defense surveys could estimate. After presenting the case analysis and discussing how the findings fit within the broader scientific literature and data on sexual violence in the Air Force, the report concludes by providing recommendations to inform Air Force sexual assault prevention efforts.

The research reported here was commissioned by the Director of the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program in the Office of the Vice Chief of Staff and the commander of Air Force Recruiting Service. It was conducted within the Manpower, Personnel, and Training Program of RAND Project AIR FORCE as part of a fiscal year 2014 study, "Enhancing Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Efforts Through a Better Understanding of Perpetrator Behaviors and Risk Factors." The study has produced two related reports: (1) Sarah Michal Greathouse, Jessica Saunders, Miriam Matthews, Kirsten M. Keller, and Laura L. Miller, *A Review of the Literature on Sexual Assault Perpetrator Characteristics and Behaviors*, RR-1082-AF, 2015, and (2) Miriam Matthews, *Assessing the Use of Employment Screening for Sexual Assault Prevention*, RR-1250-AF, 2017.

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Summary

Recent high-profile reports and incidents have highlighted the ongoing problem of sexual assault within the U.S. military. For example, the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study indicates that 2.90 percent of active-duty U.S. Air Force women and 0.29 percent of active-duty Air Force men had experienced a sexual assault in the past year (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. 10). Among the women who were sexually assaulted, 82 percent indicated that the offender was another member of the military.¹ To combat sexual assault, the Air Force has taken a number of actions to improve prevention and response efforts, including seeking more information about offender characteristics and behaviors and the situations and settings in which sexual assaults occur.

The vast majority of information on sexual assault offenders and how they operate comes from studies of offenders in the general civilian population.² Although many risk factors for sexual assault perpetration have been identified in the literature, previous sexual assault behavior appears to be the strongest available predictor of future behavior. Research has also found that the strategies and behaviors of sexual assault offenders vary. For example, their tactics and levels of force may differ according to whether the victims are acquaintances or strangers or whether the offenders have consumed alcohol prior to the sexual assault. In addition, although some offenders make deliberate decisions that lead to a sexual assault, some research suggests that many offenders make a series of often seemingly irrelevant decisions that lead to opportunities for committing sexual assault. Although there is much to learn from the empirical literature examining civilian populations, sexual assault offenders in the Air Force may execute their strategies in different ways, including in military-specific situations that may present them with different types of opportunities.

This report documents findings from a RAND Project AIR FORCE analysis of convicted and other alleged sexual assault offenders. The Air Force aims to prevent and respond to incidents experienced as sexual assault, regardless of whether such incidents lead to a trial and whether suspects are convicted under a sexual assault offense. Thus, to align our scope more closely with Air Force efforts to address sexual violence, this study focused on perpetration of behaviors that investigators categorized as possible sexual assaults, rather than only incidents that resulted in sexual assault convictions through courts-martial. Specifically, we focused on better

¹ The survey did not ask respondents to identify the service of the offender. This information was not reportable for active component Air Force men because of the relatively small sample size.

² See the companion report for this project, *A Review of the Literature on Sexual Assault Perpetrator Characteristics and Behaviors* (Greathouse et al., 2015), for a more detailed summary of the civilian literature.

understanding reported suspect demographic characteristics and behaviors, the suspect's relationship to the victim, victim characteristics, the settings and circumstances of sexual assaults, and behavior and justifications following sexual assaults. To achieve our objective, we coded and analyzed 192 Office of Special Investigations files for sexual assault cases closed in 2012 or 2013. We included only cases that involved airmen with one or more adult victims (military or civilian) whose behavior was reported to Air Force authorities and proceeded to investigation. For a subset consisting only of cases that went to trial, we reviewed supplementary information from 61 Judge Advocate General's Corps court-martial records. We coded for specific discrete suspect and sexual assault characteristics that appeared in the cases we analyzed, but because the numbers are small from a statistical standpoint, we advise against generalizing them beyond the sample. However, the perceptions and behaviors highlighted here do suggest additional details for which future U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) surveys could estimate prevalence rates.

Key Findings

Our case analysis of sexual assault perpetration highlighted several key themes with implications for Air Force policies and programs, including the following:

- victims and others who are confused about whether certain incidents constitute sexual assault and are thus reportable, including sexual assault that occurs after consensual sexual activities have begun or when previous sexual activities were consensual
- offenders who sexually assault a spouse or intimate partner and who have a history of violence or other problematic behaviors
- offenders who take advantage of those who trust that they can safely get drunk with fellow airmen and share rides or sleeping space afterward
- offenders who were intoxicated at the time of the sexual assault
- offenders who later offer apologies, denials, and attempts to persuade others not to report a sexual assault.

We also compared reported sexual assaults that occurred overseas with those that occurred in the continental United States and found that they were similar, rather than different, and mostly involved alcohol.

Although offenders in the Air Force may take advantage of particular situations and settings in the Air Force, elements of military culture, or their position within the organization, their general patterns of behavior may also be found in the literature on sexual assault in other military organizations and, more broadly, in civilian society. After presenting the case analysis and discussing how its findings fit within the broader scientific literature and data on sexual violence in the Air Force, the report concludes by providing recommendations for improving Air Force sexual assault prevention and response efforts.

Recommendations

Screening Opportunities Could Include Removing Airmen Who Are Being Persistently Managed for Other Forms of Violence

Particularly within the reported incidents of marital sexual assault, we encountered examples of offenders who were often violent, hostile, and abusive prior to a sexual assault, and the targets of their aggression included others besides their spouses. Airmen like this exhibited clear warning signs of interpersonal violence prior to committing a sexual assault. These sexual assault offenders had more than once, over a period of years, come to the attention of law enforcement; had no-contact orders issued against them; or had been referred to treatment for alcohol abuse, domestic violence, anger management, or mood disorders. These types of airmen are not a good fit for the Air Force in multiple ways and, ideally, could have been removed from the service before their behavior escalated or spread. Training on Air Force values and sexual assault prevention is unlikely to influence such individuals because even more-intensive treatment options appear inadequate.

The Air Force should consider the extent to which such behaviors warrant counseling or treatment and at what point their persistence should lead to a discharge or denial of service continuation. Even with the best screening mechanisms in place, some at-risk individuals are still likely to make their way into any organization as large as the Air Force. We therefore recommend that Air Force leadership develop guidance for making this judgment call. Understandably, there are airmen struggling with various personal challenges who will benefit significantly from leadership support and professional treatment and should be encouraged to seek help. Developing a strategy for scrutinizing airmen engaged in significant interpersonal conflict and physical aggression will need to entail a serious discussion sensitive to such concerns.

Address Specific Types of Activities That Precede Sexual Assaults

Although we recommend paying greater attention to removing generally violent airmen from the Air Force environment, this might apply to only a small fraction of offenders, so other approaches will be needed. To target other types of offenders, we considered ways to minimize opportunities for committing sexual assault in potentially higher risk Air Force contexts.

In group settings where heavy and binge drinking is prevalent, offenders can gain access to intoxicated individuals without themselves having to drug or push alcohol on anyone. Offenders can also leverage such situations to take advantage of airmen trusting that airmen could be safe drinking buddies, could safely escort one another home, and could share a hotel room or spend the night at one another's homes to avoid driving under the influence. Additionally, heavy and binge drinking by offenders at these social gatherings raises the question of whether some airmen were too intoxicated themselves to perceive the victim's lack of consent. Although

alcohol misuse is not an excuse for sexual assault perpetration, it can be addressed as a risk factor for sexual aggression and aggression more generally.

The Air Force's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program (ADAPT) already focuses on curbing abuse and misuse of alcohol and promoting responsible drinking. To help further minimize situations in which group socializing with alcohol may lead to opportunities for sexual assault, the Air Force should continue to explore ways to reduce alcohol misuse. For example, event-specific prevention strategies that have successfully targeted problematic drinking associated with 21st birthday celebrations in the civilian realm (Neighbors et al., 2012) might also reduce the number of sexual assaults associated with binge and heavy drinking. Also, the Air Force should explore the effectiveness of offering fun alternatives to drinking and partying, particularly for celebrations more likely to involve excessive alcohol consumption, such as 21st birthdays, New Year's Eve, and Saint Patrick's Day (Mallett et al., 2013). Preserving and even enhancing offerings of enjoyable alcohol-free social activities can contribute to drinking-control strategies and have been effective in civilian populations (Sugarman and Carey, 2007; Wolfson et al., 2012). The hypothesis is that the more activities the environment provides and the more airmen choose to participate in activities that do not revolve around a partying culture, the fewer the opportunities that may arise for sexual assault and other alcohol-related injuries to take place (Wolfson et al., 2012). Moreover, such activities can offer other benefits, such as stress relief, building social support networks and other resilience resources, and developing camaraderie in units and the Air Force community at large. Of course, the extent to which these community-based prevention strategies would be effective in reducing alcohol misuse and sexual assault among airmen would need to be evaluated.

Another possible response to this pattern that the Air Force may want to explore is an increased noncommissioned officer (NCO) presence in unaccompanied housing. Underage drinking can inhibit not only reporting but also willingness to give statements to the Office of Special Investigations. It is plausible that an increased active NCO presence could help reduce the number of dorm parties involving underage and binge drinking. It is important for NCOs to conduct walk-throughs, not just sit at a desk—that they be actively present in the day-to-day off-duty lives of the junior enlisted. Note that we are not implying that this never happens, just that our case files suggest that occasions or locations where it is not happening could lead to activities that increase the risk of sexual assault in on-base housing. Increased presence of and monitoring by NCOs in areas where this is not already occurring could help the Air Force with socialization and airman development more broadly, in addition to addressing alcohol misuse and sexual assault.

That many of the sexual assaults stem from group activities highlights the importance of bystander behaviors and the intervention of fellow airmen. *Bystander* in this context refers to individuals who detect signs of an inappropriate or unsafe situation and not to someone directly observing a sexual assault in progress. The Air Force has already begun to promote the importance of bystander intervention for sexual assault, and existing research on bystander-

intervention programs, which focus on teaching peers to try to intervene during high-risk situations, shows promise. The Air Force should continue to explore ways to educate airmen on their role as bystanders and the actions they can take to help prevent sexual assault and minimize opportunities for an offender to take advantage.

Help Address Misconceptions and Confusion as Part of Sexual Assault Prevention Training

The Air Force cannot assume airmen will be able to easily adopt and apply a shared understanding about the definitions of sexual assault because such definitions vary across our society and because some situations can be ambiguous. Airmen may have understandings of sexual assault shaped by their own beliefs, the communities from which they come, media depictions, or outdated laws or state variations. Even if, after Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) training, airmen are able to recite the relevant portion of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), that does not mean they could apply it to many situations they face. Even within the legal system, lawyers, judges, and juries debate the application of the UCMJ to particular circumstances. Although it is unrealistic to train airmen to the level of scholars or military lawyers, there is likely room to improve their understanding of the situations described earlier. SAPR training could help victims or their confidants recognize that an unwanted sexual experience might meet the UCMJ criteria for a sexual assault offense and thus prompt them to report it.

Effective training is an essential part of an integrated approach to changing the culture and behavior of Air Force members relevant to sexual conduct to better reflect service values. As a basic building block, making expectations about sexual conduct explicit—defining appropriate and inappropriate behavior—gives members a common framework, regardless of their cultural and personal background prior to entry. Such training can help clarify “gray areas” of conduct between members. In particular, in our case analysis, we noted confusion in understanding whether particular real-world events (rather than training scenarios) should be considered sexual assault and therefore should be reported, including those involving verbal coercion, occurring after consensual sex, occurring within marriages, and occurring when the aggressors were inebriated. This confusion has possible implications for victim help-seeking and reporting behaviors. Furthermore, research could address whether greater clarity in these areas could reduce perpetration by airmen.

To help address some of this confusion, training on sexual assault prevention should provide airmen with detailed, concrete information to help them understand how to apply Air Force definitions of sexual assault to a wide range of circumstances, with particular attention to where there may be differences between legal definitions and cultural understandings. We cannot presume a shared understanding of such concepts as “consent” and “harm.” An example of being concrete would be explicitly spelling out to airmen in training numerous ways that someone can indicate unwillingness to participate in sexual activity and that it is not acceptable to proceed or

to persist in pursuing it. Airmen should be instructed that attempts to communicate lack of consent may be either nonverbal or verbal, with specific examples of each. For situations in which consent is uncertain, training can also include appropriate and comfortable ways to ask a partner whether they want to proceed.

Training should also discuss appropriate victim and bystander responses for addressing an offender following an incident. These scenarios could attend to the types of situations we observed, with offenders trying to convince victims or other airmen to believe them, forgive them, help them, or otherwise resolve the incident among themselves rather than report the behavior to someone else. Victims should understand that available resources can help them think through these situations. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize bystanders' responsibility to report an incident and that sexual assault is not an issue they should try to resolve on their own. We recommend incorporating this type of material into training that actively engages participants: Forcing them to engage critically with this content is more likely to lead to better retention and knowledge gains and to allow them to introduce real-world situations specific to their frames of reference.

Coordinate Training and Information Campaigns Across Key Stakeholders

Together, several different Air Force stakeholders have roles to play in preventing and responding to the types of sexual assaults that involve alcohol, intimate-partner sexual assault, and individuals with broader behavioral problems. Although the SAPR office at Air Force Headquarters oversees SAPR for the entire Air Force, the Air Force's ADAPT also has a role to play, given the importance of alcohol as a factor in so many sexual assault incidents. Additionally, the Air Force's Family Advocacy Program (FAP) is responsible for cases of spousal and intimate-partner sexual abuse. These three programs offer victims multiple points of entry into the Air Force's system for managing sexual assaults, and through each, the Air Force may identify offenders and patterns among them. Given this, we recommend close coordination among key stakeholders in this area, including SAPR, ADAPT, and FAP. This should include coordinating training and information campaigns such that each references the link between sexual assault, alcohol misuse, and intimate-partner violence. In addition, alcohol should be portrayed as not only a risk factor for victimization but also one for perpetration and failed bystander intervention. Likewise, SAPR training should raise domestic violence as a potential risk factor for sexual assault and should educate airmen that partners are not entitled to sexual access and that relationship status does not change the definition of sexual assault. Efforts to educate civilian spouses in this regard may help bring to light more airmen whose proclivity for sexual assault is currently hidden. By coordinating training and information campaigns across these stakeholders, sexual assault and related risk factors (e.g., alcohol misuse) may be better communicated, more often, and in a variety of ways.

Include Intimate-Partner Sexual Assault in SAPR Tracking and Reports

Currently, intimate-partner sexual assault is tracked by FAP. During the time of this study (prior to 2016), FAP's statistics had not been integrated into the sexual assault reports the SAPR office tracks and reports to DoD. Given that intimate-partner sexual assaults often happen within the context of other ongoing domestic violence, it is logical that the responsibility for documenting incidents of sexual assault within that context would fall under FAP. However, we found that intimate-partner sexual assault represents an important subset of sexual assault incidents that should not be overlooked. Furthermore, as we saw in our research, confusion about the idea that sexual assault can take place within the context of a marriage or ongoing intimate relationship is still possible today. Therefore, to ensure that current sexual assault tracking and aggregate statistical reports more comprehensively reflect all incidents of sexual assault, we recommended that incidents of intimate-partner sexual assault be included. We note that the Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel also recommended including FAP statistics in the annual DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office reports (2014, p. 33). Incorporating these types of sexual assaults into SAPR metrics and reports may also help reduce confusion and stigma around spousal sexual assault. However, we are not suggesting intimate-partner sexual assault incident rates simply be combined with stranger and acquaintance sexual assault data, as doing so may mask differences important for understanding the prevention, context, and response to intimate partner sexual assaults.

Conclusion

This report supports the Air Force's interest in learning more about sexual assault perpetration as it occurs within the Air Force and contributes to a growing body of publicly available information on the subject. Although at the time of this publication no publicly available data source provides an estimate of the number of Air Force personnel who are offenders or a representative sample of offender characteristics and behaviors, this examination of reported cases can provide some insights into Air Force offender behaviors and the situations and settings in which they sexually assault other adults. However, further research is necessary to understand how unreported Air Force offenders may differ from those who are reported to Air Force authorities and to understand the context surrounding less commonly reported situations, such as offenders who sexually assault men and perpetration by women.

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Abbreviations

ADAPT	Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program
AFI	Air Force instruction
AFRS	Air Force Recruiting Service
CONUS	continental United States
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FAP	Family Advocacy Program
FY	fiscal year
JA	Judge Advocate General's Corps
MAJCOM	major command
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NR	not reportable
OCONUS	outside the continental United States
OSI	Office of Special Investigations
RMWS	2014 RAND Military Workplace Study
SARC	Sexual Assault Response Coordinator
SAPR	Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program
UCMJ	Uniform Code of Military Justice
USAF	U.S. Air Force

1. Introduction

Background and Objective

Recent high-profile reports and incidents have highlighted the ongoing problem of sexual assault within the U.S. military (e.g., U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2014; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2008; Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a; Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel, 2014; Obama, 2013). The 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study (RMWS) indicates that, among those in the active component of the U.S. Air Force (USAF), an estimated 2.90 percent of women and 0.29 percent of men had experienced a sexual assault in the past year (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. 10). Among the active component women who were sexually assaulted, 82 percent indicated on this confidential survey they had been sexually assaulted by another member of the military, although the offender was not necessarily a fellow airman.¹ USAF policy on sexual assault prevention and response emphatically states that the Air Force will not tolerate sexual assault; sexual assault violates Air Force core values and falls well short of the standards America expects of its men and women in uniform. To address the issue of sexual assault, the Air Force has taken a number of actions to improve prevention and response efforts. A critical component of these efforts has been to seek information about risk factors for the occurrence of sexual assault, including offender characteristics and behaviors and the situations and settings in which sexual assaults tend to occur.

The vast majority of information on sexual assault offenders and how they operate comes from studies examining offenders in the general civilian population. These studies have largely surveyed convicted offenders of sexual assault or members of the general population, including college students who are similar in age to many new airmen. As we present in a companion comprehensive review (see Greathouse et al., 2015), previous studies largely focused on sexual assault men committed against female victims and have found both individual-level and contextual risk factors for sexual assault perpetration (see also Jewkes, 2012, and Tharp et al., 2013, for recent reviews of the empirical literature on sexual assault offenders). At the individual level, these factors include a history of being abused or exposed to violence during childhood, casual attitudes toward sex, previous sexual assault perpetration, interpersonal skill deficits (e.g., lack of empathy, misinterpretation of sexual cues), and negative gender-related attitudes (e.g., hostile attitudes toward women, hypermasculinity). Examples of contextual factors associated with sexual assault perpetration include peer attitudes toward sexual assault and the use of

¹ The survey did not ask respondents to identify the service of the offender. This information was not reportable for active component Air Force men because of the relatively small sample size.

alcohol. Although many risk factors for sexual assault perpetration have been identified, previous sexual assault behavior appears to be the strongest available predictor of future behavior (Loh et al., 2005). However, researchers agree that myriad factors likely interact to lead to sexual assault perpetration, the exact combination of which likely varies among offenders (Abbey et al., 2001; Terry, 2012; Tharp et al., 2013).

Research has also found that the strategies and behaviors of sexual assault offenders vary. For example, offenders' tactics and levels of force may differ according to whether the victims are acquaintances or strangers or whether the offenders have consumed alcohol prior to the sexual assault (e.g., Abbey et al., 2003; Woods and Porter, 2008). In addition, although some offenders make deliberate decisions that lead to a sexual assault, some research suggests that many offenders make a series of often seemingly irrelevant decisions that lead to an opportunity for committing sexual assault (see Greathouse et al., 2015).

Although there is much to learn from the empirical literature examining civilian populations, we know less about the extent to which similar sexual assault offender characteristics, risk factors, and behaviors exist in the Air Force population. We do not propose that sexual assault offenders in the Air Force are completely unlike those in broader society. However, they may differ in meaningful ways from the samples of offenders studied in the general civilian literature. For example, offender behaviors could reflect military-specific situations and settings that present them with different types of opportunities. Additionally, entry-level screening procedures should reduce the presence of offenders with known criminal histories. Further, most of the information that currently exists on sexual assault offenders in the military and Air Force comes from surveys of victims and annual reports of basic statistics on formally reported incidents and related judicial proceedings (see Section 4 and Appendix A), rather than narratives of events before, during, and after a sexual assault.

Thus, the goal of this research was to provide the Air Force with a better understanding of alleged sexual assault offenders and the situations and settings in which incidents tend to occur within the Air Force to help improve sexual assault prevention and response efforts. Specifically, we focused on better understanding offender characteristics and behaviors, including relationships with victims, victims' characteristics, circumstances surrounding sexual assaults, and post-sexual assault behavior and justifications.² To achieve our objective, we analyzed Office of Special Investigations (OSI) case files and Judge Advocate General's Corps (JA) court records closed in 2012 or 2013 regarding convicted and other alleged Air Force sexual assault offenders. The team found that these files did not typically mention the presence or absence of many of the offender risk factors from the scientific literature (noted above). Still, these data

² In this report, we will typically refer to those who were sexually assaulted as *victims* because they were the victims of the crimes on which we focus. We acknowledge that some prefer other terms, such as *survivor* or *complainant* and do not intend to imply that "victim" is their primary identity.

offer a unique opportunity for examining the existence of any patterns in offender demographic characteristics and behaviors visible in records of reported incidents, as well as the situations and settings that provided the context for the reported sexual assaults.

Study Scope and Definitions

The Air Force aims to prevent and respond to incidents experienced as sexual assault, regardless of whether such incidents lead to a trial and whether suspects are convicted under a sexual assault offense. Thus, to align our scope more closely with Air Force efforts to address sexual violence, this study focused on perpetration of behaviors that investigators categorized as possible sexual assaults, rather than only incidents that resulted in sexual assault convictions through courts-martial.

In scoping the study, the research sponsor asked us to focus on the population of active-duty officer and enlisted Air Force personnel accused or convicted of sexual assault against one or more adults, regardless of whether the victims are also Air Force members. Thus, the victims could be civilian or military (from any branch of service, active duty or reserve) and could be strangers, acquaintances, friends, fellow unit members, partners, or spouses of the offender. Both victims and offenders could be either men or women.

This scope does not include all possible sexual assault offenders in the Air Force community. Offenders who are civilians, who are military members from other branches of service, or who sexually assaulted only individuals under the age of 18 were outside the scope of our case analysis, although they may have been included to some degree in the previous research we noted above or drew on when developing our coding scheme. Although not outside our scope, sexual assaults Air Force Reservists committed while not on active or inactive duty would fall under civilian legal authority and thus do not appear in our data unless the offenders were also investigated for committing an offense while on duty. Air National Guard members are subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)³ under even more limited circumstances (only if performing federal service) and thus are also unlikely to appear as suspects in our files. Sexual assault offenders not reported to Air Force authorities or reported only in a restricted manner would not appear in our set of records.

Military Definitions of Sexual Assault

We focused on penetrative and nonpenetrative sexual assault offenses as defined in the UCMJ under Articles 120 and 125, as well as attempts to commit these sexual assault crimes, which fall under Article 80. Article 120 of the UCMJ has seen two major amendments in recent

³ The UCMJ is set forth in 10 U.S. Code §§801–946.

years, first in 2007 and then again in 2012 (see Table 1.1). Definitions and the names of some offenses changed. Offenses charged under past versions of Article 120 are within this study’s 2012–2013 scope because an offense, regardless of when investigated or tried, would be charged according to the UCMJ provisions at the time of the occurrence.⁴ Not shown in Table 1.1, other changes in 2007 included moving indecent assault, indecent acts, and indecent exposure from the general Article 134 to Article 120 and the addition of stalking to Article 120.

