

Errata

To: Recipients of RR-870/10-OSD, Effects of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment on Separation from the U.S. Military: Findings from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study

From: RAND Corporation Publications Department

Date: March 23, 2021

Re: Corrected pages (pp. 23, 26)

The authors identified an error on p. 23 of the originally published document, and the error was repeated on p. 26. The number of members who separated from the military over the ensuing 28-month period in the study was roughly 217,000 (as correctly reported on p. 9), not roughly 98,000. As a result of that error, the percentages reported in the last sentence of the first paragraph on p. 23 were also incorrect. That sentence should instead read, “That is, after controlling for all other characteristics of service members, we estimate that 1 percent of all military separations over a 28-month period were associated with sexual assault in FY 2014, and 4 percent of all separations were associated with sexual harassment.” The posted document has been corrected.

This error does not affect any other numbers or the primary conclusions of the report.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Using a representative sample of all service members in the active component as of April 2014, we examined whether exposure to sexual assault or sexual harassment in FY 2014 was associated with measurable effects on service members' separation from the U.S. military. We found that, of the roughly 217,000 members who separated from the military over the ensuing 28-month period, 2,000 of these losses appeared to be associated with experiences of sexual assault in FY 2014, and 8,000 of the losses were associated with sexual harassment in that year, although some of these 8,000 were the service members whose separations were also associated with sexual assault. That is, after controlling for all other characteristics of service members, we estimate that 1 percent of all military separations over a 28-month period were associated with sexual assault in FY 2014, and 4 percent of all separations were associated with sexual harassment.

It is worth noting that