Terms

It is difficult to choose terms that reflect both a presumption of truth-telling among those who come forward to report sexual assaults and a presumption of innocence until proven guilty for the accused. Thus, we clarify here how we chose our terms:

- **Victims:** Because of the sensitive nature of this topic and the history of sexual assault victims not being believed (significantly more so than victims of other crimes), we purposely avoid the language *alleged victim*. We have retained the use of *victim* consistent with the academic and policy literature. This practice is also consistent with organizations that focus on prevention and victim support services (e.g., *victim advocacy* rather than *alleged victim advocacy*).
- **Offenders and suspects:** We use the term *offenders* to apply to anyone accused of sexual assault, in accordance with the Bureau of Justice Statistics definition of offender: “The perpetrator of a crime. This term usually applies to crimes involving contact between the victim and the offender” (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017). When discussing individuals in our analytic sample who were investigated by law enforcement,

Table 1.1. Recent Modifications to Sexual Assault Articles in the UCMJ

Prior to October 1, 2007	October 1, 2007, to June 27, 2012	Since June 28, 2012
The offenses that constituted sexual assault <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rape (Article 120, UCMJ) • Forcible Sodomy (Article 125, UCMJ) • Indecent Assault (Article 134, UCMJ) • Attempts to Commit these Crimes (Article 80, UCMJ) 	The offenses that constituted sexual assault <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rape (Article 120, UCMJ) • Aggravated Sexual Assault (Article 120, UCMJ) • Aggravated Sexual Contact (Article 120, UCMJ) • Abusive Sexual Contact (Article 120, UCMJ) • Wrongful Sexual Contact (Article 120, UCMJ) • Forcible Sodomy (Article 125, UCMJ) • Attempts to Commit these Crimes (Article 80, UCMJ) 	Current sexual violence crimes are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rape (Article 120, UCMJ) • Sexual Assault (Article 120, UCMJ) • Aggravated Sexual Contact (Article 120, UCMJ) • Abusive Sexual Contact (Article 120, UCMJ) • Forcible Sodomy (Article 125, UCMJ) • Attempts to Commit these Crimes (Article 80, UCMJ)

SOURCE: Extracted verbatim from Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel, 2014, p. 65.

⁴ Article 1, Section 9, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution states that “no Bill of Attainder or ex post facto Law shall be passed.” In *United States v. Gorki*, 47 M.J. 370 (C.A.A.F. 1997), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces upheld that ex post facto laws could not be applied in courts-martial.

we also use *suspects*, the term in the OSI files we analyzed. Note that not all of the suspects described in these files have been identified, brought to trial, or convicted. When referring to a particular subset of this population in our sample, we specify further (e.g., *convicted offenders*).

Organization of This Report

The remaining sections in this report document our methods, findings, and recommendations for the Air Force. Section 2 provides an overview of the methodology we used to analyze the case files and the basic demographic characteristics of the victims and suspects in our coded sample. Section 3 then presents our case analysis findings. These include frequencies for several sexual assault characteristics within our sample and a narrative description of key patterns across circumstances surrounding the sexual assault, the suspect's relationship to the victim, and postincident behaviors. Then, in Section 4, we offer recommendations, based on the case analysis and an assessment of how those findings fit within the broader scientific literature and data on sexual violence in the Air Force, for improving Air Force sexual assault prevention and response efforts.

The report also contains two appendixes for further reference. Appendix A provides additional details from the 2014 confidential survey of Air Force personnel, Air Force–published statistics on reported incidents, and selected Air Force statistics on intimate-partner sexual abuse. Appendix B contains a more detailed description of our coding process and the codes from the coding guide we used for our analysis of the case files.

2. Case Analysis Methodology and Sample

This section explains the methodology we used to develop the key findings presented in Section 3. For readers less familiar with the military setting, it opens with an overview of how sexual assault cases are handled in the Air Force. This information provides context for understanding the nature of our data sources. The section then describes the case files used in our analysis, gives a brief overview of our methodological approach to analyzing them, and describes the limitations under which we are permitted to discuss the results. Finally, it also provides some basic demographic characteristics for the suspects and victims in the cases in our sample. Appendix B contains additional detail about how we organized and coded the data.

How Air Force Sexual Assault Cases Are Investigated and Documented

For readers unfamiliar with how sexual assault cases are handled within the Air Force, this subsection provides a high-level overview of reporting options, the investigation process, and the judicial process.¹ This overview will help clarify what is and is not included in our data set and where in the military process the information was collected.

Response According to Victim's Reporting Option and Relationship to the Suspect

Air Force victims may or may not choose to report unwanted sexual experiences to the Air Force. An airman who does choose to report the sexual assault or seek help from the military has the option of making a restricted or unrestricted report.² A *restricted report* occurs when an airman seeks out an Air Force Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), a victim advocate, or a health care provider and indicates that he or she would like to seek confidential medical care or counseling but does not want anyone else to be told about the incident. This type of victim's report does not trigger notification of the chain of command and law enforcement officials, and thus, no investigation is started as a result. Basic data on restricted reports are aggregated to help the Air Force track trends in reporting, but any identifying information related to the victim or offender is kept confidential, and access to that information is severely restricted. RAND did not request access to these restricted, confidential Air Force reports. It is important to note that victim conversations with chaplains or lawyers may be protected by law as well. However, these individuals cannot accept a restricted report.

¹ Given the focus of the report, we do not elaborate here on the many Air Force support services that provide victim care and advocacy.

² See Air Force Instruction (AFI) 90-6001, 2015, for greater detail on reporting options.

Alternatively, victims who would like their reports to initiate official investigations can make what is called an *unrestricted report*. An individual can initiate an unrestricted report by contacting law enforcement, someone in their chain of command, a SARC, a victim advocate, or a health care provider. Air Force law enforcement and the victim's chain of command are notified when an unrestricted report is made; however, the report itself is not shared with them. Witnesses (i.e., those who directly observed the incident or heard about it from the victim or others) may file unrestricted reports as well; however, if only a witness reports a sexual assault, the victim is encouraged, but not forced, to cooperate with an investigation.³ Our OSI case files consist of investigations of these unrestricted reports closed during the study time frame (2012–2013). Victims may also choose to report sexual assaults to civilian, rather than military, law enforcement, but our analyses did not include cases reported only to civilian law enforcement.

If the victim alleges a sexual assault by a spouse or intimate partner, whether as a restricted or unrestricted report, the case will be tracked by the Air Force's Family Advocacy Program (FAP) and not by the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program (SAPR). FAP works to prevent domestic abuse, including spousal and unmarried intimate-partner sexual violence, among U.S. military personnel and their partners.⁴ FAP provides education and awareness programs and counseling, and FAP counselors can serve as victim advocates (AFI 40-301, 2009). When cases of spousal and intimate-partner violence, including sexual violence, are referred to FAP, FAP completes a referral form that contains basic demographic information about those involved. A clinician will also complete an extensive psychosocial examination intake, which includes the collection of data on multiple risk factors (e.g., substance use, controlling behaviors). According to representatives from the Air Force FAP, the victim typically provides this information on themselves and on the alleged abuser. FAP maintains records for substantiated reports of maltreatment, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of spouses and intimate partners, but tabulations of these records are not routinely made available to the public. FAP data on sexual abuse of spouses and intimate partners have been kept separately from SAPR statistics. Our OSI case files include unrestricted cases of spousal or intimate-partner sexual assault.

If the reported sexual assault does not involve an intimate partner, a local SARC will coordinate care for the victim. The SARC serves as the central SAPR focal point on an installation and is responsible for such duties as tracking the status of sexual assault cases at the designated installation, facilitating SAPR training, providing monthly updates to the installation or host wing commander and major command (MAJCOM) SARC, and providing oversight for the SAPR victim advocates who respond to sexual assaults and provide advocacy services. As

³ See DoD Instruction 6495.02, 2015.

⁴ Originally, FAP focused only on married couples, but the scope was expanded in 2006 to include former spouses, couples who live together, and those who share a child.

part of tracking sexual assault cases, SARCs are responsible for documenting and maintaining the sexual assault data included in the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database, a DoD-wide database on reported sexual assaults, including the services requested and used.⁵

The Criminal Justice Process

On the law enforcement side of managing a report of sexual assault, OSI responds to an unrestricted report by opening an investigation—attempting to interview victims, suspects, and witnesses and to collect other evidence. DoD Instruction 5505.18 (2013) and §1742 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (signed into law on December 26, 2013) require that, regardless of severity, all adult sexual assault allegations over which the U.S. military possesses investigative jurisdiction must be investigated by a military criminal investigative organization. Prior to March 1, 2013, the Air Force OSI was responsible for investigating all penetrative offenses (i.e., rape, sexual assault, and sodomy) over which the Air Force exercised investigative jurisdiction. Since then, OSI has been responsible more broadly for investigating allegations of both penetrative and nonpenetrative sexual assault (i.e., aggravated sexual contact and abusive sexual contact) within its jurisdiction. Prior to March 1, 2013, the Air Force’s Security Forces (the Air Force police force) would have had the authority to investigate nonpenetrative cases (e.g., abusive sexual contact). Additionally, indecent exposure cases, both then and today, may be investigated by either OSI or Security Forces.

Once an investigation has been completed, OSI provides the final Report of Investigation to the suspect’s commander. The suspect’s commander then reviews the final report and, in consultation with JA, recommends whether military justice action is appropriate and, if so, recommends an appropriate disposition or punishment to the initial disposition authority. On review and in consultation with legal counsel, the initial disposition authority (an O-6 or above) may decide to administer administrative actions (e.g., letters of reprimand and counseling), impose nonjudicial punishment, initiate criminal charges (the first step in the court-martial process), or take no action at all. Once the suspect’s commander provides written documentation of all disposition(s) resulting from the investigation, OSI documents the disposition(s) and archives the case file (DoD Instruction 5505.18, 2013).

There are three options for trial: a summary, special, or general court-martial. The differences in the courts largely depend on the severity of the punishment they can impose. In a *summary court-martial*, a commander can impose a prison sentence of up to one month, reduction of rank, and/or forfeiture of pay for a relatively minor offense. A *special court-martial* is designed to handle less-serious offenses (akin to misdemeanors), can impose a prison sentence of up to a year, and can impose a bad-conduct discharge. A *general court-martial* is designed for serious offenses (akin to felonies) and can impose a wide range of more-severe sentences. In special and

⁵ See AFI 90-6001, 2015, for more information on the role of a SARC.

general courts-martial, a military judge (an experienced military attorney) or a panel (jury) of command-selected military personnel can impose harsher penalties. Additionally, guilty verdicts in special and general courts-martial are convictions of federal crimes and leave offenders with criminal records.⁶

If the commander decides to initiate criminal charges, the next step in the general court-martial process is an Article 32 preliminary hearing, a pretrial probable cause hearing in which evidence is presented to determine whether the case should proceed to court-martial. Depending on the findings from the Article 32 hearing, the convening authority (the commander responsible for calling the court-martial) then decides whether to refer the charge for trial. The JA records we reviewed as part of our case analysis represent transcripts from trials that occurred and were closed within the designated 2012–2013 study time frame but do not include any Article 32 hearing documents.

The military justice system allows the accused and the convening authority to come to a pretrial agreement (akin to a plea bargain in the civilian justice system) that limits the accused's sentence in exchange for the accused pleading guilty to agreed-on charges and potentially waiving certain rights (e.g., panel member sentencing, certain motions). The sentence ultimately received is the lesser of either the pretrial agreement or the sentence imposed at trial. Many sexual assault cases are contested and thus do not have a pretrial agreement, however. Our data set includes cases with pretrial agreements (but we did not extract such cases to analyze separately from those that did not have pretrial agreements).

To summarize, our OSI and JA records included investigation files and adjudicated court-martial records based on cases that closed during the study time frame (2012–2013). Our data set includes cases regardless of whether care for victims and tracking of incidents would fall under the responsibility of FAP or SAPR. It also includes courts-martial in which the suspect entered into a pretrial agreement. Our data set does not include any confidential communication (e.g., between victims or suspects and their counselors, chaplains, or lawyers) or pretrial hearing transcripts. We have outlined the processes for sexual assault reporting and the military criminal justice systems so readers unfamiliar with the military setting can understand the nature of the data available to us. The purpose of this project, however, was not to evaluate these systems.

Data Sources

To examine cases of sexual assault suspects who are airmen, we analyzed the content of (1) closed investigation case files from Air Force OSI and (2) completed court-martial records from Air Force JA. We did not include any investigations or trials that were still open at the time of the study. As a reminder, only unrestricted Air Force reports were included, so our data set

⁶ For further details about the military criminal justice process, see Dunlap, 2013, and Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel, 2014.

excludes sexual assaults not reported to the Air Force or that were described only in a restricted manner (e.g., to medical professionals or a SARC). Prior to requesting any data, we first spoke with representatives from OSI and JA to understand how much information is contained in each case file, the range of pages typical for such files, and how many cases in each of the previous three years might fall within our study scope. To ensure we had sufficient data to work with, and mindful that the Air Force would have to identify and assemble these records for us, we decided on a sampling frame of cases that closed in 2012–2013.⁷ In this subsection, we first describe the 407 OSI files and 208 JA records we received and then describe why and how we selected a smaller subset of 192 OSI cases and 61 JA records for coding and analysis.

OSI Criminal Investigation Files

Our sample was selected from a set of 407 OSI criminal investigation reports. Each of these case files included an offense information worksheet providing some very basic information on each suspect and victim (e.g., date of birth, pay grade, unit, installation) and the type of offense. The OSI investigator also categorizes the activity under an appropriate section of the UCMJ, although the airman is not necessarily charged with that offense if the case goes to trial. If the case does go to trial, the actual charges filed may change as the military lawyers review the case or uncover additional victims or offenses during preparation for the trial or as plea agreements are made.

Each OSI investigation file also includes a summary of the investigation, written by the investigator. These summaries vary in length and level of detail. In these summaries, investigators highlight their sense of the key elements of the case. These reports may describe one incident or multiple incidents and may involve one victim's allegations against multiple individuals or multiple victims' allegations against a single individual.

The bulk of an OSI file usually consists of written statements or summaries of oral statements labeled according to whether they come from suspects, victims, or witnesses. Suspects have the right to decline to be interviewed or provide a statement to OSI investigators.⁸ An OSI file may also contain other relevant information, such as forensic evidence or references to other OSI investigations of one or more of the parties involved. The files describe characteristics of the suspect; victim; witnesses; and behavior before, during, and after the incident. The file may contain observations from the investigator.

⁷ This study plan was reviewed and approved by the Director of Air Force SAPR in the Office of the Vice Chief of Staff; RAND's institutional review board, the Human Subjects Protection Committee; the Research Oversight and Compliance Division of the Office of the Air Force Surgeon General; and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Research & Engineering.

⁸ Suspect statements were available and legible for 54 percent of the 196 Air Force suspects in the subset of OSI files that we coded.

Note that, unless they appear in the OSI case files, we do not have any documents from Air Force Security Forces regarding sexual assault offenses they investigated.

JA Court Records

Military trials—courts-martial—are documented in what is called a “record of trial.” We received 208 records of trial or, in the case of acquittals, summary records of trial. The Air Force record of trial includes a transcript of the court-martial proceedings. In cases where the sentence severity for a conviction met a threshold described in the UCMJ (e.g., more than six months confinement, bad-conduct discharge), the transcription was verbatim. In all other cases, including acquittals, the transcript of the proceedings was summarized (per UCMJ, 2012, Part II, p. 142).⁹ The records of trial typically ranged from 200 to 500 pages, but some were much longer. Our JA transcripts of court-martial proceedings include preliminary legal administration sections (including charges and selection of jurors), a case-in-chief section (the core of the case), a findings section, and then a sentencing section. As with the OSI investigation files, we focused on information describing the suspect(s), victim(s), incident(s), findings from the investigation (e.g., witness statements and descriptions of evidence), and the results of the trial.

We were not able to access the sealed transcripts of the closed hearing portions of trials for our study, but the relevant information we were seeking about suspects and their behavior should appear in the open portion if included at all. Portions of the courts-martial can be closed for very specific reasons, such as protecting discussions of rape victims’ prior sexual behavior (UCMJ, 2012; DoD, 2014).¹⁰ As with rape shield laws more generally, these closures are designed to prevent undue humiliation, embarrassment, or degradation of the victim.

The JA files are extremely detailed and can provide important information to supplement the OSI files. For example, the trial records can reveal more victims than those identified in the OSI files and can thus help identify patterns of serial perpetration. Additionally, when the suspects declined to speak to the OSI investigator or provide a written statement, the record of trial may provide our only account of the suspect’s version of events. Another reason these records are valuable is that they allow us to take a closer look at cases in which the suspects have been found guilty of sexual assault. As in the U.S. civilian criminal justice system, suspects in the military criminal justice system are innocent until proven guilty. Trials that result in a guilty verdict may differ from trials that do not, and cases that go to trial can differ from those that do not. Our objective was to explore the characteristics and behaviors of *sexual assault offenders* and the situations and settings in which they operate. Therefore, before characterizing any patterns as being related to perpetration, we sought to confirm that they were apparent at least in the cases of

⁹ The 2016 version of the UCMJ changed the threshold requirement for a verbatim transcript, but records used in the study that we describe here predate that change.

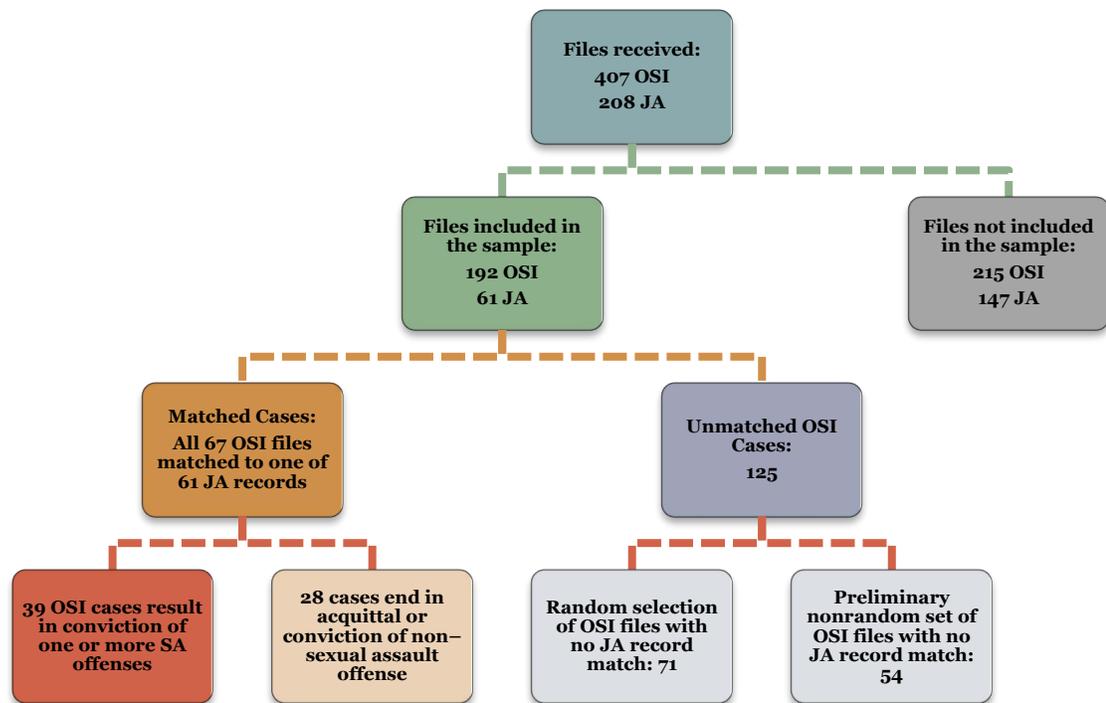
¹⁰ For a brief overview of the military criminal justice system, see Dunlap, 2013, or Annex 4 in DoD, 2014.

those convicted. When the suspect was acquitted, only a short summary of the trial, not a transcript, is produced and retained, so we did not have access to any additional relevant information that might have come to light during such trials.

How a Subset of Files Was Selected for Analysis

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the subset of cases included in our analysis. As the figure shows, the final subset of cases for our analysis consisted of 192 OSI files and 61 JA court records. This final subset of cases included all 67 of the OSI files that matched one of our 61 JA court records: 39 OSI cases that resulted in a sexual assault offense conviction and 28 cases that resulted in an acquittal or conviction of only a non-sexual assault offense. Note that in some cases, more than one OSI file was associated with a JA court record. We did not *exclude* the cases in which the suspect was acquitted or was convicted only of a non-sexual assault offense because the Air Force wants to prevent these types of incidents regardless of whether a sexual assault conviction is ultimately obtained through a court-martial. Just as organizations may launch crime-prevention efforts based on recent reported incidents in a neighborhood and not just those for which suspects have been convicted, sexual assault prevention efforts can be based on reported incidents and not just those for which suspects have been convicted.

Figure 2.1. OSI and JA Files Selected for Analysis



In addition to these cases, we selected for inclusion a random sample of 71 of the 125 OSI cases that did not have corresponding JA court records. Finally, we included 54 additional cases

that we had already coded as part of our preliminary work to familiarize ourselves with the files and develop our coding scheme while awaiting the JA data set. It is important to keep in mind that this is not a flowchart reflecting how the cases at the top proceeded through the criminal justice system: It reflects our data matching and selection process. The findings we discuss in Section 3 are based on these cases in the aggregate. For readers interested in the rather complex details, the remainder of this subsection describes the process by which we arrived at the final subset included in our analysis.

Step 1: Preliminary Work with OSI Files

We initially received a data set containing OSI adult sexual assault investigations closed in 2012 and 2013. We began coding these files first because (1) we received this data set first, and the Air Force was eager for us to proceed with our study; (2) the OSI files exist both for incidents that went to trial and for those that did not; (3) these files contain relevant information in a much more easily accessible format than in the trial narratives; and (4) methodologically, there was no reason to wait to begin developing our codes and training our team members. We used these files for preliminary work. Our initial coding efforts and team discussions helped us refine our a priori codes and coding instructions (e.g., clarifying that assigned duty station and victim-suspect relationship codes referred to the characteristics at the time of the sexual assault, not at the time of the investigation). Our selection of the final subset of files for analysis then continued over the following steps.

Step 2: Matching OSI and JA Records

After we received and began coding the OSI files in Step 1, JA provided a spreadsheet outlining JA records it had identified to provide to us and our first installment of copies of court records. Ultimately, we received 208 records, although 36 were outside the scope of the study (which was restricted to Air Force military personnel accused of a sexual assault offense against one or more adults). In some instances, the trial records within the scope of our study corresponded to the investigation records we had. Given the immense size of the data set and the only partial overlap with the OSI files,¹¹ it was not practical to attempt to code all the JA files we received.

As we received these court records, we began matching OSI records to the JA files using the suspect names and then further details, such as pay grade and installation. After receiving all the

¹¹ The JA files could be hundreds of pages long and, in some cases, exceeded 1,000 pages, which would have required a significant amount of time to code. It would not have been feasible to rigorously code all the JA files separately in a timely manner. Moreover, the primary purpose for requesting these files was to build on the OSI files; before receiving the data, we lacked information about the extent of the overlap.

JA files, we found that we were able to supplement investigation information for 67 of the OSI cases (16 percent) with one of 61 records of trial or summary records of trial.¹²

We coded all the OSI files in our possession that had matching JA records (and, thus, that we know did go to trial). As discussed earlier, the JA files can provide important additional details that might not have been included in the OSI files and can thus potentially help build a more comprehensive picture of offenders. Trial outcome codes assigned to each case allowed us to confirm that the key themes identified in the full analytic set of cases were indeed found in the separate subset of cases in which the suspect had been judged guilty of sexual assault. Together, the OSI investigation records and the records of trial gave a fairly detailed sense of the demographics of those involved in these cases of sexual assault, their actions, and the context for their behavior.

Our most in-depth focus was on airmen who had been convicted by a judge or jury of a sexual assault offense, because we had additional information for these cases and because, once convicted, they are no longer “alleged” offenders. We also coded and analyzed cases for which we had no trial records and thus were cases that did not appear to go to trial. Unfortunately, only 39 of the OSI cases matched a JA record that ended in a sexual assault conviction, so the additional trial data supplemented our information for only a small subset of the sample. We lacked OSI files for approximately 111 court-martial records that appeared to be within the scope of our research (73 convictions, 38 acquittals for sexual assault offenses against adults) and so did not code or analyze these records. We did, however, compare suspect pay grades for the court-martial cases we had analyzed (those having both JA and OSI records) and those we had not analyzed (those with only JA files). This comparison indicated that the sample we analyzed had a higher percentage of officers and a lower percentage of junior enlisted airmen (E-1 to E-4) than the sample of unmatched JA files we did not analyze. However, after reviewing our findings, the OSI representative in the Air Force SAPR program office stated that the cases in these additional files would still be consistent with the broad themes we had identified in our analyses; thus, additional effort would be unlikely to provide a different perspective on the conclusions we reached. For at least some of these cases, corresponding OSI files may not exist; for lesser offenses, Security Forces may have conducted the initial investigation, or the investigation for an early 2012 trial may have been conducted in late 2011 (prior to the scope in our data request). Thus, we emphasize that the numbers presented here are intended to describe our set of case files, not to represent patterns in the Air Force at large proportionately.

Step 3: Selecting a Random Sample of Unmatched OSI Files

Our sample of OSI files was not limited to only the 67 cases connected to court-martial records. First, some trials may have occurred beyond our sample time frame. Second, there could

¹² A court-martial can address multiple investigations at once.

be many reasons an OSI case does not go to trial, including a victim unwilling to testify, lack of evidence, other disciplinary action taken (e.g., discharge, demotion), a suspect leaving the military before the report was filed, or an unknown suspect. Some cases might be more likely to be prosecuted because of a stronger legal case resulting from multiple victims, documented physical injuries, or witnesses who observed the sexual assault or attempted sexual assault in progress. The Air Force is working to combat the full range of sexual assault incidents, not only those for which the offenders are known, reported, brought to trial, and convicted. Thus, we also included some OSI files that were not matched to trial records. After we had some experience coding these files, however, we realized that we would not be able to code all the remaining OSI files in a thoughtful, qualitative manner and that a superficial coding of only quick-to-identify characteristics (e.g., victim and suspect gender or pay grade) would not add value to what the Air Force already tracked.

For these reasons, once we had extracted our set of matched OSI/JA cases, we coded a random selection of the unmatched OSI files. We used a random selection as a safeguard against missing key themes that might result from an OSI file sample being disproportionately drawn from any particular part of the Air Force or point in time. We coded until we reached 71 cases, which was approximately the same number of cases that we knew did go to trial. Some of our initially coded cases fell within this random sample, but an additional 54 cases did not, resulting in a total of 125 coded OSI cases included in our final analyses that did not have matching JA court records. These final 125 coded OSI cases, along with our subset of matched OSI and JA cases, informed the themes that we highlight in this report. Our purpose was not to estimate the prevalence of incidents of sexual assaults by airmen but to better understand the nature of the events before, during, and after incidents reported and investigated as sexual assaults.

Coding Methods

Our coding and analytic process was iterative, with our goal being to detect patterns in suspect characteristics and behaviors, including the situations and settings in which they operate and the types of victims targeted. Our research design was a variation of convergent design; although most convergent studies have segregated quantitative and qualitative strands, we conducted both of these strands simultaneously, case by case (Creswell et al., 2011; Wisdom and Creswell, 2013). This means we were both creating the ability to count certain discrete characteristics (e.g., gender, pay grade) and qualitatively reviewing elements of the narrative (e.g., descriptions of the role of alcohol, offenders' apologies). We did, however, have a *point of interface* at which we merged these strands: tabulating characteristics of sexual assault offenders and sexual assaults, as well as describing the situations and settings that provide context for the sexual assault. It is important to note that we were not judging individual cases ourselves or evaluating the criminal justice system and, thus, were not attempting to resolve conflicting accounts.

Prior to receiving our data sets, we developed an initial set of codes deductively, using prior research from the academic literature and relevant DoD surveys and reports. In particular, we were guided by earlier research on offender characteristics (see Greathouse et al., 2015, for our review). This resulted in a coding scheme that included suspect, victim, and sexual assault characteristics. The codes and additional details about them are provided in Appendix B. Using this initial coding scheme, we coded the first set of OSI files we received, ensuring that all team members were using the coding scheme in the same way and refining the coding scheme inductively based on the content of the cases. During this initial coding phase, supplemental codes to sort cases by prominent, recurring themes or emerging themes of interest were suggested; these appear at the end of our list of codes in Appendix B. Additionally, in the latter stages of analysis and team coordination, we identified other commonalities or nuances for particular themes worthy of discussion, but it would be impractical and unnecessary to revisit the entire data set to provide a numerical count of their occurrence.

In addition to applying our coding scheme to our selected sample of OSI files, we explored more fully the subset of cases for which we had both investigative and trial information. We filled out information that was not available from the OSI files (e.g., from additional victims or when suspects had declined to speak with OSI) and added codes for court-martial information, such as the charges and trial outcomes. We then clustered our set of OSI/JA matched cases into groups based on potentially salient characteristics (e.g., whether the installation was in the United States or overseas, the age ranges of victims and suspects). We then assigned individuals to serve as the experts for these clustered groups of OSI/JA matched cases to look for particular patterns (or lack thereof) within the cases and to explore whether these observations also applied to the coded, unmatched OSI case files. Finally, we prepared counts of basic sample demographic characteristics, such as gender, rank group, and age group (presented below) and of sexual assault characteristics (see Section 3). Appendix B describes these coding steps and our approach to ensure coding reliability in more detail.

Demographic Characteristics of Our Sample

This subsection provides an overview of victim and suspect demographic characteristics in our coded sample of cases. We have collapsed or omitted categories with only one or two people to ensure that it is not possible to identify any particular individuals included in our sample. For similar reasons, we have combined into one column in each table the cases in which the suspect was acquitted or convicted of only a non-sexual assault offense, even though those are very different types of outcomes. We caution that the characteristics presented here are intended to describe only the sample we coded, not to represent the demographics of sexual assault victims and suspects in the Air Force statistically. As described above, this does not represent the complete universe of reported Air Force sexual assault cases in our period and is not a random sample of all reported cases: Along with a random sample of OSI cases, we coded and analyzed

all cases for which we had both an OSI record and a JA record because those files together would be able to provide the most available information on sexual assaults within the Air Force.

Victim Demographics

Table 2.1 shows gender, age group, military affiliation, and pay grade information for the 214 victims that appeared in the case files we examined. Some information typically collected for social science purposes, such as marital status, is not included in the table because it was not a standard part of the information collected for investigative purposes. Overall, more than 90 percent of the victims in our set of cases were women, and more than 50 percent of the victims (59 to 75 percent) were under the age of 24. In terms of military status, the vast majority of victims were military members (roughly 70 percent). However, for the subset of the OSI cases we randomly selected from the ones OSI provided to us, only 47 percent were military members, with 30 percent civilian spouses of military members and 23 percent other civilians. Again,

Table 2.1. Sample Victim Demographics by Data Sources Used

Victim Demographics	All the OSI Files We Received That Also Had Matching JA Records (%) (n = 78)	Data from OSI Records Only ^a (%)	
		Random Selection of Cases (n = 73)	Preliminary Nonrandom Set of Cases (n = 63)
Gender			
Female	94	92	>90
Age group			
18–20	42	19	29
21–23	33	40	40
24+	24	40	32
Military affiliation			
Military	71	47	70
Civilian, married to military member	6	30	14
Civilian, not married to military member	23	23	16
Pay grade of military victims			
E-1 to E-4	74	82	77
E-5 to E-9	15	6	18
Other (cadets, O-1 to O-3)	11	12	5

NOTE: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding. Individuals did not fall into more than one column often enough to fundamentally change the represented distribution. In a few cases in the last two columns, complete information for all victims was not available: Calculations excluded cases with information missing from the denominator. For gender, “>90” percent means that the number of men was so low that giving the actual percentage might have risked identifying who was included in our sample.

^a Case may have gone to trial after 2013 or may not have gone to trial. Other actions may have been taken against the suspect (e.g., discharged, demoted), or the individual may have left the military before action could have been taken.

because we do not have a complete set of cases, we caution the reader against drawing any conclusions about the legal process based on the characteristics of this sample. Across our entire sample, of the victims who were military members, the majority (from 74 percent to 82 percent) were in the junior enlisted ranks (E-1 to E-4).

Suspect Demographics

Table 2.2 provides gender, age group, and pay grade information for the 196 Air Force suspects in the coded case files. Note that the sample size for each column does not correspond to the sample sizes in Table 2.1 because suspects can have multiple accusers, and victims can identify multiple suspects. For example, 11 of those convicted of a sexual assault offense (31 percent) were judged to have had more than one sexual assault victim. The behaviors of these serial offenders are more visible to us in the conviction case files than in the other records

Table 2.2. Sample Suspect Demographics by Data Sources Used

Suspect Demographics	All the OSI Files We Received That Also Had Matching JA Records ^b (%) (n = 63)	Data from OSI Records Only ^a (%)	
		Random Selection of Cases (n = 77)	Preliminary Nonrandom Set of Cases (n = 55)
Gender			
Male	100	>90	>90
Age group			
18–20	16	14	9
21–23	32	30	33
24+	52	57	57
Pay grade			
E-1 to E-4	48	59	55
E-5 to E-6	33	26	30
E-7 to E-9	3	8	8
Officers	13	7	8
Cadets	3	0	0

NOTE: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding. Individuals did not fall into more than one column often enough to fundamentally change the represented distribution. In a few cases in the last two columns, complete information for all suspects was not available: Calculations excluded cases with information missing from the denominator. For gender, “>90” percent indicates that the number of women was so low that giving the actual percentage might have risked identifying who was included in our sample.

^a Case may have gone to trial after 2013 or may not have gone to trial. Other actions may have been taken against the suspect (e.g., discharged, demoted), or the individual may have left the military before action could have been taken.

^b In this nonrandom sample, 17 airmen were acquitted of all charges, 11 were convicted of something other than a sexual assault offense (e.g., assault consummated by battery), and 36 were convicted of a sexual assault offense. These numbers are not large enough to support a statistical comparison of the demographics of these three subgroups.

because we have more information about them. The courts-martial can bring together multiple investigations or uncover additional victims. It is possible that additional victims also came forward for trials among those acquitted or receiving less-severe sentences; however, because only very succinct summary records of trial are preserved in these cases, we do not have the information to know whether this happened. For cases that did not go to trial, it is possible that some suspects have since had additional victims file reports: We would not know because of the time bounds on our sample selection. Thus, as with the victim table, these figures are meant to represent only the cases in our sample and the information visible to us based on the available records, not the entirety of suspect characteristics and behavior. Readers should refrain from making inferences about the criminal justice system that cannot be supported by this type of data (e.g., it would be erroneous to conclude from these figures that serial offenders are likely to be convicted). In Section 4, we discuss surveys and official reports as broader and complementary sources of information.

All the suspects in the OSI cases for whom we also have court-martial records were men, but a few female suspects were included in the other investigation files we coded. The small number of male victims in our sample usually corresponded to a male suspect.¹³ The suspect sample was generally older than the victim sample, with 52 to 57 percent or more being 24 years or older. In terms of pay grade, reported suspects were mostly enlisted members, with 48 to 59 percent of suspects in the ranks of E-1 to E-4 and 26 to 33 percent in E-5 to E-6.

Point of Reference: Air Force Sexual Assault Court-Martial Summaries

The Air Force published summaries of sexual assault courts-martial from 2010 to March 2015 (JA, 2015). These abstracts provide very brief overviews of cases in which an airman was tried for a sexual assault against an adult and in which the outcome was either a conviction on the sexual assault offense or a conviction on a related offense against the victim. The report indicates that 43 percent of sexual assault offenses resulted in convictions for fiscal year (FY) 2014; it is unclear whether this means that 43 percent of the suspects who went to trial were convicted or whether 43 percent of sexual assault charges (with some airmen facing multiple charges) resulted in convictions for the specific charges. The Air Force does not publish summaries of acquittals or OSI cases that do not go to trial, so we do not have official publicly available material to cite from these types of cases.

To ensure that the convicted offender cases and files we coded were not uncharacteristic in general terms, we reviewed all these summaries, which extend two years before and after the time frame of our study. Although these summaries do not contain the rich qualitative

¹³ OSI raised the possibility that lifting the ban on openly gay service members at the end of 2011 may have increased the level of comfort in reporting a sexual assault by victims of same-sex assault, which would include many of the male victims here.

information that is in the files we coded, this review helped confirm, at a general level, that the predominant themes we found in our cases were consistent with a broader sample of Air Force files, which also share some commonalities with the broader literature. Since we are unable to quote from the cases we analyzed, we offer a few of the descriptions from these summaries in Section 3 to help illustrate themes from our case analyses.¹⁴

Limitations

As with any study, it is important to note the limitations of our analysis so that the conclusions are not generalized beyond what the data can support. First, RAND received information only on cases that entered the Air Force criminal investigation system and came to the attention of the chain of command. Thus, these files do not represent all incidents of sexual assault in the Air Force. As noted in our literature review (Greathouse et al., 2015), research on sexual assault in the general population finds that victims who were sexually assaulted by strangers, victims who were sexually assaulted with weapons or other means of force, and victims who felt that their lives were in danger are more likely to formally provide a report to law enforcement than victims who were sexually assaulted by someone they know or under other circumstances. Similar or other differences may exist in the Air Force community as well.

In addition, as with any study, we had to scope our effort. Having no visibility into the cases prior to requesting them, we selected a two-year time span to ensure we would have enough records to review. Once we had become familiar with the files, we recognized it was infeasible to code them all in a timely manner. Focusing only on cases that led to a sexual assault conviction would have too narrowly constrained the sample, however, by omitting cases in which the offenders escaped detection or accountability. Therefore, as described previously, we prioritized our remaining coding in the following order: (1) coding the 67 cases that had both an OSI and JA match and (2) coding a random, similarly sized sample of 71 of the remaining OSI cases (rather than the entire remaining sample of OSI cases). This sample size limited our ability to examine offenders who were relatively rare in this sample of cases, such as offenders with male victims. Even rarer were female suspects, so we would have needed additional years of data to gain sufficient examples to evaluate for patterns there. Thus, our analyses primarily describe cases with male suspects and female victims. Additionally, we do not have visibility into the Security Forces investigations that fall within their authority, such as nonpenetrative sexual assaults prior to March 2013 or cases of indecent exposure (which they and OSI may investigate).

In Section 3, we report on the most common themes we identified that we were able to analyze. These themes spanned both OSI cases that went to trial and those that did not, although those that went to trial may have varied from those that did not in important ways. For example,

¹⁴ To avoid citing one of our actual cases as it may appear in these summaries, we selected examples that are outside our sample's specific time frame.

suspects who were unknown to the victims and unable to be identified could not be tried. Cases that resulted in courts-martial may have had more-severe physical injuries to the victim, multiple victims, victims more willing to testify, or sober victims able to clearly remember and articulate the sexual assault. Additionally, the records we used contained evidence collected for criminal investigations or court-martial proceedings, not for social science research purposes. Thus, these records often lacked mention of many of the offender risk factors identified in the civilian research literature (such as exposure to abuse or violence as a child, casual attitudes toward sex, and interpersonal skill deficits) that may not have been seen as directly relevant to the case.

As a final note, to obtain approval for this study from RAND's Institutional Review Board and Air Force and DoD oversight committees, we agreed not to describe individual cases or even offer excerpts from individual cases to ensure that no one could be identifiable, even through inference. We were required to adopt strict constraints to protect the privacy of the individuals represented in these files, which include victims, witnesses, prisoners, and suspects not convicted of a sexual assault offense. Therefore, when reporting the frequency with which a particular code was found within our set of cases, we may indicate that a number is not reportable because of small numbers or may collapse finer categories of distinction into a broader category. Additionally, because of these concerns about protecting human subjects, we are not permitted to provide any individual-level data, which would include specific examples or quotes from the cases we reviewed. Typically, in qualitative research, actual quotes or rich description of actual cases would be integrated into a results section. Instead, we discuss our findings more generally and have developed fictional, composite scenarios based on the cases as a whole. To help further supplement this, we also provide examples from publicly available summaries of Air Force convictions that do not fall within our study's time frame. Thus, although we must mask many of the particular details, we have employed multiple strategies to convey the selected themes.

3. Key Findings

This section conveys key themes in our sample of incidents investigated by Air Force law enforcement. These general themes appeared regardless of whether the investigation led to a trial, although the nature, severity, and frequency of their occurrence varied. The section first provides a high-level overview of some basic characteristics of the sexual assaults, including the suspect's relationship to the victim prior to the sexual assault, the nature and location of the sexual assault, and aspects of the suspect's post-sexual assault behavior. The section then moves into the primary aim of the analyses, describing the themes qualitatively. We first note signs of confusion about how to apply definitions of sexual assault to real-world settings. We then discuss the sexual assaults between individuals involved in a romantic or sexual relationship either in the past or at the time of the sexual assault, which we will refer to as *intimate-partner sexual assault*. Next, we explore variations in the role of alcohol as represented in the case files. Finally, we characterize patterns in offenders' behavior and justifications following the sexual assault. The key findings described here are highlighted because of their potential contribution to Air Force efforts to educate its community, prevent sexual assault perpetration, and increase reporting and offender accountability. Thus, our aim was not to focus solely on what is most common among reported incidents or to provide estimates on prevalence throughout the Air Force. Instead, the goal of this qualitative analysis is to illuminate a range of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to help the Air Force close any potential gaps in its strategies to combat these sexual-assault crimes.

Sexual Assault Characteristics

As background for our qualitative discussion of the coded case files, this subsection highlights the frequency with which certain sexual assault characteristics appeared in them. Because the numbers are small from a statistical standpoint, we advise against generalizing these percentages beyond the sample.

Before creating the tables in this section, we first counted the characteristics for each of four categories of files: OSI cases linked to a court-martial with sexual assault conviction, OSI cases linked to a court-martial without sexual assault conviction, the random sample of OSI cases without court-martial records, and the remaining sample of OSI cases without court-martial records. Broken out this way, however, some of the frequencies were very small and thus not reportable. Additionally, presenting the results at that level of detail risks readers drawing conclusions about the relationships between sexual assault characteristics and investigation outcomes. Our study sample was not, however, designed for assessing the criminal justice system, and the methods we used could make such conclusions erroneous. Thus, we present only the overall results here.

Table 3.1 shows the relationships between suspects and victims, as indicated in the statements available for 207 of the victims in the cases we coded. Overall, 88 percent of victims knew the offender: Twenty-four percent knew them only from work; 15 percent knew them from work but also had some degree of a personal relationship beyond work; and 50 percent had only a personal relationship with the suspect. Nine percent of suspects were senior in the victims' chain of command; none were subordinates; and 29 percent were past or present coworkers. Twenty-eight percent of suspects were current or past intimate partners of the victims. In sum, in these reported cases, victims were typically identifying suspects they might consider peers: their coworkers, friends, acquaintances, and current or past romantic or sexual partners.

Whether the suspect had stalked or sexually harassed the victim before the sexual assault was too rarely noted in the files for us to report here. It is likely that these records simply do not capture some harassment and stalking behaviors. The 2014 RMWS confidential survey data support this probability, indicating that 31 percent of active-duty airmen who were sexually assaulted had been sexually harassed by the offender prior to the sexual assault and that 8 percent had been previously stalked by the offender (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 70–71). See Appendix A for more details.

Table 3.1. Suspect-Victim Relationship in the Study Sample, as Reported by Victims

	Total (n = 207) (%)
Suspect relationship to victim at the time of the sexual assault	
Work only	24
Personal only	50
Work and personal	15
No prior relationship	12
Specific relationship at the time of the sexual assault ^a	
Friend	17
Acquaintance	17
Intimate partner	20
Previous intimate partner	8
Other personal relationship	5
Suspect is senior in victim's chain of command	9
Suspect is subordinate in victim's chain of command	0
Past or present coworkers	29
No prior relationship	12

NOTE: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding or when more than one characteristic may apply. Calculations excluded cases with information missing from the denominator. This information came from victim statements because suspects declined to provide statements in 46 percent of the cases we coded.

^a More than one may apply.

We also coded information on the location of the offense. As shown in Table 3.2, 42 percent of the incidents happened on base, and 38 percent happened off base. In 19 percent of the cases, it was unclear to the victim where the sexual assault happened (e.g., if they were unconscious at the time) or unclear to us whether the named location was on or off an installation. More specifically, 24 percent of victims described the offender as having committed the sexual assault (or first sexual assault, if there were multiple instances) at the victim’s residence; 25 percent said it happened at the suspect’s residence; 13 percent said it happened at a residence the victim and suspect shared; 8 percent said it happened at another residence; and the remainder said it happened at other locations. That is, altogether, 70 percent of these cases occurred in a residence. Seven percent of the victims reported that the sexual assaults occurred in the workplace, and a further examination of the files revealed that none of these sexual assaults were penetrative.

Table 3.3 conveys information we coded about additional characteristics of the sexual assault, as reported by the victims. Sixty-five percent of the reported sexual assaults were penetrative, and 34 percent involved touching or attempted touching of breasts, buttocks, or genitals. Kissing or attempted kissing was reported by 23 percent of victims, and 13 percent of the victims described suspects as using romantic language, gestures, or overtures, such as

Table 3.2. Sexual Assault Location in the Study Sample, as Reported by Victims

	Total (n = 207) (%)
Sexual assault location	
On base	42
Off base	38
Unclear or unknown	19
Specific location	
Victim’s residence	24
Suspect’s residence	25
Shared victim and suspect residence	13
Other residence	8
Hotel or temporary lodging	8
Workplace	7
Vehicle or outdoors	10
Other	5

NOTE: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding. Calculations excluded cases with information missing from the denominator. Victim statements were the source of this information because suspects declined to provide statements in 46 percent of the cases we coded.

Table 3.3. Sexual Assault Characteristics in the Study Sample, as Reported by Victims

	Total (<i>n</i> = 207) (%)
Sexual nature ^a	
Penetration	65
Oral contact	15
Attempted penetration or oral contact	6
Touching or attempted touching	34
Kissing or attempted kissing	23
Romantic language, gestures	13
Other (e.g., indecent exposure)	9
Suspect substance use	
Yes, alcohol or drug	51
No	17
Missing from victim statement	31
Victim substance use	
Yes, alcohol or drug	55
No	21
Missing from victim statement	25
Victim incapacitation	
Chemical incapacitation	24
Sleeping/unconscious (not chemical)	14
None	55
Other or missing from statement	7
Physical nature ^b	
Restrained the victim	22
Physical violence in addition to sexual assault itself	12
Weapon present or other physical means	4
Victim injured	19
None	56
Missing from victim statement	9

NOTE: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding. This information came from victim statements because suspects declined to provide statements in 46 percent of the cases we coded.

^a More than one may apply.

^b Unless “none” or “missing,” more than one may apply.

attempts to hold hands, hug, or put their arm around the victim. About 51 percent of victims reported that the suspect had consumed alcohol prior to the sexual assault,¹ and slightly more

¹ Among airmen in our sample who were convicted of a sexual assault offense, 47 percent indicated they had consumed alcohol prior to the incident.

(55 percent) said they themselves had been consuming alcohol. Too few victims reported drug use (primarily in the form of prescription medication) for us to break out the results here, so Table 3.3 combines mentions of drugs with the alcohol use category. Twenty-four percent of victims reported circumstances in which they were sexually assaulted during chemical incapacitation, that is, because of their level of intoxication, they were unconscious, drifting in and out of consciousness, and/or unable to physically resist the offender or control their own bodies. Additionally, 14 percent of victims were asleep when the sexual assault began. Suspects also restrained victims to commit the sexual assault (22 percent), e.g., by holding them down; used physical violence beyond the sexual assault itself (12 percent); and/or physically injured victims (19 percent).

We also coded victim statements for suspect postincident behavior. The most commonly reported behavior was an apology: Twenty percent of all victims described receiving some form of apology from the offender. The next most frequently reported postincident offender behaviors were denial (12 percent) and attempts to justify the behavior (8 percent). Fewer than 5 percent of victims described other possible suspect behaviors, such as threats or harassment. It is important to consider that some suspect actions may have occurred after the victims provided their statements to law enforcement; particularly when there was no trial (and thus no later testimony), we may have less information from victims on subsequent suspect actions.

Suspect statements also provide information about suspect postincident behavior. Ten percent of suspects said they had apologized to the victim. These percentages should not be directly compared with victim statement percentages, however, because our cases contained more victims than suspects and because, as noted earlier, suspect statements were often missing. Further, 19 percent of suspects denied to investigators that they had sexually assaulted the victim, and 10 percent offered statements that included attempts to justify their actions. In none of the cases did suspects admit to threatening or harassing victims after the incident.

This subsection has reported summary descriptive statistics for the sample of case files we analyzed. It was not surprising, based on other available information (see Appendix A), that the Air Force cases we reviewed often contained suspects who knew their victims, sexual assaults that occurred outside the workplace, and alcohol consumption by victims and suspects. Our intention, however, was not simply to count the features of the cases. It was to understand and describe some of the context surrounding the sexual assaults. The remainder of this section explores several key themes with an eye toward their implications for education about sexual assault and other prevention activities and for increased reporting of sexual assault and offender accountability. An objective of this qualitative research is to convey the *types* of circumstances, explanations, and situations that occur, not to estimate their frequency in the population. The aim of Air Force prevention efforts is to prevent as many sexual assaults as possible, not merely to address only the most common scenarios.

Confusion About What Constitutes Sexual Assault

Throughout our review of the cases of reported incidents, we detected a recurring sense of ambiguity in understanding exactly how to apply formal definitions of sexual assault to real-world experiences. This was expressed in a number of ways and was represented in statements from victims, suspects, and witnesses. Some victims were clearly trying to understand whether an unpleasant experience was sexual assault or just something they should consider as “bad sex,” a miscommunication, or an unfortunate mistake. The research literature on the general population notes that the consequences of unacknowledged rape can include survivors not reporting the incident, not seeking medical treatment or counseling, and not even turning to friends or family members for support (Wilson and Miller, 2016). Types of situations that appeared to cause doubt or confusion among individuals represented in the OSI cases we reviewed include the following:

- The victim was in a romantic relationship with or married to the suspect.
- Following mutual romantic or close interaction (e.g., after dating, kissing, sexual banter, falling asleep together), the offender used sexual touching as an attempt to initiate sexual activity (and may have stopped when asked to stop).
- Some previous sexual acts had been consensual.
- The couple had previously engaged in “rough sex.”
- The victim did not yell or physically fight off the suspect but verbally indicated unwillingness to engage in sex.
- The victim did not voice objections or verbally agreed only out of fear or to end the pressure to comply.
- The suspect was seriously intoxicated, calling into question whether he was able to hear or process the victim’s resistance.

Intoxication or failing to understand the UCMJ, however, does not exonerate an offender. As we were coding the data for other characteristics, ambiguity in the eyes of those who gave the statements or testimony in our case files emerged as a theme in several different ways. Victim explanations about when or how they decided to report the incident were primary sources for this theme. Some only came to believe that their experience had been a sexual assault as a result of discussions about the events with others or after debating with themselves about whether it was or not. It is thus possible that some delayed reporting may be due to uncertainty about the application of the law. *Sexual assault* is a socially constructed concept, and UCMJ definitions do not necessarily align with other legal definitions, larger stereotypes, cultural understandings, or idiosyncratic personal definitions of sexual assault. That society offers many competing definitions of sexual assault can present a challenge for Air Force education efforts because recruits do not arrive as clean slates but rather with their own understandings of sexual assault, and they will continue to be exposed to societal messages that could cloud their understanding or acceptance of DoD legal standards.

The Air Force cannot assume airmen will be able to easily adopt and apply a shared understanding about the definitions of sexual assault because such definitions vary across our society and because some situations can be ambiguous. Airmen may have understandings of sexual assault shaped by their own beliefs, the communities from which they come, media depictions, or outdated laws or state variations. Even if, after SAPR training, airmen are able to recite the UCMJ, that does not mean they could apply it to many situations they face. Even within the legal system, lawyers, judges, and juries debate the application of the UCMJ to particular circumstances. Although it is unrealistic to train airmen to the level of scholars or military lawyers, there is likely room to improve their understanding of the situations described earlier. Air Force sexual assault prevention and response training could help victims or their confidants recognize that an unwanted sexual experience might meet the UCMJ criteria for a sexual assault offense and thus prompt them to report it.

Intimate-Partner Sexual Assault

In this subsection, we consider intimate-partner sexual assault, which includes sexual assault by spouses and unmarried romantic or sexual partners. We first describe the broader problem of sexual assault within the context of relationships or following consensual sexual activities, then focus more specifically on sexual assaults by partners with a history of abusive, violent, or other problematic behaviors.

Sexual Assault That Follows Consensual Sexual Behavior

Particularly distant from the stereotype of the stranger offender are sexual assaults that occur following consensual activity. We saw a number of examples of this situation in the investigations we reviewed (19 percent of OSI investigations for which we also had trial records and 18 percent that did not appear to go to trial). As with our cases overall, these cases primarily involved male offenders with female victims. We observed that, within marriages and other romantic and sexual relationships, a sexual assault (i.e., nonconsensual activity) may be committed after consensual sexual contact in the following situations:

- The victim had engaged in sex earlier in the evening but did not want to again.
- The victim had been willing to have sex but then wanted to stop (e.g., because it hurt, the victim started feeling sick, the victim no longer felt comfortable with the situation).
- The victim was willing to engage in some sexual activities but not others (such as oral or anal sex).
- The victim was willing to engage in multiple-partner sex but did not want to engage in all activities with all participants.

Consensual activity may also occur following these unwanted sexual experiences. Victims may initially define these experiences as bad, unwanted, or a mistake and may only come to recognize them as sexual assaults when talking with others about their experiences and their

psychological struggles afterward. In apologies to victims, a few offenders admitted that they knew their actions were wrong at the time. Of course, there were also offenders who argued that the sexual activity had been consensual, and naturally, offenders might claim this merely as a defense (we have access only to their statements and cannot know their thoughts). However, as noted in our literature review, offenders who misinterpreted victim's statements or behavior may have believed they were engaging in consensual sex (Greathouse et al., 2015). Indeed, when *some* of the sexual activity was consensual, but not all, victims who appear to "consent" may be doing so only out of fear. Overall, 7 percent of the victims in the cases we coded described their behavior during the sexual assault as the result of fear, including freezing and complying because they were afraid the offender would get angry, yell, hit them, or do some other type of harm. Questions of when and how the cultural norms of men pursuing women's romantic and sexual attention, including with coaxing and various forms of coercion, cross the line into sexual assault have been the focus of academic study (Camilleri, Quinsey, and Tapscott, 2009; DeGue and DiLillo, 2004; Jones and Olderbak, 2014; Littleton and Axsom, 2003; Messman-Moore et al., 2008). *Sexual coercion* has been defined as a "strategy to obtain sex from a reluctant sexual partner by using forceful and manipulative tactics that may result in physical and emotional trauma" (Camilleri, Quinsey, and Tapscott, 2009, p. 959). Researchers refer to verbal tactics that are less threatening and more about persistence and insistence on sex as *sexual coaxing* (Jones and Olderbak, 2014). It is this potentially more ambiguous territory that may be particularly fruitful to explore in SAPR education and training activities, if not for the possibility of prevention (Tharp et al., 2013, points to mixed findings), then for the possibility of earlier and wider recognition of events that may warrant reporting, forensic evidence collection, or professional counseling.

Offending Partners with a History of Violence or Other Problematic Behaviors

We now turn to a subset of cases that, while they are not the most common, are of special concern for the Air Force because they involved abusive, violent behavior that was ongoing and typically harmed more than one individual. One of the Air Force priorities for this research project was to identify whether there were opportunities to improve screening efforts to make it possible to exclude individuals with a greater propensity to commit sexual violence from military service or remove them before they become offenders (see Matthews, 2017, for further discussion). Even though particularly violent offenders are not typical, their cases illustrate that certain patterns of problematic behavior can indicate that a sexual assault may be imminent or is ongoing. Such patterns could trigger additional scrutiny from leadership or service providers (such as counselors or chaplains).

In 16 percent of the cases in our sample, the victim and suspect had been in a bad intimate-partner relationship marked by abuse, discord, and separation or divorce. In most of these intimate-partner sexual assault cases, the accused airman was or had been married to one or more of the victims. Domestic violence was present in most of the marriages, and in the cases that

went to trial, convictions were for sexual or physical violence or both. Couples' persistent arguments spanned a wide variety of subjects, including their sexual relationship. Often, the conflict had been escalating, and arguments or physical aggression had occurred in front of others. Some victims reported that their spouses had sexual fantasies involving rape or violence during sex that they would ask their spouses to act out with them. Violence occurred even when the wives were pregnant or when children were present in the home. In some cases, both spouses and other victims accused an airman of perpetrating sexual assault.

Victims reported a wide range of offender behaviors that were intimidating, controlling, or fear-invoking. In addition to physical violence or threats of violence directed at the spouse, offenders also instilled fear through property damage to homes or cars and violence toward others or animals. Offenders also made threats regarding custody of the children or withholding of financial or other support for the spouse or children. Airmen who perpetrated sexual violence toward spouses also used emotional and psychological abuse, such as insults, name-calling, controlling or tracking the movements and interactions of their spouses with others, and threatening or attempting suicide.

In most of the cases of intimate-partner sexual assault in the context of other abuse or domestic violence, someone in the Air Force had been aware that the relationship or airman was problematic. For example, the police or Security Forces had been called to intervene in domestic disputes, or FAP had been counseling the couple and documented other forms of maltreatment. Other ways the Air Force could become aware of such couples include medical attention for injuries, issuance of no-contact orders, and mandated anger- or stress-management training. Civilian and military friends, neighbors, or coworkers may also have witnessed relationship volatility, physical aggression, physical injuries, or changes in mood. We reemphasize that our cases include only incidents reported to Air Force authorities and investigated by OSI; it is possible that victims who reported their partners or spouses had experienced a greater degree of violence than those who did not involve law enforcement.

In the box on the next page, we present a fictional example to provide a sense of the general themes in these cases in our data set. This fictional scenario, if true, would be typical of this type of case (but not of all cases) in a number of ways. Particular constellations of factors will vary with each case, but the patterns represented here include a rush to intimacy; frequent arguments; and behaviors that are generally hidden from outsiders but occasionally and increasingly become apparent, such as domestic violence, emotional abuse, mood swings and angry outbursts, and lack of impulse control. Concrete details, such as the throwing of tools, are provided just to illustrate the larger themes and are not intended to suggest that the example of tool-throwing in particular was common or is a behavioral indicator of sexual assault perpetration. Also seen in this scenario is the pattern we observed of Air Force authorities trying to manage various aspects of the offender's myriad problematic behaviors, as well as the earlier noted victim confusion over whether sexual assault can occur within the context of marriage. We do not attempt to represent the offender's frame of mind. The lesson we draw is that Air Force education could

Composite Fictional Example of Sexual Assault Within an Abusive Intimate-Partner Relationship

A couple has been married for a few years. Their relationship began as a whirlwind romance, but after about a year, they began arguing with increasing frequency. Eventually, the wife felt as though even a perceived slight would ignite an explosive argument. Whenever the husband saw her texting on her phone or talking with male colleagues, he would become jealous and accuse her of wanting to cheat on him. At times, he would follow her or search through her belongings. When they first began arguing, he would just call her names or tell her that she was worthless, but over time, his reactions escalated. Increasingly, he would become physical, sometimes slapping her, punching the wall near her head, or grabbing and shoving her. She became very frightened of him and would not tell anyone because she did not want to make him angry or hurt his career. In public, his behavior was much more reserved, and few suspected what went on at home. The wife would downplay their arguments to others or lie about the cause of her bruises, especially after a neighbor had noticed her injuries, and her husband became angry that she had worn clothes that revealed them. Once, at a party, she learned from other airmen that an ex-girlfriend had a no-contact order against him.

Finally, after one fight in which he strangled her until she lost consciousness, she broke down and told a friend about the abuse. The friend convinced her to tell her first sergeant. As a result, the couple began counseling with FAP. The wife did not want a divorce and was hoping their marriage could return to the way it was at the beginning. The Central Registry Board reviewed the incident and concluded that there was maltreatment. The husband's reactions ranged from anger, apology, attempts to repair the relationship, and depression to threats of suicide. At work, he was counseled for cursing and throwing tools at his supervisor. At one point, the wife decided to separate from him and move in with her friend. One day, when she came by the house to pick up some clothes, her husband was home instead of at work, where she had expected him to be. At first, the conversation was pleasant, but at the mention of the divorce, he screamed at her, physically assaulted her, and raped her while reminding her that they were still married and that she was still his wife. After discussing this sexual assault with her counselor, the victim came to realize that previous incidents were also sexual assaults: She had just not labeled them as such because she thought that husbands were entitled to have sex with their wives whether the wives were willing or not.

emphasize to that airmen that, regardless of their personal beliefs or what they may have heard from others, sexual access is not a marital right and that they can be prosecuted for sexually assaulting their spouse.

Examples from Published Synopses of Air Force Convictions

In published brief synopses of major Air Force sexual assault convictions covering a longer period than our cases, we found other examples of intimate-partner sexual abuse to supplement our aggregate and composite descriptions. Here, we excerpt and paraphrase some of the most relevant parts of the descriptions in a few examples.² Because these were drawn from abstracts of cases that resulted in court-martial and conviction for sexual assault or a related offense, they may not be representative of cases that did not go to trial. Indeed, that minors were also harmed in the second example and that a pet was also harmed in the third may have contributed to the likelihood of a trial and a conviction. The purpose of including the following excerpts is just to share a glimpse into some specific, real-world examples:

- At a general court-martial in 2011, a major was convicted of raping his wife. The sexual assault took place after an argument in their home had escalated (JA, 2015, p. 101).
- In 2009, a staff sergeant groped his girlfriend against her will and without her consent. An investigation of this report revealed that, during parties at his residence, he had been providing alcohol to women who were minors and had sexually assaulted one. At a general court-martial, he was “convicted of indecent liberties with a child, aggravated sexual assault of a child, indecent acts, wrongful sexual contact of an adult, and providing alcohol to minors” (JA, 2015, p. 46).
- The civilian spouse of an airman first class reported ongoing domestic violence. During a violent incident, he strangled her and told her he would stop if she had sex with him, to which the wife agreed out of fear. The victim also reported that her husband had threatened to kill their pet cat and then had done so. In 2014, at a general court-martial, the airman was convicted of

failure to obey a no contact order, three specifications of aggravated assault, two lesser included offenses of assault consummated by a battery, communicating a threat, and conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces by wrongfully killing a cat.

He was found not guilty, however, of “two specifications of aggravated assault, all specifications of sexual assault, and one specification of communicating a threat” (JA, 2015, pp. 115–116).

Overall, our analyses of the richly detailed case files of reported sexual assaults indicate that airmen who perpetrate marital sexual violence may be visible to others as generally violent and abusive individuals who may not only terrorize their spouses but victimize others as well.

In the next subsection, we move on to the role of alcohol in the cases we studied. These subsections do not represent mutually exclusive categories: For example, some sexual assault between intimate partners can occur after consuming alcohol with others at parties. The

² See the original document (JA, 2015) for the name of the case, location, additional trial information (such as Special Victims’ Counsel representation), and sentence.

organization of this section merely permits us to shine the spotlight on different aspects of these cases, and these aspects may intersect.

Group Socializing with Alcohol

One of the main themes we noted across our reported cases involved sexual assault occurring in the context of group socializing with alcohol. That alcohol is a factor in sexual assault in the Air Force is already known; our review sought to examine the role more closely. Alcohol was not necessarily always a factor in our cases, but as noted earlier, the victim, the suspect, or both had been consuming alcohol prior to the sexual assault in about one-half of our cases.

Taking Advantage of Airmen's Trust in Other Airmen as Safe Drinking Buddies

Impulsive offenders seeking to take advantage of opportunities in their surroundings may be attuned to when conditions are right to sexually assault someone, resulting in an ongoing *modus operandi* with multiple victims. A number of offenders in the cases we reviewed maneuvered vulnerable victims into isolated settings or took advantage of individuals already vulnerable and isolated. Rather than drugging a potential victim or plying them with alcohol, opportunistic offenders can simply take advantage of settings where potential victims are already likely to drink heavily or are asleep in shared or unlocked quarters. Offenders can thus target the vulnerable who are drunk, asleep, and/or alone. As noted above, 38 percent of the victims in our sample were asleep, unconscious, or chemically incapacitated when the sexual assault occurred or began.

Our case analysis found evidence that Air Force offenders can also be socially adept, taking advantage of the cultural assumptions of fellow members, particularly expectations of trust among airmen. While all sexual assault involves a violation of trust, the opportunistic offenders we identified in our cases seem to make particular use of USAF cultural expectations of trust and mutuality among members. Articulated in victim and witness statements was the presumption that airmen can trust fellow airmen, even when intoxicated, and that being safe includes relying on other airmen for protection against dangerous strangers. Offenders can take advantage of this trust and of the perception that home is a safe space in which to relax, sleep, socialize, or “get hammered.” Repeatedly, we read evidence of a level of comfort with leaving dorm and bedroom doors unlocked and sharing sleeping space with other airmen.

Isolation of potential victims can occur in a number of ways. With the best of intentions, airmen may try to help severely intoxicated friends by putting them to bed. Placing a friend in a dorm room (or a bedroom in off-base housing) puts the friend in a safe place to sleep but isolates a person who may be incapacitated or impaired. This provides opportunities for an offender to gain access to the victim, including by explicitly offering to check on the friend that was put to bed. Other variations on this scenario that take advantage of cultural expectations of mutual support are offering to walk a drunk member home or to protect a victim from someone else,

whether from a person who was harassing them or from a potential encounter with a stranger. In other cases, the offender can exploit an Air Force focus on looking out for one another to create an opportunity for an isolated sexual assault by asking for a ride home or permission to spend the night on the couch to avoid driving home under the influence or having to pay for a taxi.

In the box on this page, we offer a fictional scenario that represents several key patterns repeated across our case files, regardless of whether an investigation resulted in a trial. In this way, we convey a bit more concretely what these cases can look like while preserving the privacy protections for our data set. This scenario represents only the themes we encountered; no actual case we reviewed looked just like this one, and the details of real-world scenarios vary quite a bit. This composite depicts the common themes of airmen out drinking at a nearby establishment and of airmen helping other drunk airmen home. Also common is an airman awakening and feeling the physical effects of a sexual assault but not remembering what happened. Another pattern is the discovery of additional victims through the course of an

Alcohol-Related Perpetration Composite Fictional Scenario

Three male airmen who work together and are friends are out at a club, where they recognize two female airmen from their base, one of whom gets very drunk early in the evening. She becomes sick, so they all help her to her house and put her to bed to sleep it off. Her husband is deployed at the time and so is not home. The other airmen then go to a local bar down the street. After about 20 minutes, one airmen tells the rest that he has decided to turn in early for the night, but that he'll stop by on his way back and make sure the other airman is all right. He purchases a couple of bottles of water to take to her and departs. Soon after he leaves, one of the airmen realizes his friend has accidentally taken his cell phone, and so he runs over to the house to find him and get it. He knocks on the door several times before his friend answers the door. The airman retrieves his phone, and they both then leave to head home. The next day, the female airman who was sick asks the other female airman what happened, because she woke up naked and sore but she does not remember having sex with anyone. They end up discussing it with the airman who went to her house to pick up his phone, and collectively they decide to confront the airman who went to "check on her" about what exactly he did while he was there. The offender storms off, claiming he was only at her house "for a second," and the group decides to call the duty noncommissioned officer (NCO) in their barracks and report this as a possible sexual assault. During the OSI investigation, another victim—an airman who had just recently arrived from technical training—also comes forward and makes an unrestricted report. Previously, the charismatic and popular offender had lured her to a remote area at night under the pretense of offering advice to help her fit in, then sexually assaulted her once they were alone.

OSI investigation. This may happen, as it does in this scenario, when someone comes forward because they heard of the investigation, or it may occur when someone being interviewed as a potential witness reveals their own victimization. Recall from Section 2 that 28 percent of the airmen in our case files who were convicted of a sexual assault had more than one reported victim. Note that specific details in this fictional scenario, such as the offender accidentally taking his friend's cell phone, are provided just to illustrate how a fellow airman might be able to contribute circumstantial evidence to a case, not to suggest that this is a common mistake among offenders.

Alcohol Also Prominent in Cases Outside the Continental United States

We considered possible differences between being stationed inside the continental United States (CONUS) and being stationed outside the continental United States (OCONUS, which includes Hawaii and Alaska) that might be relevant for our study. These possible differences might include the greater likelihood of a lack of social structure as family and friends are left far behind,³ limited social options because of rural locations or language barriers, and increased availability of alcohol because the legal drinking age is lower. In 22 percent of the 67 cases we were able to examine more fully because we had both investigation and trial records, the suspect's assigned duty station was OCONUS at the time of the sexual assault.⁴

We found, however, that rather than a unique pattern for overseas incidents in this subset of cases, the common theme is also alcohol, often in excessive amounts.⁵ Nearly all the OCONUS cases in the sample subset involved alcohol, and about one-half involved shared sleeping space. About one-half of the incidents occurred on base. Most of these situations with alcohol involved drinking by both parties in a group recreational setting with shared alcohol and did not typically involve the provision of alcohol specifically by the suspect. In some cases, the shared sleeping arrangement was planned in advance; in others, it was a result of alcohol use, making driving a risky option. The available information indicates that, in at least three-quarters of the cases, both the suspect and the victim had been drinking alcohol during the events leading up to the sexual assault. In just over one-half of these cases, the victim was in a vulnerable state due to sleep, alcohol-related unconsciousness, or a social or emotional vulnerability. Other types of cases also occurred OCONUS, but those involving alcohol were the most common.

³ Moves within CONUS can also disrupt social support networks.

⁴ As a reference point, according to the Air Force Personnel Center's Interactive Demographic Analysis System, 18 percent of airmen were stationed OCONUS at the end of FY 2013, and 20 percent were stationed OCONUS at the end of FYs 2012 and 2011.

⁵ There was also no unique pattern in the OCONUS cases for which we do not have trial documents.

One aspect of these cases worthy of further consideration is policy regarding the legal drinking age for airmen stationed in other countries. According to Air Force policy,⁶ it is up to the commander to decide whether airmen who are underage by American standards may consume alcohol in local establishments in countries where they would be of legal age to drink. This policy option may present opportunities for commanders to limit alcohol misuse; alcohol-related sexual assault is a challenge in both CONUS and OCONUS. Although further study would be needed in this specific context, leadership strategies could aim to reduce unsupervised underage drinking and the potential risk of alcohol-related sexual assault among the youngest airmen.

The box on this page presents another fictional scenario that would fit well among the actual cases. Here, the common pattern includes a group that decides to share a hotel room, with alcohol as a part of the activities. Also common is the victim awakening to another person touching her sexually, and the offender blaming his behavior on his intoxication. Finally, this scenario reflects the pattern of an airman offender pleading with the victim not to report his behavior. In our cases, the victim does sometimes agree, and the sexual assault is uncovered only

OCONUS Alcohol-Related Perpetration Composite Fictional Scenario

While stationed overseas, a group of four airmen who are friends, along with two airmen not known to the whole group, decides to visit a nearby city for a weekend getaway. To save money, they rent two adjoining hotel rooms. After a day of sightseeing, the group brings alcohol to the rooms to have a small party. After drinking more than she was used to drinking, one of the airmen passes out on the bed in her room. Later, she wakes up to find another airman she did not know before the weekend digitally penetrating her. She tells him to stop and struggles to push him off of her. After a minute or so, he rolls over and goes to sleep. The next day, she confronts him about it, and he says he does not remember, but it must have been because of the alcohol. He apologizes, asks her to please not tell anyone and ruin his career over a stupid mistake, and promises to cut back on his drinking so it will never happen again.

⁶ AFI 34-219, 2015, p. 5, states that

Military personnel 18 years old or older may purchase, serve, sell, possess, and consume alcoholic beverages outside the United States, its territories, and possessions unless a higher drinking-age requirement exists in accordance with applicable status of forces or country-to-country agreements. A higher drinking age requirement may also be imposed based on the local situation as determined by the installation commander.

after it has been repeated and then reported by someone else. This scenario represents a variation in the types of cases, and all these scenarios blend multiple themes and include details provided for illustration.

Intoxicated Offenders

One final type of alcohol-related sexual assault we noted in our cases is particularly complex to address and likely highly sensitive because it could be misconstrued as supporting an excuse for sexual assault, rather than as an opportunity to identify ways to prevent it. In particular, we were unable to disentangle cases in which the offender was knowingly sexually assaulting the victim but used intoxication as an excuse to try to escape accountability after the fact from cases in which the airman may have genuinely been too intoxicated to perceive the victim's lack of consent or impairment. As we will note below, the civilian literature identifies alcohol misuse as a risk factor for perpetration. Our sample includes cases of suspects admitting to and being observed to have been drinking heavily; suspects being perceived by others to be intoxicated; and suspects claiming that, because of alcohol, they have no memory of the period in which the sexual assault took place. While we cannot discern the honesty or psychological motivations of individuals from the statements they provided to law enforcement or at trial, it is possible that severe intoxication could limit some airmen's ability to process their surroundings (e.g., victim's own level of intoxication or comfort level with the perpetrator's advances) and fuel sexual aggression. A cultural norm of heavy or binge drinking (e.g., as described in Bray, Brown, and Williams, 2013; SAMHSA, 2014; Patrick and Schulenberg, 2011) may increase risk not only of victimization but also of perpetration.

Examples from Published Synopses of Air Force Convictions

To supplement these summaries and fictional composite scenarios, we drew from published brief synopses of major Air Force sexual assault convictions covering a longer period than our cases span. Thus, we are able to excerpt and paraphrase some earlier examples of the kinds of incidents that were common in our sample but that also occurred outside the time frame for our cases.⁷ Although these examples are drawn only from cases that went to trial and resulted in a sexual assault conviction or related conviction, the pattern of sexual assault following group social interaction involving alcohol clearly also extends to cases that did not result in a court-martial:

- In 2010, an airman first class was convicted in a general court-martial of three counts of aggravated sexual assault for sexually assaulting a fellow airman. The offender and the

⁷ See the original document (JA, 2015) for the name of the case, location, additional trial information (such as Special Victims' Counsel representation), and sentence.

victim had been drinking and watching movies earlier in the evening; he sexually assaulted her while she was sleeping in his dorm room (JA, 2015, p. 8).

- A technical sergeant and his wife brought home a female airman with whom the wife had been drinking to the point of substantial inebriation. After the airman's wife fell asleep, the airman sexually assaulted the female airman while she was incapable of providing consent. In 2010, the airman was convicted by general court-martial of five counts of aggravated sexual assault (JA, 2015, p. 29).
- After a night of drinking at local bars with friends, an airman basic drove home a female colleague who was too drunk to drive. Once home, the female airman invited the airman to spend the night in her suitemate's room. Later, when she was asleep, the airman entered her room and had sexual intercourse with her. He was subsequently convicted in 2010 by general court-martial of two counts of aggravated sexual assault (JA, 2015, p. 82).
- A major was convicted in a 2015 general court-martial of sexual assault and five specifications of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman (and was acquitted of an additional specification of conduct unbecoming). In 2014, a female airman reported that, when an air crew including both the major and the victim was staying in a U.S. city on its way home from a deployment, its members socialized and consumed alcohol. Later that night, the major entered the airman's room and sexually assaulted her. He also sent her and two other female airmen inappropriate text messages (JA, 2015, p. 22).
- In 2014, a staff sergeant underwent a general court-martial for offenses against three different victims. The first incident occurred after the airman and a female NCO were attending a party on base. The offender got into the victim's car, directed her to drive around the corner, removed the keys from the ignition, and then "put his mouth on her breast, her hand on his penis, and his hand on her inner thigh without her consent." In the second case, the staff sergeant had met a civilian woman through social media. After meeting in person, he invited her to go to some local bars with him. Afterward, they went to the victim's apartment, where he raped her. Later that month, the offender encountered a female civilian drunk in her car in the parking lot of a bar. He offered to drive her home and, once inside her apartment, sexually assaulted his intoxicated victim. The staff sergeant was convicted of "one specification of rape, one specification of sexual assault, and one specification of abusive sexual contact." He was found not guilty of two additional specifications of sexual assault (JA, 2015, p. 83).

Offenders' Post-Sexual Assault Behavior and Justifications

In the civilian research literature, a small number of studies have asked offenders about their post-sexual assault explanations or justifications for their behavior (Wegner et al., 2015).

Overall, previous research indicates that many offenders offer some sort of justification for their behavior; most commonly, offenders place blame on the victim or assert that there was a misunderstanding of sexual interest or consent. Some research, in particular research focused on effective treatment of sex offenders, refers to the tendency of sexual assault offenders to engage in *cognitive distortions*, or thought processes that justify or excuse their behavior (Murphy, 1990). Examples of offenders' cognitive distortions include minimizing the seriousness of their

actions, responsibility, and harm to the victim; denying that the offense happened; or denying that they planned to commit the act (e.g., Marshall, Anderson, and Fernandez, 1999).

The offender's perspective, as represented in the Air Force case files we examined, was also illuminating. In sexual assault research, victims' statements and testimony give rich pictures of how they understand what happened to them, but the offender's perspective can be less visible. Because we had access to both OSI files and court transcripts, we began to understand how offenders articulated their understanding. In adherence with restrictions on the level of detail we are able to report, we describe types of behavior we observed without discussing any particular cases.

Following an incident, an offender may attempt to apologize, explain, or justify their behavior. As noted above, 20 percent of all victims said their offenders apologized for their behavior. Offenders may initiate contact with the victims themselves or may attempt to explain only after being confronted by the victim or others. Alternatively, suspects may offer justifications once approached by investigators (indeed, they may first learn of the accusations at that point) or only later, during their trials.

Denial was a common thread in suspect statements and could take the form of blaming the victim, arguing the activity was consensual, asserting they did not realize it was not consensual, or denying it even occurred. The files also contained demonstrations of ways offenders could frame themselves as victims: victim of the accuser who was lying, victim of alcohol addiction, or victim of trauma or emotional problems that caused them to lose control.

We observed that, at times, offenders use similar apology strategies with fellow airmen to try to prevent sexual assault reports from being filed. An airman may describe their behavior as a mistake (especially when caught in the act with little alternative but to confess) and may ask for help from fellow airmen; promise that they have learned their lesson and will not repeat their actions; or pledge to seek help through counseling, alcohol abuse treatment, or spiritual guidance. The story can vary, but the underlying strategy appeared to be for offenders to frame themselves as eagerly willing to self-correct but in need of help and forgiveness, rather than accountability in the military criminal justice system. Our discussion of this pattern emerged later in the coding process, so we do not have a count of this behavior across all the files, but multiple coders who coded separate sets of files noted such attempts to persuade victims to interpret the events as misunderstandings or mistakes and not to report them.

Summary of Key Findings

Several key points emerged from this analysis. Among the reports against airmen that were investigated by law enforcement, victims tended to be filing a complaint against someone they knew socially as a friend, acquaintance, coworker, or former or current intimate partner. Still, on average, the suspects in our data set were older than their victims and less likely to be at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy (E-1 to E-4) than their military victims. As a reminder,

nearly all the offenders in our sample were men accused of sexually assaulting women. Sexual assaults often occurred in the victim's, suspect's, or someone else's residence. Much less common were offenders who were strangers to their victims and offenders who sexually assaulted subordinates in their chain of command. Also infrequent among these reported cases were sexual assaults that occurred in the workplace, and the workplace sexual assaults we reviewed were all nonpenetrative.

The rates of victimization of Air Force personnel are already well below those of the other services (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a). However, any signs of gaps in airmen's ability to understand or apply the policy suggest opportunities for further improvement. As noted earlier, the narratives in the OSI files revealed some evidence of confusion among victims and suspects about how to apply definitions of sexual assault to real-world settings. For example, there were questions about whether physical touching as an attempt to initiate sexual activities with current or prospective partners should be treated as a misstep or a sexual offense. Misconceptions and confusion about whether certain behaviors cross the line into sexual assault present a challenge for reducing perpetration and for increasing reporting and help-seeking when sexual assaults do occur. The confusion we saw victims and witnesses express in these files over the application of sexual assault definitions suggests the possibility that some offenders may not realize that their actions could meet the UCMJ criteria for sexual assault. Careful, additional research could explore further whether SAPR training leads some individuals to realize for the first time that their past behavior could have been sexual assault perpetration. Our review also suggests that one reason for delay or lack of reporting from victims is also confusion over whether certain types of scenarios should be written off as bad encounters or should be reported as sexual assaults. To be clear, most airmen would likely identify many of the sexual assault descriptions in these files as sexual assaults. We call attention to the cases that appeared to be more ambiguous to airmen because of the potential to inform future guidance.

Reported offenders who sexually assaulted their spouses tended to have a lot of behavioral and emotional problems that had previously caught the attention of Air Force authorities. Consistent with research on risk factors for intimate-partner sexual violence, many of these relationships had been abusive or violent. Typically, someone in the Air Force had been aware that these relationships or these airman were problematic. Prior to the reporting of the sexual assault, Air Force agencies may have already been involved in managing protective orders, counseling the victim or suspect, providing the offender with alcohol abuse or mental health treatment, providing medical treatment for spouse's physical injuries, or intervening in other ways. Compared with suspects in our sample who were not married to their victims, airmen accused of reported marital sexual violence were generally more violent and tended to abuse their spouses on an ongoing basis. Typically, these individuals had abused or harmed others as well, contradicting any notion that such hostilities were interpersonal conflicts particular to that couple.

Alcohol was present in more than one-half of the investigated situations we reviewed. The most common situation among these cases was a sexual assault occurring after group socializing with alcohol (rather than couples drinking on a date or privately at a residence). Drinking, including binge drinking and heavy drinking, is common among young adults, among both the civilian and military populations in this age group (Bray, Brown, and Williams, 2013; SAMHSA, 2014; Patrick and Schulenberg, 2011). Relaxation, celebration, entertainment, or escaping problems are commonly cited reasons for drinking, and these reasons for drinking may vary by one's drinking habits (DoD, 2013). Further, in the cases we analyzed, drinking was a common way to let off steam and bond, providing offenders a means of creating or taking advantage of a situation to commit sexual assault.

Alcohol can affect both the offender and the victim in sexual assault cases. Alcohol can increase the level of aggression of an offender. Although offenders may use alcohol as an attempted excuse for their behavior, the descriptions in the files we read suggest that it is possible that airmen can become too intoxicated themselves to perceive lack of victim consent.

More-strategic offenders can target those already clearly intoxicated, making it unnecessary for them to actively try to incapacitate someone through drugs or other means. In a typical example of such a case, after an evening of group partying, offenders would take advantage of trust in fellow airmen and responsible drinking and driving norms. Suspects would volunteer to be a designated driver, to escort a victim back to the victim's room or residence, or would be spending the night in a shared space with the victim (e.g., at someone's house or a hotel suite a group had arranged to share). The offender would then sexually assault the sleeping or intoxicated victim.

Alcohol may render a victim unaware of the possibility or commission of sexual assault until it is in progress or has even been committed. Unfortunately, one unintended consequence of certain steps to avoid driving while intoxicated (e.g., getting a ride home, spending the night at someone else's house, sharing a hotel room downtown) is that it can inadvertently place individuals in a situation in which a strategic offender can take advantage of them.

Although we explored whether there were any distinct patterns of sexual violence in the OCONUS locations in the cases of unrestricted reports we had, the incidents were most often also alcohol related and closely resembled those in CONUS locations.

Our case analysis also revealed rich information regarding suspect post-sexual assault behavior. Not surprisingly, there were suspects who denied the incidents happened or argued that the activity was consensual. We read post-sexual assault suspect apologies to victims and pleas not to ruin their careers or abandon their friendships, relationships, or possibility of a relationship. Justifications for their actions included blaming their behavior on alcohol or personal weakness or blaming the victim. These airman offender strategies are important to understand because these offenders attempt to persuade the victim or others to give them a second chance and not report them to a SARC or to law enforcement. Importantly, research indicates that post-sexual assault justifications may actually signal increased risk for future

perpetration. Thus, having a better understanding of such justifications may aid efforts to prevent sexual assault and to promote reporting and ensure offender accountability.

4. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The goal of this report was to help inform Air Force sexual assault prevention and response efforts through a better understanding of sexual assaults committed by airmen, including suspect characteristics and behaviors and risky situations and settings. In pursuit of this objective, we analyzed a sample of OSI cases closed in 2012 and 2013 for 196 suspected Air Force sexual assault offenders. We also obtained and coded supplementary court-martial records for 64 of these airman suspects. For each of the cases we coded, we counted the frequency of certain victim, suspect, and sexual assault characteristics and analyzed the narratives for themes that might span the particular constellation of circumstances in individual cases.

By the nature of the data sources, our case analysis included only incidents that were reported to Air Force OSI. However, several different sources of information also provided background and contextual information, including the scientific literature (Greathouse et al., 2015), the 2014 RMWS (Morrall, Gore, and Schell, 2015a; Morrall, Gore, and Schell, 2015b), Air Force-specific content in DoD's annual reports on sexual assault, published summaries of major sexual assault court-martial convictions (JA, 2015), and statistics on cases of intimate-partner sexual assault that FAP provided to us for this research (see Appendix A). One of the primary purposes of research is to contribute to the ongoing development of a body of knowledge. Each study design contains strengths and weaknesses associated with its purpose and its selection of data sources and methods. Thus, we learn more from scholarship as a whole than we do from any individual study.

Table 4.1 illustrates the complementary nature of different sources of information about the incidence and characteristics of alleged sexual assaults by or against members of the USAF. None of these sources represents a complete picture of sexual assault in the Air Force, but each can contribute to a greater understanding of the challenges Air Force leadership is facing and where it has been relatively successful. These sources vary in terms of whether they include nonmilitary offenders or nonmilitary victims; whether the suspect was in an intimate relationship with the victim; whether the incidents were formally reported to the Air Force; and, if reported, whether the source includes restricted reports. Because of the variation in the populations, data sources, and types of information gathered, each has something different to offer, and the statistics are not directly comparable.

Even though the exact figures are not directly comparable, there are still some themes that are repeated across these sources and that are also apparent in our cases (see Section 2 and Appendix A). For example, offenders who are airmen and/or who sexually assault airmen tend to be men sexually assaulting women they know personally (although that is not always the case). Offenders also tend to have ranks similar to or higher than those of victims, and junior enlisted

Table 4.1. Complementary Features of Primary Sources of Information About Sexual Assault Perpetration in the Air Force

Resource	Suspects or Offenders	Victims	Suspect-Victim Relationship	Sources of Information	Air Force Reporting Status
OSI and JA reports used in this study	Airmen only	Military and civilian	Intimate partners, nonintimate relationships, and strangers	Law enforcement records ^a	Unrestricted ^b
Incidents reported to SAPR	Airmen and other military, civilian	Military and civilian	Nonintimate relationships and strangers	Statistical data from completed investigations within a given year	Unrestricted, ^b restricted
FAP statistics	Airmen only	Military and civilian	Intimate partners	Victims, sometimes suspects, counseled by FAP	Unrestricted, ^b restricted
2014 RMWS	Military (all services combined) and civilian	Military only; some results broken out by service of victim	Intimate partners, nonintimate relationships, and strangers	Victims who are confidential survey participants indicating experiences from the past year	Unrestricted, ^b restricted, and unreported

^a These records include statements from investigators and may include statements from victims, suspects, and witnesses; forensic evidence; and other personnel data. *Witnesses* does not refer exclusively to individuals who observed the sexual assault in progress but extends more broadly to anyone who might be able to speak to the individuals or events surrounding the case.

^b Includes reports that were initially restricted but later converted to unrestricted. DoD reports that, overall, about 15 percent of victims convert their reports from restricted to unrestricted (DoD, 2014).

women appear to be the Air Force population at greatest risk. Alcohol is also a common factor, with victims often reporting that they and/or the offender had been drinking alcohol prior to the sexual assault—often at a bar, club, or party or just when socializing with others. These sources suggest that offenders drugging victims is highly atypical, although it does occur. Sexual assaults often happen late at night at someone’s home, and our research suggests some of these sexual assaults may be the unfortunate unintended consequence of strategies to avoid drunk driving or sexual assaults by strangers. Finally, airmen accused of reported marital sexual abuse in particular tend to have histories of domestic violence and other behavioral and emotional problems. Although offenders in the Air Force may take advantage of particular situations in the Air Force, elements of military culture, or position within the organization, these general patterns of behavior may also be found in the literature on sexual assault in other military organizations and, more broadly, in civilian society.

Thus, although sexual assault in the military, and the Air Force, is marked by high variability, it does have some recognizable patterns. Solutions will not be “one size fits all” and will require culturally specific interventions tailored for different populations and contexts within the Air Force. We found several consistently identifiable themes with policy, education, and training implications. In the remainder of this report, we consider the possible implications of the key findings from this research for policy, programs, and future research.

Recommendations

Screening Opportunities Could Include Removing Airmen Who Are Being Persistently Managed for Other Forms of Violence

Ideally, the Air Force would like to screen out individuals who have previously committed sexual assault or who show a propensity for its perpetration before they enter the service. As this study notes elsewhere, there are significant challenges to developing a screening mechanism, such as the potential for faking, misclassification, privacy concerns, and disparate impact on certain groups (Greathouse et al., 2015; Matthews, 2017). That is not, however, the only step the Air Force could take in this direction.¹ Moreover, even with the best screening mechanisms in place, some at-risk individuals are still likely to make their way into any organization as large as the Air Force.

For this case analysis, we considered whether there were examples of airmen displaying a concentration of characteristics who might have been screened out before entry or removed sooner than they were through discharge or denial of service continuation. We focused on the cases for which the Air Force might be most likely to see the preceding or co-occurring signs, bearing in mind that it can be difficult to obtain information related to many of the risk factors for perpetration noted in the research literature (e.g., childhood abuse, number of sexual partners). Particularly within the reported incidents of marital sexual assault, we encountered examples of offenders who were often violent, hostile, and abusive prior to a sexual assault, and the targets of their aggression included others besides their spouses. Airmen like this exhibited clear warning signs of interpersonal violence prior to committing a sexual assault. These sexual assault offenders had more than once, over a period of years, come to the attention of law enforcement; had no-contact orders issued against them; or had been referred to treatment for alcohol abuse, domestic violence, anger management, or mood disorders.

These types of airmen are not a good fit for the Air Force in multiple ways and, ideally, could have been removed from the service before their behavior escalated or spread. Those who have persistent impulse-control problems and, despite every effort, repeatedly defy the desired Air Force culture in many ways can be disruptive to units and can harm performance and readiness, in addition to harming other members of the Air Force community. Sexual assault prevention and values training is unlikely to influence such individuals because even more-intensive treatment options appear inadequate.

¹ Our accompanying report, *Assessing the Use of Employment Screening for Sexual Assault Prevention* (Matthews, 2017), provides recommendations for improving the current screening process. These include asking applicants about past commission of sexual assault when asking them to self-report other morally disqualifying behaviors. That report also reviews the strengths and limitations (e.g., validity and disparate impact) of self-report tests for predicting counterproductive workplace behaviors and considers the applicability of these and other assessments, including background checks and personality-based assessments, to sexual assault prevention.

The research literature on intimate-partner violence, which typically encompasses violence between current and former spouses and intimate nonspouses (e.g., boyfriends and girlfriends, particularly those who are cohabiting; Martin, Taft, and Resick, 2007; Rennison and Welchans, 2000), suggests that at least 40 percent of partners who experience physical violence (e.g., slapping, hitting, kicking) also experience sexual violence (Campbell and Soeken, 1999; McFarlane et al., 2005).² Furthermore, in the sexual-abuse cases reported to them, Air Force FAP counselors commonly find ongoing patterns of marital discord, emotional abuse, use of physical aggression in relationships, increasing violence frequency, and a history of forcing or coercing sex in relationships.

The Air Force should consider the extent to which such behaviors warrant counseling or treatment and at what point their persistence should lead to a discharge or denial of service continuation. We therefore recommend that Air Force leadership develop guidance for making this judgment call. Understandably, there are airmen struggling with various personal challenges who would benefit significantly from leadership support and professional treatment and who should be encouraged to seek help. Developing a strategy for scrutinizing airmen engaged in significant ongoing interpersonal conflict and physical aggression will need to entail a serious discussion sensitive to such concerns.

Address Specific Types of Activities That Precede Sexual Assaults

Although we recommend paying greater attention to removing generally violent airmen from the Air Force environment, this might apply to only a small fraction of offenders, and other approaches will be needed. To target other types of offenders, we considered ways to minimize opportunities for committing sexual assault in potentially higher risk Air Force contexts.

For example, in many of the CONUS and OCONUS sexual assault cases we reviewed, alcohol had played a prominent role in group socializing prior to the sexual assault. In group settings where heavy drinking and binge drinking are prevalent, offenders can gain access to intoxicated individuals without themselves having to drug or push alcohol on anyone. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health defines *binge drinking* as consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the past 30 days and *heavy drinking* as consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion on five or more days during the past month (SAMHSA, 2014). Offenders can also leverage such situations to take advantage of airmen trusting that airmen could be safe drinking buddies, safely escort one another home, share a hotel room, or spend the night at one another's homes to avoid driving under the influence. Additionally, although heavy and binge drinking by offenders at these social gatherings is not a legal defense, it raises the question from a prevention standpoint of whether some airmen were too intoxicated

² Notably, these estimates and most research on intimate-partner violence address the experiences of female victims sexually assaulted by male offenders.

themselves to perceive the victim's lack of consent. Although alcohol misuse is not an excuse for sexual assault perpetration, it can be addressed as a risk factor for sexual aggression and aggression more generally (Abbey et al., 2003; Abbey, 2011; Brecklin and Ullman, 2001; Farris and Hepner, 2014; Ullman, Karabatsos, and Koss, 1999).

Alcohol, as a factor in sexual assaults, was also highlighted in the 2014 RMWS, which found that nearly one-half of Air Force members who had been sexually assaulted in the previous year indicated that they had been using alcohol at the time of the sexual assault, and about the same percentage indicated that the offender had been consuming alcohol.

The Air Force's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program (ADAPT) already focuses on curbing misuse of alcohol and promoting responsible drinking. To help further minimize situations in which group socializing with alcohol may lead to opportunities for sexual assault, the Air Force should continue to explore ways to reduce alcohol misuse. For example, event-specific prevention strategies that have successfully targeted problematic drinking associated with 21st birthday celebrations (Neighbors et al., 2012) might also reduce the number of sexual assaults associated with binge and heavy drinking. Also, the Air Force should explore the effectiveness of offering fun alternatives to drinking and partying, particularly for celebrations more likely to involve excessive alcohol consumption, such as 21st birthdays, New Year's Eve, and Saint Patrick's Day (Mallett et al., 2013). Preserving and even enhancing offerings of enjoyable alcohol-free social activities can contribute to drinking control strategies and have been effective in civilian populations (Sugarman and Carey, 2007; Wolfson et al., 2012). The hypothesis is that the more the environment provides and the more airmen choose to participate in other activities that do not revolve around a partying culture, the fewer the opportunities that may arise for sexual assault and other alcohol-related injuries to take place (Wolfson et al., 2012). Moreover, such activities can offer other benefits, such as stress relief, building social support networks and other resilience resources, and developing camaraderie in units and the Air Force community at large. Of course, the extent to which these community-based prevention strategies would be effective in reducing alcohol misuse and sexual assault among airmen would need to be evaluated.

Another possible response to this pattern that the Air Force may want to explore is an increased NCO presence in unaccompanied housing. We were struck by the cases we read involving underage drinking in dorms, despite housing policy against it (AFI 32-6005, 2008). Although we did not notice this pattern early enough in the coding process to produce and report a complete count of its frequency in our sample, we mention its appearance here as a possible opportunity to reinforce existing policy. Underage drinking can inhibit not only reporting but also willingness to give statements to OSI investigators. Given the noticeable absence of NCO interventions in dorm activities in some of the OSI and court narratives we read, it is plausible that an increased NCO presence could help reduce the number of dorm parties involving underage and binge drinking. It is important for NCOs to conduct walk-throughs, not just sit at a desk—that they be actively present in the day-to-day off-duty lives of the junior enlisted. Note

that we are not implying that this never happens, just that our case files suggest that occasions or locations where it is not happening could lead to activities that increase the risk of sexual assault in on-base housing. NCO leadership of junior enlisted personnel has historically been critical within the barracks, as well as on the field of battle (e.g., Krulak, 1999). Thus, increased presence of and monitoring by NCOs in areas where this is not already occurring could help the Air Force in multiple ways, in addition to addressing alcohol misuse and sexual assault.

That many of the sexual assaults stem from group activities highlights the importance of bystander behaviors and the intervention of fellow airmen. *Bystander*, in this context, refers to an individual who detects signs of an inappropriate or unsafe situation, not someone directly observing a sexual assault in progress (Colon-Francia, 2012). The Air Force has already begun to promote the importance of bystander intervention for sexual assault, and existing research on bystander-intervention programs, which focus on teaching peers to try to intervene during high-risk situations, shows promise (e.g., Banyard, Moynihan, and Plante, 2007; Coker et al., 2011). The Air Force should continue to explore ways to educate airmen on their role as bystanders and the actions they can take to help prevent sexual assault and minimize opportunities for an offender to take advantage.

Help Address Misconceptions and Confusion as Part of Sexual Assault Prevention Training

Effective training is an essential part of an integrated approach to changing the culture and behavior of Air Force members relevant to sexual conduct to better reflect service values. As a basic building block, making expectations about sexual conduct explicit—defining appropriate and inappropriate behavior—gives members a common framework, regardless of their cultural and personal background prior to entry. Such training can help clarify “gray areas” of conduct between members (Antecol and Cobb-Clark, 2003). In particular, in our case analysis, we noted confusion in understanding whether particular real-world events should be considered sexual assault or reported, including those involving verbal coercion, occurring after consensual sex, occurring within marriages, and occurring when the aggressors were inebriated. This confusion has possible implications for victim help-seeking and reporting behaviors. Furthermore, research could address whether greater clarity in these areas could reduce perpetration by airmen.

To help address some of this confusion, training on sexual assault prevention should provide airmen with detailed, concrete information to help them understand how to apply Air Force definitions of sexual assault to a wide range of circumstances, with particular attention to where there may be differences between legal definitions and cultural understandings. We cannot presume a shared understanding of such concepts as “consent” and “harm.” An example of being concrete would be spelling out to airmen in training that the following are all ways that someone is indicating unwillingness to participate in sexual activity and that it is not acceptable to proceed or to persist in pursuing it:

No. Stop. Please don't. You're hurting me. Don't do that. I don't want to. I can't/we can't. I want to wait. I'm not ready. Go away. Leave me alone. Quit it. I'm not going to. Things are moving too fast for me. I'm too tired. I'm too wasted. I'm feeling sick. I really don't feel like doing this now. I should go/you should go.

Airmen should be instructed that attempts to communicate lack of consent may be nonverbal as well as verbal, with specific examples of each. Nonverbal may include crying; squeezing legs together tightly; lying still and becoming unresponsive; removing someone's hands or face from their breasts, groin, or buttocks or attempting to block movement toward those areas; and readjusting clothing in response to attempts to remove it or putting back on clothing that has been removed. For situations in which consent is uncertain, training can also include appropriate and comfortable ways to ask a partner whether they want to proceed.

Training should also discuss appropriate victim and bystander responses for addressing an offender following an incident. Scenarios could attend to the types of situations we observed, with offenders trying to convince victims or other airmen to believe them, forgive them, help them, or otherwise resolve the incident among themselves, rather than report the behavior to someone else. Victims should understand that available resources can help them think through these situations. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize bystanders' responsibility to report an incident and that sexual assault is not an issue they should try to resolve on their own.

In keeping with current goals of military training on sexual assault prevention and response, we recommend incorporating this material into training that actively engages participants: Forcing them to engage critically with content is more likely to lead to better retention and knowledge gains (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Deslauriers, Schelew, and Wieman, 2011) and to allow them to introduce real-world situations specific to their frame of reference. Passive learning, such as slide presentations, is likely to have little effect (Waldron, 2012). Facilitated discussions and decision games are good examples of learning activities in which members with greater expertise can structure the active learning of junior members (Allen and Tanner, 2005; Prince, 2004). Additionally, these activities give airmen the opportunity to ask questions or raise objections so that the Air Force can help ensure that they understand. These interactions also help trainers gather insights that can inform the next iteration of the training. Asking unit members to bring in a popular-culture example of sexual encounters, such as those in a song, film, or TV show, would offer much greater chances of authentic learning than would a briefing-style class and would help ensure fresh and tailored content for the small-group discussion portion of the mandatory training.

Coordinate Training and Information Campaigns Across Key Stakeholders

In our case analysis, we highlighted several types of themes related to sexual assault incidents committed against women by men who are in the Air Force (as other types of cases were relatively rare). Again, one of the primary themes we found focused on sexual assault in the context of group socializing and alcohol use. This theme was prevalent across many of the cases

we analyzed and is consistent with incidents in recent surveys and formal reports in the Air Force. Another theme focused on intimate-partner sexual assaults in which the offenders were particularly abusive, violent, and problematic for the Air Force; the behavior was ongoing; and, typically, more than just one victim was harmed.

Together, several different Air Force stakeholders have roles to play in preventing and responding to these types of sexual assaults. Although the SAPR office at Air Force headquarters oversees SAPR for the entire Air Force, the Air Force's ADAPT also has a role to play, given the importance of alcohol as a factor in so many sexual assault incidents. Additionally, the Air Force's FAP is responsible for cases of spousal and intimate-partner sexual abuse. These three programs offer victims multiple points of entry into the Air Force's system for managing sexual assaults, and through each, the Air Force may identify offenders and patterns among them. Given this, we recommend close coordination among key stakeholders in this area, including SAPR, ADAPT, and FAP. This should include coordinating training and information campaigns such that each references the link between sexual assault, alcohol misuse, and intimate-partner violence. In addition, alcohol should be portrayed as not only a risk factor for victimization but also one for perpetration and failed bystander intervention. Likewise, SAPR training should raise domestic violence as a potential risk factor for sexual assault and should educate airmen that partners are not entitled to sexual access and that relationship status does not change the definition of sexual assault. Efforts to educate civilian spouses in this regard may help bring to light more airmen whose proclivity for sexual assault is currently hidden. By coordinating training and information campaigns across these stakeholders, sexual assault and related risk factors (e.g., alcohol misuse) may be better communicated, more often, and in a variety of ways.

Include Intimate-Partner Sexual Assault in SAPR Tracking and Reports

Currently, intimate-partner sexual assault is tracked by FAP, and during the time of this study (prior to 2016), FAP's statistics had not been integrated into the sexual assault reports the SAPR office tracks and reports to DoD. Given that intimate-partner sexual assaults often happen within the context of other ongoing domestic violence, it is logical that the responsibility for documenting incidents of sexual assault within that context would fall under FAP. However, as described in Section 3, we found that intimate-partner sexual assault represents an important subset of sexual assault incidents that should not be overlooked. Furthermore, as we saw in our research, confusion about the idea that sexual assault can take place within the context of a marriage or ongoing intimate relationship is still possible today. Therefore, to ensure that current sexual assault tracking and aggregate statistical reports more comprehensively reflect all incidents of sexual assault, we recommended that incidents of intimate-partner sexual assault be included. We note that the Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel (2014, p. 33) also recommended that FAP statistics be included in the annual DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office reports. Incorporating these types of sexual assaults into SAPR metrics and reports may also help reduce confusion and stigma around spousal sexual assault. However, we

are not suggesting that intimate-partner sexual assault incident rates simply be combined with stranger and acquaintance sexual assault data; doing so may mask differences important for understanding the prevention, context, and response to intimate-partner sexual assaults.

Conclusion

This report supports the Air Force's interest in learning more about sexual assault perpetration as it occurs within the Air Force. It contributes to a growing body of publicly available information on the subject, including published synopses of Air Force sexual assault convictions, official reports to the Air Force of sexual assaults, and confidential survey data from Air Force personnel. Prior studies provided both a point of departure for this research and a resource to help explain the findings.

We described evidence of patterns in perpetration in investigation and court-martial records from 2012–2013 with implications for Air Force policy or programs. Although at the time of this publication, no publicly available data source provides an estimate of the number of Air Force personnel who are offenders or a representative sample of offender characteristics and behaviors, an examination of reported cases can provide some insights into types of behaviors among them and the circumstances surrounding the sexual assaults. Further research is necessary to understand how unreported Air Force offenders may differ from those who are reported to Air Force authorities. Additionally, further research is needed to understand the context surrounding less commonly reported situations, such as offenders who sexually assault men and perpetration by women.

The wealth of information provided in the Air Force investigation and trial documents illuminated beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, situations, and settings that the Air Force can leverage as it continues to hone its sexual assault prevention and response efforts. The Air Force should continue to focus on addressing the role of alcohol in the potential risk for sexual assault, including ways to shape the environment. The Air Force should also look more closely at the management of airmen exhibiting signs of other forms of interpersonal violence, including intimate-partner violence, or other serious problems. Regardless of how rates of sexual assault in the Air Force may compare with rates in the other services, the Air Force is dedicated to identifying ways to reduce the incidence of sexual assault, to encourage victim help-seeking and reporting, and to increase offender accountability. The recommendations contained in this report seek to support that effort.

Appendix A. Other Sources of Information About Sexual Assault Offenders in the Air Force

No single data source provides a comprehensive picture of all incidents of sexual assault committed by offenders who are members of the USAF, but several sources do provide a great deal of information. As further context for the report, this appendix consolidates additional details from other sources of information about sexual assaults in the Air Force. Much of this information is publicly available in the cited sources. However, some of the Air Force-specific findings we provide from the RMWS and the aggregate data from the FAP have not been previously published in this format.

In the following sections, we first describe victim, offender, and sexual assault characteristics of sexual assaults as reported by Air Force military respondents to the confidential 2014 RMWS survey (Morrall, Gore, and Schell, 2015a; Morrall, Gore, and Schell, 2015b). Victims indicated that most of these crimes were committed by military personnel (although not necessarily Air Force personnel). Unlike the data set analyses for this report, this source also includes sexual assaults that were not reported to Air Force authorities or that were restricted reports. Next, we review victim, offender, and sexual assault characteristics as represented in official reports of sexual assault to Air Force authorities and incorporated in annual DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office reports (USAF, 2015). Like the cases in the data set we analyzed, these cover only reported incidents, albeit both restricted and unrestricted reports, but are missing intimate-partner sexual assaults. Finally, we present some previously unpublished Air Force intimate-partner sexual-abuse statistics and characteristics that FAP shared with us.

Air Force Results from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study

The most recent comprehensive survey to assess sexual assault of military personnel comes from the 2014 RMWS (Morrall, Gore, and Schell, 2015a). This confidential survey was a revision of DoD's biannual Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members, and we had consulted recent reports of prior survey results at the outset of our research (Rock, 2013; Rock et al., 2011).

The 2014 RMWS sampled close to 560,000 active component service members, and 53,550 active component airmen participated in the voluntary survey (Morrall, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, pp. 3, 107). The sampling strategy included all active-duty women and a random, stratified sample of active-duty men; the Air Force had the highest response rate, at 43.5 percent (Morrall, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. 5). The responses were weighted to be representative of the service prior to analyzing the results. The data do not capture civilian spouses of military personnel or other civilians who may have been sexually assaulted by airmen.

The survey assessed the percentage of service members who experienced sexual violence, as defined by UCMJ Articles 80, 120, and 125, by asking about incidents perpetrated by civilians or other members of the military. According to the 2014 RMWS, an estimated 5 percent of active-duty women and 1 percent of active-duty men had experienced a sexual assault in the previous year, which represents an estimated 9,600 servicewomen and 10,600 servicemen (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. xvii). As we describe further later, this figure includes both penetrative and nonpenetrative sexual assaults, with nonpenetrative sexual assaults being more common.

The total number of service members who reported victimization may not equal the number of offenders in the military, given that some victims may have had multiple offenders; some individuals might be serial offenders; or offenders might come from outside the military. The survey's findings provide insights on rates of sexual assault within the Air Force, types of sexual assaults taking place, basic demographics of the victims (and thus whom offenders may be targeting), and basic characteristics of the offenders involved in these incidents.

The following discussion, based on the 2014 RMWS, provides an overview of sexual assault victim, offender, and incident characteristics as reported by active component Air Force victims. To provide a brief overview of the study's findings in this appendix, we extracted a subset of Air Force-specific findings from several tables in an annex to that study's main report and obtained a few previously unpublished statistics.

Victim Characteristics

The Air Force specifically had lower rates of sexual assault victimization than any of the other services. According to the survey, in the Air Force, an estimated 2.90 percent of active-duty women and 0.29 percent of active-duty men had experienced a sexual assault in the past year (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. 10). In particular, 1.21 percent of active-duty women and 0.07 percent of active-duty men in the Air Force had experienced a penetrative sexual assault in the past year (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. 12).¹ Thus, Air Force women were more

¹ The RMWS developed three mutually exclusive categories of sexual assault: penetrative sexual assault, nonpenetrative sexual assault, and attempted sexual assault:

Penetrative sexual assaults are events that people often refer to as rape, including penetration of the mouth, anus, or vagina by a penis, body part, or object. We describe the measure as penetrative sexual assault in order to include both penetrative assaults that would be charged as rape and penetrative assaults that would be charged as sexual assault. *Non-penetrative assaults* include incidents in which private areas on the service member's body are touched without penetration, or where the service member is made to have contact with the private areas of another person's body. The *attempted penetrative sexual assault* category applies only to those people who could not be classified as experiencing crimes that could be charged directly via Article 120 (i.e., penetrative or non-penetrative sexual assaults). That is, they indicated having experienced an event in which someone attempted to sexually assault them (charged via UCMJ Article 80), but the person never made physical contact with a private area of their body (which would have allowed categorization under the non-penetrative sexual assault category). (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, pp. 11–12)

likely to have experienced a sexual assault than Air Force men. Victim characteristics can indicate who might be more likely to be the target of an offender or who might be more vulnerable to the offender's tactics. In terms of rank, Table A.1 shows that junior enlisted and junior officer women were more likely to have experienced a sexual assault than were higher-ranking enlisted and officer women, while there was little difference in rates by pay grade among active-duty Air Force men who were sexually assaulted. Only 10 percent of Air Force victims had been interviewed by military police or a criminal investigator: By gender, this was true for 13 percent of female Air Force victims and 4 percent of male Air Force victims (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 114–115).

Offender Characteristics

The survey asked Air Force respondents who had been sexually assaulted to provide some information about offenders. Overall, 78 percent of Air Force victims indicated that the offender in either the sole or the worst sexual assault they had experienced was a military member; unfortunately, the survey does not capture whether this person was in the Air Force or another service (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, p. 35).

Table A.2 shows that 66 percent of Air Force victims indicated that their worst or most serious sexual assault had been perpetrated by a single offender, and 72 percent of female victims reported that their worst or most serious sexual assault had been perpetrated by a single offender (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 12–13).²

Table A.3 shows the gender of the offender by victim gender. For nearly all female victims (96 percent), sexual assaults in the past year had involved only male offenders (rather than only female offenders or a combination of at least one man and one woman). While similar precise estimates of offender gender are not reportable for most male Air Force victims, 17 percent of male respondents indicated that they had been sexually assaulted by a mix of men and women, which is greater than the 2 percent of female victims who indicated the same.

Not shown in the table, among men across the services combined (not just Air Force) who had experienced a sexual assault in the past year, 63 percent reported that they had been sexually assaulted by a man or men only, compared with only 1 percent of women reporting they had been sexually assaulted by a woman or women only (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 20). Since the broader Air Force sexual assault survey results differed significantly from those for other services in important ways and since the Air Force male victim sample size was particularly small, we cannot presume from these data that this broader DoD pattern holds for the Air Force-only subset.

² Because of the limited number of male Air Force sexual assault victims, the RMWS does not report this percentage for men. Because of small sample sizes in certain analyses, such as these, percentages that have a margin of error greater than 15 percentage points are considered to be not reportable (NR) due to the imprecision of the estimates.

Table A.1. Estimated Percentage of Active-Component Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Gender and Pay Grade

Pay Grade	Men	Women
E-1 to E-4	0.31% (0.17–0.51)	4.25% (3.78–4.76)
E-5 to E-9	0.26% (0.16–0.42)	1.97% (1.68–2.30)
O-1 to O-3	0.34% (0.13–0.74)	3.67% (2.99–4.46)
O-4 to O-6	0.29% (0.06–0.83)	1.01% (0.58–1.63)

SOURCE: Unpublished statistics from the 2014 RMWS. For the equivalent figures for all services combined, see Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. 11.

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals for each estimate are indicated in parentheses.

Table A.2. Number of Offenders in the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Victim Gender

Number of Offenders	Total	Men	Women
Single offender	65.58% (59.62–71.21)	NR (32.01–64.83)	72.32% (68.35–76.04)
More than one offender	32.92% (27.30–38.93)	NR (33.91–66.82)	26.13% (22.48–30.04)
Not sure	1.49% (0.64–2.92)	1.32% (0.00–10.28)	1.56% (0.71–2.95)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 12–13).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

Table A.3. Gender of Offender(s) in the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Victim Gender

Offender Gender	Total	Men	Women
Man or men only	81.43% (74.69–87.02)	NR (26.65–60.18)	96.19% (94.19–97.65)
Woman or women only	12.18% (7.30–18.69)	NR (24.21–57.50)	1.54% (0.68–2.95)
A mix of men and women	6.20% (3.22–10.62)	17.18% (7.40–31.78)	2.00% (0.96–3.67)
Not sure	0.19% (0.00–1.08)	—	0.27% (0.01–1.48)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 20–21).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

Ninety percent of Air Force victims knew or had previously met the offender(s) (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, p. 25). Of that 90 percent, Table A.4 shows that about 10 percent said they were currently or had previously been in a romantic or sexual relationship with the offender, while 62 percent indicated the offender was a friend or acquaintance.

Table A.5 shows that, in the single or most serious sexual assault that airmen experienced in the past year, most of the offenders were other military personnel. Airmen travel with and are

Table A.4. Relationship of Offender(s) to Victim in the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year and Who Knew the Offender(s), by Victim Gender

Relationship Type	Total	Men	Women
Spouse	2.99% (1.52–5.26)	2.80% (0.07–14.56)	3.06% (1.74–4.96)
Boyfriend or girlfriend	3.24% (1.92–5.11)	0.00% (0.00–9.95)	4.30% (2.70–6.47)
Someone the victim had divorced or broken up with	3.17% (1.69–5.38)	2.40% (0.04–13.93)	3.42% (1.95–5.54)
Friend or acquaintance	62.06% (56.16–67.72)	NR (28.08–63.62)	67.49% (63.09–71.67)
Someone the victim had a child with	0.46% (0.08–1.47)	0.00% (0.00–9.95)	0.61% (0.12–1.78)
Relative or family member	0.42% (0.06–1.41)	0.00% (0.00–9.95)	0.56% (0.11–1.67)
None of the above	30.68% (25.05–36.77)	NR (36.38–71.92)	22.89% (19.18–26.94)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 28–29).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

Table A.5. Identity of Offender(s) in the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year and Who Knew the Offender(s), by Victim Gender

Identity Type	Total	Men	Women
Someone in the military	77.99% (72.16–83.09)	NR (50.40–83.12)	81.82% (78.36–84.94)
Civilian employee or contractor working for the military	10.83% (6.83–16.09)	NR (9.08–36.08)	6.72% (4.45–9.67)
Person in the local community	29.80% (24.15–35.95)	NR (19.98–53.16)	27.41% (23.48–31.62)
Foreign national	1.80% (0.80–3.46)	1.44% (0.00–11.03)	1.96% (0.93–3.61)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 35–37).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses. Table reflects percentage who indicated “yes.” Other response options were “no” and “do not know.”

assigned to locations where other military personnel are present, so we cannot assume that all these offenders were also in the Air Force.

Table A.6 presents the relative ranks of the offender and victim for cases in which the offender was a military member. As the table shows, for the 78 percent of victims whose offender was a service member, offenders were typically of similar (43 percent) or higher rank (44 percent) than the victim. Not shown in the table, 21 percent of victims whose offender was in the military said the offender was an officer (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 45–46). Among airmen who said their sexual assault offender was in the military and higher ranking, 27 percent said the offender was their unit leader or someone above them in the chain of command (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, p. 49).

Characteristics of the Sexual Assault

Table A.7 presents the types of sexual assaults male and female active-component airmen experienced. Most victims (62 percent) had experienced a nonpenetrative sexual assault, meaning that the sole or most serious incident involved the touching of private areas but no penetration. Female victims were more likely than male victims to indicate that their sole or most serious sexual assault had been penetrative (40 percent compared with 24 percent, respectively).

Table A.8 provides an overview of the different locations at which sexual assaults took place. The survey provided a yes-or-no response option for each item; therefore, because more than one may apply, we cannot sum these rows. About 51 percent of the victims indicated that their sole or worst incident had occurred at a military installation, although not necessarily in a work environment or during duty hours. Thirty percent indicated that it had occurred during work or duty hours, although not necessarily at a military installation. Nevertheless, nearly all airmen

Table A.6. Highest Rank of Offender(s) in the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year and Indicated the Offender(s) Included Someone in the Military, by Victim Gender

Rank Relative to Victim	Total	Men	Women
Lower rank	9.62% (6.86–13.02)	NR (1.72–25.34)	9.79% (7.20–12.91)
Similar rank	42.93% (37.05–48.96)	NR (19.57–58.36)	44.61% (39.85–49.45)
Higher rank	43.91% (37.96–49.98)	NR (31.92–70.60)	41.57% (36.84–46.43)
Do not know	3.55% (2.04–5.69)	1.99% (0.01–15.09)	4.03% (2.38–6.33)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 42–43).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

Table A.7. Type of Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Victim Gender

Type of Sexual Assault	Total	Men	Women
Penetrative sexual assault	35.53% (30.75–40.54)	24.30% (13.39–38.34)	40.36% (36.30–44.52)
Nonpenetrative sexual assault	61.65% (56.53–66.59)	75.70% (61.66–86.61)	55.60% (51.40–59.75)
Attempted penetrative sexual assault	2.82% (1.68–4.41)	0.00% (0.00–7.33)	4.03% (2.50–6.13)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 17–18).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

Table A.8. Location of the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Victim Gender

Location	Total	Men	Women
Military installation	50.76% (44.98–56.52)	NR (41.36–74.11)	47.63% (43.32–51.97)
During work or duty hours	30.31% (24.73–36.36)	NR (29.74–62.91)	23.81% (20.18–27.73)
While on temporary duty or during field exercises	12.78% (9.20–17.13)	16.15% (6.89–30.15)	11.39% (8.68–14.57)
Deployed to combat zone or to area where you drew imminent danger pay or hostile fire pay	10.53% (7.09–14.89)	18.60% (8.58–33.00)	7.17% (4.97–9.96)
In a delayed entry program	0.56% (0.13–1.56)	0.00% (0.00–8.47)	0.80% (0.23–1.96)
Basic training	1.35% (0.37–3.42)	1.96% (0.03–11.34)	1.10% (0.35–2.59)
Any type of military combat training	3.32% (0.77–8.95)	NR (1.90–27.04)	0.60% (0.12–1.74)
Officer Training School or Basic or Advanced Officer Course	0.56% (0.13–1.55)	0.00% (0.00–8.47)	0.79% (0.20–2.07)
Technical training or professional military education	11.51% (8.18–15.58)	15.66% (6.56–29.58)	9.78% (7.42–12.58)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 54–56).

NOTES: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses. Columns total more than 100 percent because more than one option may apply. Location items were edited for this table for Air Force service-specific language (e.g., “basic training” rather than “recruit training/basic training”).

(97 percent of men, 90 percent of women, and 96 percent overall) indicated that they felt safe or very safe from being sexually assaulted at their home duty stations (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, p. 300).

This survey also solicited information about the situational context of the sexual assault, allowing participants to select all responses that applied to an incident. Table A.9 shows crimes most commonly occurred in social settings, when the victim was out with friends or at a party

Table A.9. Situational Context of the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Victim Gender

Situational Context	Total	Men	Women
Out with friends or at a party	39.21% (33.73–44.90)	NR (24.80–57.89)	38.69% (34.54–42.96)
On a date	2.78% (1.62–4.43)	0.00% (0.00–8.51)	3.86% (2.42–5.81)
Being intimate with the person	5.07% (3.22–7.55)	2.69% (0.08–13.53)	5.99% (4.16–8.31)
At work	24.71% (19.35–30.72)	NR (24.09–57.47)	18.81% (15.52–22.46)
Alone in a public place	11.72% (8.28–15.95)	15.06% (5.85–29.63)	10.43% (7.95–13.36)
In your home or quarters	21.67% (18.11–25.59)	5.55% (0.91–16.91)	27.93% (24.18–31.92)
In someone else's home or quarters	20.01% (16.30–24.15)	12.87% (4.70–26.42)	22.78% (19.27–26.60)
At a military function	11.20% (7.52–15.86)	NR (10.65–36.93)	7.11% (4.93–9.85)
In temporary lodging/hotel	9.16% (6.54–12.40)	10.04% (3.04–22.88)	8.83% (6.59–11.51)
None of the above	3.82% (2.44–5.68)	0.00% (0.00–8.51)	5.30% (3.48–7.70)
Do not recall	1.92% (0.68–4.22)	3.60% (0.29–14.09)	1.26% (0.51–2.58)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 61–63).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

(39 percent); at work (25 percent); in their own home or quarters (22 percent); or in someone else's home or quarters (20 percent). Because the options shown in this table are not mutually exclusive categories, we cannot sum them. A victim who was at a party in someone's home or quarters, as a part of a military function, or in a hotel would be represented in more than one row. Less common, but also noteworthy, is that 11 percent said the crime had happened at a military function. We also note that 5 percent of victims were being intimate with the person when they were sexually assaulted, which would align with our discussion of the occurrence of nonconsensual acts after the initiation of consensual activity within the case files we analyzed.

Table A.10 provides information on offender behavior related to sexual harassment and stalking of the victim before and after the sexual assault. As the table shows, 31 percent of victims responded that they had experienced sexual harassment prior to the sexual assault, and 26 percent indicated that they had experienced it afterward. Note that, because some victims may have been harassed both before and after a sexual assault, we cannot sum these percentages. Stalking before or after a sexual assault was also reported, although it was less prevalent than harassment. Eight percent of airmen indicated that they had been stalked by the offender prior to the sexual assault, and 12 percent reported that stalking occurred afterward.

Ten percent of victims reported that sexual assault took place in the context of hazing, which was defined for respondents as “things done to ‘toughen up’ people prior to accepting them into a group” (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 67). Three percent of female airman victims described their single or most serious sexual assault in the past year as hazing. We do not have precise estimates for men in the Air Force because of the smaller number of victims in the sample. Across all the services, men were four times more likely than women to describe the sexual assault as hazing, leading the authors of the report to conclude that “these differences suggest a pattern in which sexual assaults against men often involve repeated, physically violent sexual assaults that occur in a context of bullying, abuse, or hazing, often perpetrated by multiple coworkers in their workplace” (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015a, p. 90). As with Table A.3’s results regarding the offenders, this DoD pattern may not accurately represent the particular experiences of Air Force male victims.

Table A.11 provides an overview of the involvement of alcohol and drugs in sexual assaults. Overall, a large proportion of victims also responded that they had used alcohol (46 percent) prior to the sexual assault. Moreover, 51 percent said that the offender had bought or

Table A.10. Stalking or Harassment by the Offender Before or After the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Victim Gender

Pre- and Postexperiences	Total	Men	Women
Prior sexual harassment	31.27% (26.15–36.76)	NR (18.37–49.56)	30.77% (26.81–34.94)
Prior stalking	8.04% (5.67–10.99)	5.73% (0.98–17.16)	8.95% (6.66–11.71)
Subsequent sexual harassment	25.84% (20.90–31.28)	NR (15.80–46.60)	24.39% (20.76–28.31)
Subsequent stalking	11.48% (8.54–14.98)	8.20% (2.08–20.50)	12.77% (10.01–15.96)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 70–71).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

Table A.11. Involvement of Alcohol or Drugs in the Single or Most Serious Sexual Assault Among Airmen Who Experienced a Sexual Assault in the Past Year, by Victim Gender

Alcohol or Drug Use	Total	Men	Women
Victim alcohol use	45.76% (40.04–51.56)	NR (20.78–53.53)	49.73% (45.36–54.09)
Bought or given alcohol by offender just prior to sexual assault	51.34% (43.16–59.47)	NR (19.87–73.82)	52.93% (46.71–59.08)
Given drug without knowledge or consent	2.80% (1.50–4.73)	1.79% (0.02–11.24)	3.19% (1.82–5.15)
Offender alcohol use	48.90% (43.10–54.72)	NR (19.34–51.29)	55.08% (50.69–59.40)

SOURCE: 2014 RMWS (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, pp. 75–77).

NOTE: Ninety-five-percent confidence intervals are provided in parentheses.

given them alcohol just prior to the incident. Victims also commonly responded that the offender had been drinking alcohol at the time of the event (49 percent), although, of course, victims might not always be fully aware of their assailants’ alcohol consumption at that time.

Summary

The responses to the 2014 RMWS survey indicate that Air Force active-duty women are more likely than Air Force active-duty men to be victims of military sexual assault. Among Air Force women, junior enlisted and junior officers are more likely to be victims than senior enlisted and senior officers. The majority of Air Force victims of sexual assault indicate that the offender was a member of the military, a lone offender, male, and known to the victim. Despite most airmen indicating that they felt safe from being sexually assaulted at their home duty stations, sexual assaults often took place at military installations and during work or duty hours. The most common situational context for a sexual assault was when airmen were out with friends or at a party or in their own or someone else’s home. More than one in four victims experienced sexual harassment prior to or after the sexual assault. Finally, nearly one-half of respondents indicated that they had been using alcohol at the time of the sexual assault, and about the same number indicated that the offender had been consuming alcohol. Many of these findings are consistent with research on sexual assault in civilian populations, which also finds that the majority of victims are women and that the majority of offenders are male and known to the victim.

The 2014 RMWS results are complementary but not directly comparable to the data we analyzed. The survey focused on military victims only, with civilian or military offenders, while our research focused on military offenders only, with civilian or military victims. The survey is limited in its contribution to a focus on Air Force–offender behaviors in that we cannot distinguish respondents who were victimized by Air Force personnel from those who were victimized by other military personnel. Additionally, because the number of male Air Force survey respondents who were sexually assaulted was so low, the 2014 RMWS was often unable

to report the offender and sexual assault characteristics for that population. We, too, had an insufficient number of reported cases with male victims to be able to contribute to the Air Force's understanding of such sexual assaults. Finally, unlike our data, which represent only unrestricted reports, the confidential survey also included events that would have been reported to the Air Force either on a restricted basis or not at all.

Formally Reported Incidents of Sexual Assault in the Air Force

A second source of information on sexual assault in the military comes from officially reported incidents documented by a SARC or military criminal investigation organization. DoD has two types of official reports: A restricted report occurs when an individual requests confidential help (e.g., medical, counseling) following the incident but does not wish to have a criminal investigation started. An unrestricted report triggers an official investigation into the incident, and the command is notified. The primary limitation of this source is that the vast majority of sexual assaults are never reported,³ and some types of incidents may be more likely to be reported than others (e.g., sexual assaults by strangers or involving a weapon). Additionally, these statistical reports have not included intimate-partner sexual assaults, which are tracked separately by FAP, as we will describe later.

Despite these limitations, these official reports contribute to our understanding of offender and victim demographic characteristics and sexual assault characteristics. The following subsections provide an overview of basic demographics from the restricted and unrestricted reports of these incidents. All of these tabulations produced by the Air Force are based on data available in the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database as of February 1, 2015 (USAF, 2015). Note that these tables include the percentage of the cases in which the information is unknown. Victims are not necessarily reliable reporters of all offender characteristics, which may be due to hesitation to report those details (e.g., out of fear of retaliation or lack of confidentiality) or lack of knowledge of the details (e.g., the offender was a stranger, the victim was unconscious during the sexual assault).

The FY 2014 DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military includes 6,131 reports of sexual assault victimization, which may include sexual assaults that occurred in previous years (DoD, 2015).⁴ Note that these do not include sexual assaults between spouses or intimate partners that are monitored by the services' family advocacy programs. In the Air Force,

³ In the confidential 2014 RMWS survey, approximately 57 percent of airmen who experienced a sexual assault responded that they had told someone about it (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015b, p. 86). However, only 17 percent indicated that they made an official report (either restricted or unrestricted) (p. 104).

⁴ Of the 6,131 reports, 4,660 were unrestricted; 1,840 were initially restricted and later converted to unrestricted. A total of 1,471 reports remained restricted at the end of the fiscal year.

specifically, there were 1,350 reports of sexual assault victimization that fall under the purview of SAPR: 406 were restricted and 944 were unrestricted (USAF, 2015).

Victim Characteristics

Table A.12 provides an overview of victim demographics from restricted reports of sexual assault in the Air Force in which the investigation was closed during FYs 2012–2014. As the table shows, most victims who filed a restricted report were active-duty military women in the junior enlisted ranks.

Table A.13 provides an overview of the victim demographics for the unrestricted reports. Here, too, most victims who filed reports were active-duty military women in the junior enlisted ranks.

Table A.12. Air Force Victim Demographics for Restricted Reports, by Fiscal Year

Victim Demographics	FY 2012 (n = 399)	FY 2013 (n = 488)	FY 2014 (n = 406)
Gender			
Male	12.3%	12.3%	16.5%
Female	87.7%	83.4%	83.3%
Unknown	0.0%	4.3%	0.2%
Military affiliation			
Military	95.2%	92.8%	97.3%
Nonmilitary	4.8%	7.0%	2.5%
Unknown	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%
Duty status of military victims			
Active duty	81.6%	88.3%	90.4%
Reserve	5.5%	4.9%	4.1%
National Guard	2.6%	0.9%	1.8%
Cadet or prep school student	10.3%	5.3%	3.8%
Unknown	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
Pay grade of military victims			
C-1 to C-4 and prep school	10.3%	5.6%	3.8%
E-1 to E-4	65.5%	69.3%	63.3%
E-5 to E-9	16.1%	12.6%	23.8%
O-1 to O-3	5.8%	6.5%	8.4%
O-4 to O-10	1.8%	1.1%	0.8%
Unknown	0.5%	4.9%	0.0%

SOURCE: USAF, 2015, p. 11.

Table A.13. Air Force Victim Demographics for Unrestricted Reports, by Fiscal Year

Victim Demographics	FY 2012 (n = 403)	FY 2013 (n = 521)	FY 2014 (n = 775)
Gender			
Male	6.9%	12.5%	11.1%
Female	93.1%	87.5%	82.2%
Unknown	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%
Military affiliation			
Military	69.5%	78.3%	77.9%
Nonmilitary	30.5%	21.7%	15.0%
Unknown	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%
Duty status of military victims			
Active duty	83.9%	92.6%	95.7%
Reserve	6.4%	4.4%	2.6%
National Guard	2.5%	2.9%	0.8%
Cadet or prep school student	6.8%	0.0%	0.8%
Unknown	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Pay grade of military victims			
C-1 to C-4 and prep school	6.8%	1.7%	0.8%
E-1 to E-4	74.3%	70.6%	74.8%
E-5 to E-9	12.9%	20.8%	18.2%
O-1 to O-3	6.1%	4.7%	5.0%
O-4 to O-10	0.0%	0.7%	1.2%
Unknown	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%

SOURCE: USAF, 2015, p. 5.

Offender Characteristics

Table A.14 provides an overview of offender demographics from unrestricted reports of sexual assault in which the investigation was closed during FYs 2012–2014.⁵ Most subjects under investigation were male, active-duty military members. As for victims, the most common pay grades for offenders among cases officially reported to the Air Force were E-1 to E-4.

⁵ These statistics for the restricted reports were not published.

Table A.14. Offender Demographics for Unrestricted Reports, by Fiscal Year

Offender Demographics	FY 2012 (n = 399)	FY 2013 (n = 521)	FY 2014 (n = 800)
Gender			
Male	93.5%	92.5%	84.3%
Female	2.0%	3.5%	5.0%
Unknown	4.5%	4.0%	10.8%
Military affiliation			
Military	87.2%	86.8%	75.5%
Nonmilitary	6.0%	6.5%	4.1%
Unknown	6.8%	6.7%	20.4%
Duty status of military offenders			
Active duty	89.4%	91.8%	93.2%
Reserve	3.7%	4.9%	3.6%
National Guard	2.0%	3.3%	0.7%
Cadet or prep school student	4.6%	0.0%	0.3%
Unknown	0.3%	0.0%	2.2%
Pay grade of military offenders			
C-1 to C-4 and prep school	4.6%	1.3%	0.3%
E-1 to E-4	60.6%	54.2%	61.3%
E-5 to E-9	27.0%	35.2%	27.3%
O-1 to O-3	4.9%	5.3%	5.1%
O-4 to O-10	2.3%	2.9%	3.5%
Unknown	0.6%	1.1%	2.5%

SOURCE: USAF, 2015, p. 7.

Characteristics of the Sexual Assault

Table A.15 provides an overview of characteristics of the sexual assaults from restricted reports in which the investigation was closed during FYs 2012–2014. More than one-half of the sexual assaults occurred off base. Many sexual assaults in the previous three years were member-on-member sexual assaults that happened between the hours of six p.m. and six a.m.

Table A.15. Sexual Assault Characteristics for Restricted Reports, by Fiscal Year

Sexual Assault Characteristics	FY 2012 (n = 449)	FY 2013 (n = 635)	FY 2014 (n = 944)
Location			
On base	33.6%	28.9%	28.6%
Off base	65.2%	56.4%	57.9%
Unknown	1.3%	14.8%	13.5%
Subject-victim service affiliation			
Member on member	63.2%	62.1%	52.0%
Member on nonmember	4.8%	7.2%	32.0%
Nonmember on member	31.6%	14.1%	3.1%
Unidentified on member	0.5%	16.6%	12.9%
Unknown	0.0%	0.0%	27.3%
Sexual assault time of day			
6 a.m. to 6 p.m.	10.8%	14.3%	13.5%
6 p.m. to midnight	40.6%	33.8%	31.5%
Midnight to 6 a.m.	36.8%	33.2%	40.1%
Unknown	11.8%	18.6%	14.8%
Sexual assault day of week			
Weekend (Friday–Sunday)	59.9%	34.8%	50.2%
Weekday (Monday–Thursday)	27.1%	11.7%	28.3%
Unknown	13.0%	53.5%	21.4%

SOURCE: USAF, 2015, p. 13.

NOTE: Subject-victim gender statistics for restricted reports were not published, but Table A.16 shows the published percentages for unrestricted reports.

Table A.16 provides an overview of characteristics of the sexual assaults from unrestricted reports. About as many sexual assaults occurred on base as occurred off base. Similar to the restricted reports, most of the reported incidents were member-on-member sexual assaults. Most sexual assaults involved a male offender and a female victim. However, there were also cases of male-on-male sexual assaults, female offenders, and sexual assaults involving both male and female offenders. These sexual assaults also typically happened in the evening or early morning hours, but particularly after midnight.

Summary

In some ways, the data from official reports of sexual assault incidents paint a picture similar to that of the survey data from the 2014 RMWS. Overall, most Air Force victims in both restricted and unrestricted reports were female, active-duty military members in the junior enlisted ranks. Many sexual assaults occurred off base, and many were member-on-member sexual assaults. The available statistics for the unrestricted reports show that most offenders were male, active-duty military members in the enlisted ranks. Finally, although most sexual assaults in unrestricted reports involved a male offender and a female victim, there were also cases of

Table A.16. Sexual Assault Characteristics for Unrestricted Reports, by Fiscal Year

Sexual Assault Characteristics	FY 2012 (n = 449)	FY 2013 (n = 635)	FY 2014 (n = 944)
Location			
On base	46.1%	47.1%	50.5%
Off base	53.0%	45.0%	43.5%
Unknown	0.9%	7.9%	5.9%
Subject-victim service affiliation			
Member on member	59.5%	65.5%	49.2%
Member on nonmember	29.2%	22.7%	16.8%
Nonmember on member	4.7%	5.7%	4.4%
Unidentified on member	6.7%	6.1%	2.0%
Unknown	0.0%	0.0%	27.5%
Subject-victim gender			
Male on female	86.9%	83.6%	61.7%
Male on male	4.5%	7.9%	6.5%
Female on male	1.6%	3.3%	2.2%
Female on female	0.4%	0.9%	0.8%
Unknown on male	0.4%	0.6%	0.0%
Unknown on female	4.5%	2.8%	0.5%
Multiple-mixed gender	1.8%	0.8%	1.7%
Unknown	0.0%	0.0%	26.6%
Sexual assault time of day			
6 a.m. to 6 p.m.	11.8%	8.2%	16.6%
6 p.m. to midnight	22.7%	24.1%	26.9%
Midnight to 6 a.m.	49.9%	28.0%	50.0%
Unknown	15.6%	39.7%	6.5%
Sexual assault day of week			
Weekend (Friday–Sunday)	60.6%	46.1%	44.2%
Weekday (Monday–Thursday)	29.8%	24.1%	53.6%
Unknown	9.6%	29.8%	2.2%

SOURCE: USAF, 2015, p. 9.

male-on-male sexual assaults, female offenders, and sexual assaults involving both male and female offenders. The numbers from these official reports are not directly comparable with those in the RMWS, however, because the confidential survey was designed to present population estimates, while the preported in this subsection were based only on sexual assaults that had been reported to Air Force authorities. Additionally, the 2014 RMWS includes only military victims, while the officially reported incidents include both civilian and military victims. Moreover, the RMWS captures a wider range of offenders (civilian or military, intimate partners and nonintimate relationships) than the SAPR-reported incidents (only military offenders who were not the victims' intimate partners).

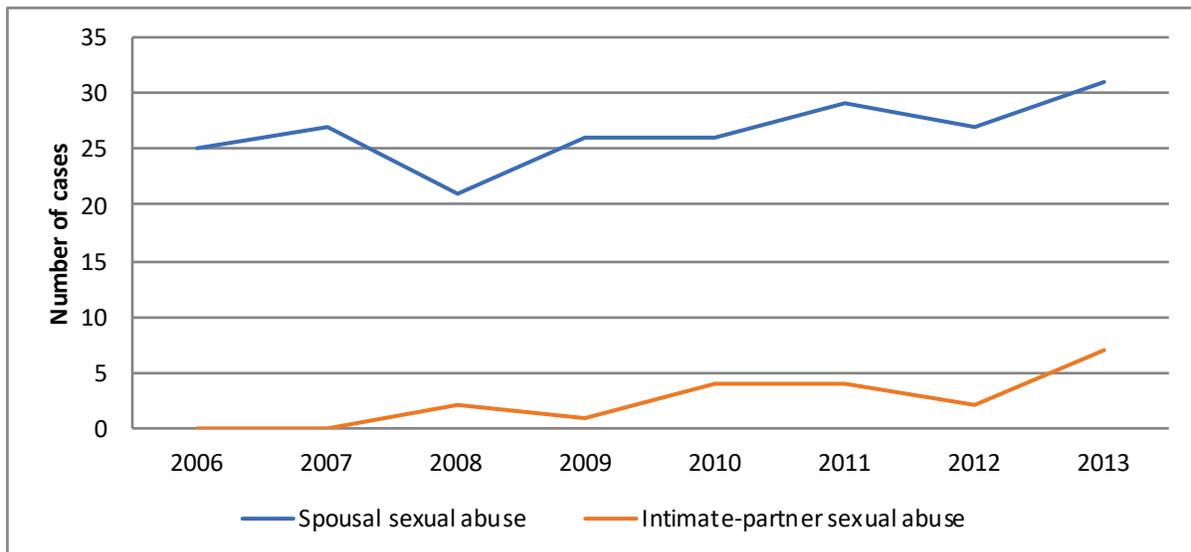
Air Force Family Advocacy Program Statistics on Intimate-Partner Sexual Abuse

For this research, the Air Force’s FAP provided us previously unpublished statistics it has been collecting on the presence of risk factors among the populations its counselors have interviewed.⁶ In the following subsections, we review descriptive information, maintained by FAP, on substantiated cases of spousal and unmarried intimate-partner sexual abuse involving offenders who were active-duty Air Force, in the Air Force Reserve, or in the Air National Guard.

Cases by Year

From 2006 to 2013, an average of 29 FAP referrals involving sexual abuse by uniformed personnel were reported each year. The FAP office that provided these statistics noted that, typically, sexual abuse is revealed during the course of treatment and is not the initial presenting problem. Of cases involving sexual abuse, most involved spouses (91 percent), rather than unmarried intimate partners (9 percent; see Figure A.1). Unknown is whether any apparent change over time represents a change in frequency of occurrence, increased FAP awareness of sexual abuse, or an increase in the substantiation of reported cases. Also, as noted in Table 1.1, UCMJ sections on sexual violence underwent revision (including expansion) during this period,

Figure A.1. Number of FAP-Recorded Adult Sexual-Abuse Cases, by Year



⁶ U.S. Department of the Air Force, Air Force Medical Operations Agency, “Family Advocacy System of Records: 2014,” computer file, San Antonio, Tex.: Family Advocacy Program [distributor], 2014.

so whether that had any effect on these records would also need to be examined. For the remainder of analyses, we look across the available data for 2006 through 2013.

Victim Characteristics

Virtually all (99 percent) sexual-abuse cases referred to FAP and involving spouses and unmarried intimate partners involved female victims. Nearly four in five victims were civilians, while one in five was enlisted, and very few were officers. On average, victims were 27 years of age. The most common education level was a high school diploma (60 percent), followed by some college (28 percent), a college degree (10 percent), less than a high school diploma (2 percent), and postgraduate education (1 percent).

Offender Characteristics

Virtually all (99 percent) of the offenders in FAP sexual-abuse cases involving spouses and unmarried intimate partners were male. More than nine in ten were enlisted personnel, and on average, they were 29 years of age. The most common education level among the offenders was a high school diploma (49 percent), followed by some college (39 percent), a college degree (8 percent), postgraduate education (3 percent), and less than a high school diploma (2 percent). Note that the individuals accused of sexual violence were, on average, two years older than their partners and were more likely than their partners to have an education beyond high school.

Sexual Assault Characteristics

Sexual-abuse cases are often referred to FAP by military law enforcement (23 percent), victims themselves (22 percent), military commanders (21 percent), military medical professionals (9 percent), or other military personnel (9 percent). Most FAP sexual-abuse cases involving intimate partners and spouses (59 percent) occurred off base. Thirteen percent of victims and 22 percent of offenders were reported as consuming alcohol at the time of the incident, and less than 1 percent of victims and less than 1 percent of their partners were reported as using drugs.

Presence of Risk Factors

FAP collects information on the presence of 55 potential risk factors for victims, their partners, and their relationships. Often, the victim is the sole source of information on these characteristics, however, because the partner does not often cooperate. During each intake interview, a FAP counselor will conduct an evaluation, including obtaining information on risk-factor categories. Thus, a single incident or couple may have multiple corresponding intake evaluations. Because we did not have access to information on which intakes were associated with which individuals, we do not document here the proportions of incidents that had each risk factor but instead focus on the overall frequency of certain characteristics relative to others.

The following were the most commonly cited risk factors for offenders in FAP adult intimate-partner sexual-abuse cases from 2006 to 2013:

- ongoing pattern of marital discord
- emotionally abusive to partner
- physically aggressive to past or present partner(s)
- forced or coerced sex on any partner
- increase in violence frequency in recent months
- cannot see partner's point of view
- financial problems
- attempts to control access to friends, family, or resources
- feels relationship options are exhausted
- jealous or insecure in current relationship.

Overall, offenders whose behavior is reported to FAP—and described primarily by victims to counselors—appear to have histories of emotional and physically abusive behaviors. Further, FAP professionals describe marital discord, controlling behaviors, and offender inability to see the partner's point of view as elements often associated with these incidents.

Conclusion

Official reports of sexual assault may not fully reflect the characteristics of all sexual assaults, especially because such a small percentage of airman victims (17 percent) indicated on the confidential 2014 RMWS survey that they had reported the sexual assaults. In general, Air Force victims of sexual assault tend to be lower-ranking women. Offenders who sexually assault active-component women are more likely to be in the military, lone offenders, male, and known to the victim. It is also important to note that both the survey and officially reported incidents do show cases of male victims and female offenders.

Despite most airmen indicating on the survey that they feel safe at their home duty stations, sexual assaults often took place on base at military installations, and some did occur during work or duty hours. The most common situation in which sexual assault occurred was when airmen were out with friends or at a party. Close to one-half of respondents indicated that they or the offender had been using alcohol at the time of the sexual assault.

In some ways, the data from official reports of sexual assault incidents paint a picture similar to that of the survey data from the 2014 RMWS. Overall, most victims were female, active-duty military members in the enlisted ranks. Most offenders were male, active-duty military members in the enlisted ranks. Many sexual assaults occurred off base, and many were member-on-member sexual assaults. Finally, although most sexual assaults involved a male offender and a female victim, there were also cases of male-on-male sexual assaults, female offenders, and sexual assaults involving both male and female offenders. As noted previously, however, the numbers are not directly comparable because the RMWS was designed to present population estimates, and the percentages in official reports are based only on sexual assaults that were

actually reported. Additionally, there are also differences in the types of victims and offenders included in the statistics.

Finally, for FAP cases of reported sexual abuse involving spouses and unmarried intimate partners, the majority of victims were civilian females, and the majority of offenders were male active-duty enlisted members. Offenders in these cases of intimate-partner sexual abuse often showed risk factors, such as histories of emotional and physically abusive behaviors, as well as marital discord and controlling behaviors.

Appendix B. The Coding Process

This appendix provides a detailed overview of our steps for organizing and coding the data. It also contains a list of codes from the coding guide used in our analysis.

Steps for Organizing and Coding Data

As described in the body of the report, our coding and analytic process was iterative, with the goal of detecting patterns in offender characteristics and behaviors, including how they might relate to characteristics of the sexual assaults. The research team had a total of seven coders, all of whom had research backgrounds, including experience coding and analyzing qualitative research data. The majority of coders had doctoral degrees (one coder had a bachelor's degree, and two had master's degrees) in relevant social science fields (e.g., psychology, sociology, criminology). In addition to general research experience in the domains of sexual assault and harassment, the team had additional relevant expertise, including previous clinical experience treating victims and offenders of sexual assault and intimate-partner violence and membership or staff roles on national panels and commissions addressing sexual violence in the U.S. military.

Step 1: Develop a Descriptive Coding Scheme to Quantify Sexual Assault Characteristics and Highlight Relevant Sections for Qualitative Review

Our first step was to develop a coding system to describe sexual assaults and those involved in them at the basic and aggregate levels (e.g., demographic characteristics of the suspect) and to guide us in highlighting more-complex information (e.g., on the role of alcohol) that would call for a more qualitative review. Before receiving the data sets we were to use, we developed initial codes deductively using prior research from the academic literature and relevant DoD surveys and reports. In particular, we were guided by earlier research on offender characteristics (see Greathouse et al., 2015, for a review). From this existing research, we knew to code for such characteristics as gender, age, substance use, sexual assault behaviors (e.g., pseudo-romantic or misogynistic language), and post-sexual assault behaviors (e.g., denial or apology). We prepared codes for postincident characteristics and behaviors for both victims and suspects for what they might reveal about the understandings of what happened and suspect-victim interactions afterward. This coding is an important step in understanding who commits the sexual assaults that are reported, where and when they happen, and what occurs during them. We developed codes and coding procedures for use with the OSI files, with the intention of being able to use the JA files to follow a subset of cases further. Discussions with the research sponsor contributed to the development of the initial content of the codes, as did applying the initial scheme to a publicly available case file. The codes were programmed into a Microsoft Access file (which

allows coders to enter data as if they were taking a survey) and into NVivo qualitative coding software (which allows coders to highlight and tag portions of text that can later be reviewed as themed segments across all cases).

We coded the investigator, suspect, victim, and witness statements for such elements as

- suspect characteristics
 - gender, birth year, pay grade, duty station, marital status, relevant history (e.g., prior disciplinary action or investigations)
- victim characteristics
 - gender, birth year, civilian or military status, pay grade if military, duty station if applicable, marital status, other possibly relevant history (e.g., previous victimization), relationship to suspect (e.g., victim and suspect are coworkers, had a previous romantic relationship, are in the same chain of command)
- sexual assault characteristics
 - contact location just prior to sexual assault, sexual assault location, suspect or victim substance use, victim incapacitation, type of sexual assault, physical nature (e.g., weapons, restraints), psychological or social nature (e.g., threats), suspect and victim physical injuries, victim response (e.g., freezing, pleading), victim postincident behavior and characteristics (e.g., contacting suspect, not remembering the sexual assault), suspect postincident behavior and characteristics (e.g., denial, apology, threat).

Step 2: Descriptive Characteristic Coding of OSI Files

The first data set the Air Force provided was the OSI case files. These files provided our first opportunity, beyond the publicly available case, to get a sense of the content of these files and to apply the descriptive coding scheme we developed in Step 1. The descriptive codes we adopted—such as noting whether a sexual assault happened on or off base and indicating the rank of the suspect—are fairly straightforward. However, before individual team members could independently apply the coding scheme to unique files, we needed to confirm that everyone agreed on and understood how to apply the codes, and we needed to identify any obvious gaps. We used multiple coding sessions and backbriefs to ensure coders understood how to consistently describe the characteristics of the sexual assault cases in our files. Later in this appendix, we supply a list of these codes and offer additional details. Again, because of data sensitivity concerns, we cannot include the illustrative quotes typical of a coding guide (MacQueen et al., 1998).

Step 3: Inductive Development and Application of Additional Codes

The initial descriptive coding process provided a close reading of individual case files and, simultaneously, a bird's-eye view of aggregate cases. It allowed us to further refine our qualitative coding scheme inductively from the text in the OSI and JA files, using thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2011). Identifying recurring and meaningful themes

(e.g., in this case, suspect behaviors and sexual assault circumstances) is important for exploratory research and allowed us to better understand how and, potentially, why the types of sexual assaults that are reported occur in the USAF. For example, identifying a particular precursory event to some sexual assaults—when an airman stays at another’s residence or shares a hotel room to avoid a potentially unsafe drive home—helps us understand the dynamics of a particular kind of sexual assault context and setting.

Initial Analysis

We were then able to integrate both kinds of analysis and to do interpretive work to discover relationships among parts of our data. We were able to summarize the relationships we found and produce descriptions of types of suspects, their perspectives on sexual assault, and the situations and settings we found repeatedly. This was largely a descriptive effort, meant to help the Air Force better understand what actually happens in sexual assaults and thereby better understand offenders and how they may operate within an Air Force context.¹ It could also inform future data-collection efforts, such as suggesting items for inclusion in surveys or databases tracking sexual assault reports. During this step and the next, additional codes were suggested that would help us sort cases by prominent, recurring themes and additional themes of interest. These codes were applied to both sets of cases. The list at the end of this appendix also includes these codes.

Reliability in Qualitative Coding

Several elements of our research approach were designed to ensure reliability in coding. Coding by a team, rather than a lone researcher, provides one type of reliability check by illuminating the ambiguity that is particularly likely with new coding schemes. That the team was diverse in experience and disciplinary background enhanced this reliability check by offering different frames of reference from which to interpret the codes and data. Ultimately, our coding structures reflect and summarize the insights from the thematic analysis, with the insights that emerged helping to further refine the coding in an iterative process. Reliability in team coding comes from a robust, shared, and explicit understanding of the emerging code structure. This avoids idiosyncratic coding—coders are reliable when they agree on what they are coding (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; MacQueen et al., 1998).

Our coding was highly collaborative, paying special attention to building agreement and shared understanding within the coding team. To safeguard the data, all our coding was conducted in a single, limited-access room on two nonnetworked computers dedicated to sensitive data analysis. As a result, rather than team members working on their own computers, either remotely or in their offices, all coding was conducted in this shared space on these shared

¹ For more about qualitative coding and content analyses, see Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, and Miles and Huberman, 1994.

computers. Although some coding was conducted alone, we often had the benefit of two to three team members (and occasionally more) being present at the same time and thus able to actively discuss the codes and their application. When not present, the coding team leader was available by phone to answer questions about the codes. Moreover, the team met weekly to discuss the coding process. The coding structure itself was designed to facilitate this discussion, with members being asked to highlight and describe content that might call for revisions of the coding scheme.

Our coding processes were also designed to achieve dependable results. Low reliability can result from the cognitive overload errors that occur when coders are asked to keep a set of codes in their minds as they read text and apply relevant codes. That approach is particularly problematic when the coding scheme is long or complex. Our procedures called instead for coders to work through each of the possible codes for each file, reading the code and then consulting the corresponding section of the file (e.g., what does the victim statement say about the victim's relationship to the suspect?). Coders viewed the file on one computer monitor and filled out the coding form displayed on an adjacent monitor. A hard copy of the coding guide sat on the desk for reference.

Our first coding iteration with the actual data set was a part of the group training, with team members double coding a sample of five files, selected because they represented obviously different kinds of cases. We then met to compare codes, answer questions, and note where additions or clarifications to the codes or instructions were needed (e.g., how would I know if the suspect and victim were friends?). We then refined our code structure to reflect this new shared understanding and recoded our first sample before moving on to group code another sample set. After that second group coding exercise, our team had enough agreement that we had a stable enough code tree to allow individual coding in a collaborative environment supervised by a more senior researcher with qualitative expertise.

To properly develop the coding scheme for this particular data set, we considered the initial coding to be provisional. Coders revised, refined, and adjusted the structure and application of codes to better capture insights from data relevant to our goals (Bowen, 2008). While it was important for us to find points of agreement among coders, it was also important to raise and discuss points of disagreement. This iterative process refined our coding by thoughtfully reconciling coding disagreements and discussing "potentially competing explanations. Such exercises encourage thoroughness, both in interrogating the data at hand and in providing an account of how an analysis was developed" (Barbour, 2001, p. 1116). Our methods led us to revise our coding inclusion, exclusion, and disambiguation criteria over the course of the research, to better reflect our shared understanding of the coding scheme. This enhanced reliability, ultimately improving the validity of our analysis.

Step 4: In-Depth Analysis of OSI/JA Matched Files

In this step, we explored the subset of cases for which we had both investigative and trial information more fully. We exported the Access data for our OSI/JA matched cases into an Excel spreadsheet and added columns for information from the court-martial transcripts (charges; whether convicted of a sexual assault offense; whether additional victims were identified at trial and, if so, their characteristics). We also created some aggregate codes to help us cluster our cases into unique groups based on salient characteristics (e.g., whether the installation was CONUS or OCONUS, the age ranges of the victim and suspect), which we ended up applying to the coded, unmatched OSI case files as well. As noted earlier, our coding and team discussions helped us identify possible themes across our OSI files (both matched and unmatched to JA records) for further analysis.

As team meetings and coding of OSI files unmatched to JA records continued, we assigned individuals to serve as the experts for subsets of clustered groups of OSI/JA matched cases to (1) further proof the coding, (2) add information and codes from the JA files, (3) write summaries of the cases containing the key elements relevant for our purposes, (4) look for patterns (or lack thereof) across cases within subsets of cases, (5) compare different summaries to look for patterns across groups, and (6) represent patterns by writing composite summaries and fictional examples.²

Step 5: Prepare Counts of Sample Characteristics

Finally, we prepared counts of basic sample characteristics, such as gender, rank group, age group, and sexual assault characteristics. For OSI cases that did not have corresponding trial information and may or may not have gone to trial, we examined the characteristics (e.g., suspect and victim genders and age groups, installations, offense types) of both the random and nonrandom ordered cases. Some of these characteristics were distinct characteristics; for example, our nonrandom ordered cases had a smaller proportion of male victims and larger portion of victims who were in the military.

Codes

Tables B.1 and B.2 present the final set of codes from our coding guide. These reflect adjustments to the codes or their descriptors following the initial team coding exercises and meetings. Not all codes are discussed in this report. In some cases, the files did not contain enough information on the topic to be meaningful (e.g., whether the suspect had been abused as a

² As we noted in the limitations subsection of Section 2, it was essential to protect the identities of individuals represented in our case files. We were therefore not able to provide specific details from any single case and, instead, present composite examples of the cases we coded.

child); in others, the information was so varied or lengthy (e.g., assigned duty locations, messages the suspect sent the victim before or after the incident) that we did not have the time to explore them fully.

Table B.1. Codes Used for the Report of Investigation Cover Sheet and Summary of Investigation for the OSI Files in Our Sample

Variable	Codes
General information	
Report date	Date of report
Offense date	Date first incident of sexual assault occurred
Offense repeated or ongoing	Yes or no
Offense description	Copy verbatim from report of investigation cover sheet.
Forensic evidence?	Check yes if there is forensic evidence of the offense, such as surveillance footage; pictures; copies of emails, texts, or letters; medical tests; date-rape drug found in suspect's possession. Highlight relevant information in NVivo.
Offense status	Copy verbatim from report of investigation cover sheet.
Suspect information	
Suspect identity known	Check yes if actual individual is named.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Missing
Birth year	Enter year or "unknown."
Military status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Force • Marine • Army • Navy • Civilian married to military (military spouse) • Civilian—other • Other
Pay grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-1 through E-4 • E-5 through E-6 • E-7 through E-9 • O-1 through O-3 • O-4 through O-6 • O-7 through O-10 • Cadet
Assigned duty station	Add the name of the base to which the person was assigned at the time of the incident(s). List all that apply. Doesn't have to be the location of the incident. Once we have all of the bases in our sample, we may code them for population size, remote location, MAJCOM. Write "Missing" or "NA" if applicable.
Marital status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single • Married • Divorced • Other • Missing
Medical and health	Check yes if OSI noted relevant information for the suspect. Highlight relevant information in NVivo.

Table B.1—Continued

Variable	Codes
Criminal history	Check yes if OSI noted information in the criminal history records for the suspect. Highlight relevant information in NVivo.
Other relevant history For discussion	Open field for coder comments. Highlight relevant information in NVivo. Write any information about the suspect that is not captured by other suspect information codes that we may want to consider incorporating into our coding scheme. Highlight corresponding text in NVivo.
Victim information	
Victim gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Missing
Birth year	Enter year or “unknown.”
Military status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Force • Marine • Army • Navy • Civilian married to military (military spouse) • Civilian—other • Other
Pay grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-1 through E-4 • E-5 through E-6 • E-7 through E-9 • O-1 through O-3 • O-4 through O-6 • O-7 through O-10 • Other (civilian, warrant officers from other services) • Missing
Assigned duty station	Add the name of the base to which the person was assigned at the time of the incident(s). List all that apply. Doesn’t have to be the location of the incident. If a civilian employee of the military, this will be the installation at which they work. If a civilian spouse of a service member, this will be the duty station to which their service member is assigned. Once we have all the bases in our sample, we may code them for population size, remote location, MAJCOM. Write “Missing” or “NA” if applicable.
Marital status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single • Married • Divorced • Other • Missing
Medical and health	Check yes if OSI noted relevant information for the victim. Highlight relevant information in NVivo.
Criminal history	Check yes if OSI noted relevant information in the criminal history records for the victim. Highlight relevant information in NVivo.

Table B.1—Continued

Variable	Codes
Other relevant history	Open field for you to enter anything else you see that you believe might be relevant, e.g., mentions of administrative actions/policy violations or previous victimization. Highlight relevant information in NVivo.
For discussion	Write any information about the victim that is not captured by other victim information codes that we may want to consider incorporating into our coding scheme. Highlight corresponding text in NVivo.

**Table B.2. Codes Used for Victim, Suspect, and Witness Statements
for the OSI Files in Our Sample**

Variable	Codes
Statement available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available and legible • Available and partially legible • Available but completely illegible • Missing <p>If “Missing” or “completely illegible,” Access will automatically fill the rest of the form in as “missing.”</p>
Victim/suspect relationship at the time of the sexual assault	
Type	<p>Overall relationship classification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No prior • Work • Personal • Both work and personal • Other • Missing <p>If “Other,” highlight in NVivo the clause that most accurately and succinctly portrays the relationship.</p>
Type (detailed)	<p>If personal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship: There is a clear statement of friendship, such as <i>pal</i>, <i>buddy</i>, and <i>BFF</i>; do not infer. • Acquaintance: It is clear they knew each other but not clear whether they were friends. • Current romantic • Previous romantic • Married • Divorced • Previous harassment or stalking • Other (personal) • Missing (personal) <p>If work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspect is senior in victim's chain of command • Victim is senior in suspect's chain of command • Suspect and victim peers in same chain of command • Coworkers (assigned to the same unit) • Temporary coworkers (including temporary duty assignments) • Prior coworkers • Other • Missing
Length	Fill in value if present, “missing” if not. Write as described in the file, e.g., a week, about 6 months, last year, since basic training.
For discussion	Write in any information about the relationship that the codes do not capture that we may want to consider incorporating into our code scheme. Highlight corresponding text in NVivo.

Table B.2—Continued

Variable	Codes
Location information	
Sexual assault location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim’s residence • Suspect’s residence • Other residence • Hotel or other temporary lodging • Workplace • Vehicle • Outdoors • Other • Missing <p>If “Other,” highlight description of location in NVivo.</p>
Initial contact location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same location as sexual assault • Different location from sexual assault • Missing <p>If different from sexual assault, highlight text describing initial contact location in NVivo.</p>
On or off base	<p>Sexual assault was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On base • Off base • Missing
For discussion	<p>Write in any information about the location that the codes do not capture that we may want to consider incorporating into our code scheme. Highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p>
Sexual assault characteristics	
Premeditation	<p>Observable evidence of possible premeditation that was specifically seen or heard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Missing <p>Essentially, almost all sexual assault is premeditated on some level. Some evidence of this (e.g., brought date-rape drugs, had restraints) is already captured in the protocol. The purpose of that variable was to see whether there were any points for intervention during the course of the events. So, what makes this variable unique is that it indicates that someone reported seeing or hearing something suspicious (even if they didn’t think it was suspicious at the time).</p> <p>A hypothetical victim statement that would fit here would be: “I heard him joking with his friends that he was going to get me for the past two weeks.” This way, we are coding only that there is an indication that someone could have known something bad was going to happen (but not that they should have known).</p> <p>If yes, highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p>
Suspect substance use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol use [suspect drinking alcohol] • Drug use [suspect using drugs] • None [file explicitly states that there was no drug or alcohol use] • Other • Missing <p>Unless “None” or “Missing,” highlight corresponding text in NVivo that best represents the amount, type, and duration consumed.</p>

Table B.2—Continued

Variable	Codes
Victim substance use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol use • Suspect supplied alcohol • Drug use [victim using drugs] • Drugged [victim drugged by someone else] • None [file explicitly states that there was no drug or alcohol use] • Other • Missing <p data-bbox="586 554 1373 611">Unless “None” or “Missing,” highlight corresponding text in NVivo that best represents the amount, type, and duration consumed.</p>
Victim incapacitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleeping • Unconscious • Chemical incapacitation • Physical restraints (start of incident) • None • Other • Missing <p data-bbox="586 865 1386 921">If “Chemical incapacitation,” highlight corresponding text in NVivo that most accurately and succinctly portrays incapacitation.</p>
Sexual nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempted penetration [attempted insertion of object or body part into an orifice] • Penetration [insertion of object or body part into an orifice] • Attempted oral contact [attempted genital or anal and mouth contact] • Oral contact [genital or anal and mouth contact] • Fondling or attempted fondling [touching private body parts (genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks)] • Kissing or attempted kissing [any kissing, by either victim or suspect] • Other • Missing <p data-bbox="586 1264 1089 1291">If “Other,” highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p>
Physical nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weapon present [gun, knife, another object being used as a weapon] • Use of violence [e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, choking, burning] • Restrained the victim [e.g., use of handcuffs, zip ties, duct tape, or suspect’s arms or body to limit movement of victim] • None [no use of violence, weapon, or restraints] • Other [any information about the physical nature of the sexual assault that we should collect for later discussion] • Missing <p data-bbox="586 1568 1089 1596">If “Other,” highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p>

Table B.2—Continued

Variable	Codes
Psychological or social nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of threats—job related [threaten demotion, being fired, or other job-related penalty for not submitting to the sexual assault] • Use of threats—ruin reputation [threaten to ruin victim’s reputation, either personal or professional] • Use of threats—victim's family [threaten to harm or interfere with victim’s family] • Use of position of authority [no direct threat, but implication that if victim does not submit, there will be professional consequences; victim did not feel that he or she could object] • Use of misogynistic language [use of words, such as <i>bitch</i>, <i>whore</i>, and <i>slut</i>] • Use of homophobic language [use of words, such as <i>fag</i> or <i>dyke</i>, or statements, such as “you are not a man.”] • Use of compensatory language [evidence that the suspect felt he or she was “owed” sexual contact, e.g., “I paid for your dinner” and “you’ve been leading me on all night.”] • Use of loving pseudo-courting language [use of loving language, such as, “I love you,” “tell me this feels good,” “how does it feel,” and “you like this?”] • Romantic gestures or overtures [such as holding hands, putting an arm around the person, hugging, caressing, stroking leg] • None [no explicit or spoken psychological or social dimension to the sexual assault] • Other • Missing
Victim injury	<p>Highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present • Absent or no mention
Suspect injury	<p>If present, highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present • Absent or no mention
Victim response	<p>If present, highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise—quiet [crying; quietly saying no, stop it, etc.] • Noise—loud [yelling, calling for help, etc.] • Physical violence [e.g., hitting, kicking, pinching, biting suspect] • Pleading, bargaining [e.g., please don’t and I promise I won’t tell anyone, please at least use a condom] • Threats [e.g., threaten to tell spouse or commander, threaten to break up with or divorce suspect] • Nonviolent resistance [e.g., trying to hold suspect back] • Attempt to get away [attempting or able to physically leave the scene by running away, driving, etc.] • Freezing [freezing up and not moving; no active resistance] • Other • Missing
For discussion	<p>If “Other,” highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p> <p>Free text to describe any sexual assault characteristics not covered above that you believe warrant discussion. Highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p>

Table B.2—Continued

Variable	Codes
Postincident characteristics and behavior: any time after the incident	
Victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks medical attention [victim goes to hospital, doctor, counselor, or another health care provider as a result of the sexual assault (either immediately or after some time)] • Contacts suspect [at some point, contacts suspect regarding sexual assault] • Contacts SARC [at some point, contacts SARC about the sexual assault] • Contacts chaplain [speaks with chaplain about the sexual assault, not necessarily to report it] • Disclosure to friend or family member [victim tells friend, spouse, or other family member about the sexual assault] • Contacts OSI or law enforcement [initiates contact with OSI or law enforcement about the sexual assault] • Disclosure to other Air Force personnel not named above [e.g., first sergeant, supervisor] • Denial [victim denies being sexually assaulted to anyone] • Doesn't remember • Other • Missing
Suspect	<p>If "Other," highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial [suspect denies the sexual assault] • Attempt to justify [e.g., was okay because was my spouse or victim initiated it] • Apology [suspect apologizes to victim for the sexual assault] • Threat [suspect threatens the victim to keep him or her from telling others] • Slander [suspect attempts to ruin victim's credibility or reputation after sexual assault] • Harassment [suspect harasses victim—either sexual or nonsexual harassment post–sexual assault] • Confession [suspect admits sexually assaulting victim] • Doesn't remember • Other • Missing
For discussion	<p>If "Other," highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p> <p>Free text to describe any postincident behavior not covered above that you believe warrants discussion. If available, please note first date that the victim told anyone in the military or who works for the military about the incident(s). Highlight corresponding text in NVivo.</p>
Suspect risk factors from the research literature	
Childhood abuse	<p>Check if yes and highlight corresponding text.</p> <p>Defined as any discussion or mention of suspect being sexually abused as a child, physically abused as a child, and/or exposed to family violence as a child</p>
Sexual behavior	<p>Check if yes and highlight corresponding text.</p> <p>Defined as any discussion or mention of suspect's early initiation into sex, impersonal sex, multiple sex partners, and/or past sexual violence perpetration</p>

Table B.2—Continued

Variable	Codes
Interpersonal skills	Check if yes and highlight corresponding text. Defined as any discussion or mention of suspect’s social skill deficits, lack of empathy, lack of intimacy or attachment, and/or cue misinterpretation [e.g., misinterpreting cues from women as sexual invitations]
Cognitions	Check if yes and highlight corresponding text. Defined as discussion or mention of a suspect expressing a willingness to commit sexual violence, rape myth acceptance, hostility toward women, belief in traditional gender roles, and/or hypermasculinity.
Peer attitudes or behavior	Check if yes and highlight corresponding text. Defined as discussion or mention of the suspect experiencing peer approval for forced sex, peer pressure for sexual activity, and/or peer sexual aggression.
Victim grooming	Check if yes and highlight corresponding text. Defined as discussion or mention of anything the suspect might have done to “groom” the victim, e.g., to make him or her more trusting or comfortable, to get him or her to engage in illicit activities so the suspect could threaten to reveal them, or to get him or her into a vulnerable position to take advantage sexually.
None of the above	Check none of the above if no evidence for them appears in any of the records.
Additional codes	
Abuse of authority	When a member treads on power differentials to sexually assault a junior member or aspirant [e.g., a trainer who sexually assaults a trainee, a recruiter who sexually assaults aspiring recruits, an instructor who sexually assaults a student]. Highlight associated text.
Bad intimate-partner relationships	When the participants have a long-standing relationship [e.g., marriage, cohabitation, or dating] marked by allegations of abuse, discord, and the prospect or occurrence of divorce or separation. Highlight associated text.
Crashing at someone else’s house	When the victim or suspect spends the night at someone else’s house, apartment, or dorm because of substance abuse, being too tired, it would take too long to drive home, etc. Highlight associated text.
Some or prior consent	When there is initially consent for sex, but it is later withdrawn [e.g., when the victim finds sexual activity painful and asks for it to stop] or when there is partial consent [e.g., for manual penetration but not for penile]. Also includes cases in which there had been consent on prior occasions. Highlight associated text.
Violation of friendship	When the victim and suspect had an ongoing platonic friendship before the suspect committed the sexual assault. Do not use this code if they are just acquaintances or coworkers, if they were romantically involved and decided to just be friends, or if they were “friends with benefits.” Highlight associated text.
Young people and alcohol	Junior military members drinking together socially. Highlight associated text.
Suspect explanations: activity consensual	When suspects explain their behavior as coming from a belief that the behavior was desired and welcome. Highlight associated text.
Victim explanations: fear	When victims explain their behavior as being the result of fear—fear that if they acted differently, the suspect would get angry, yell, hit them, etc. This code would also apply to cases in which victims freeze. Highlight associated text.

Table B.2—Continued

Variable	Codes
Male on male sexual assaults	Highlight associated text.
Multiple assailants	Highlight associated text.

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To assist Air Force efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assault, this report focuses on providing a better understanding of sexual assaults committed by airmen, including suspect characteristics and behaviors, the suspect's relationship to the victim, victim characteristics, the settings and circumstances of sexual assaults, and behavior and justifications following sexual assaults. To do so, the researchers analyzed investigation and court-martial records from closed cases of convicted and other alleged Air Force sexual assault offenders. The cases included offenders who took advantage of norms of group socializing with alcohol, trust in fellow airmen, and responsible drinking and driving to create situations that facilitate sexual assault. Some victims and suspects were confused about whether certain behaviors constitute sexual assault, such as first attempts to initiate sexual activities with dates or friends, unwanted acts that followed consensual sexual behavior, or actions of highly intoxicated individuals. Notably, although far less common, reported offenders who sexually assaulted their spouses had typically also harmed others, tended to have behavioral and emotional problems, and had previously caught the attention of Air Force authorities. After a sexual assault, offenders may apologize and attempt to persuade the victim or others to forgive them and not report them to authorities. This report concludes by describing how these sexual assault data complement other sources and by providing recommendations related to the themes identified in this analysis.



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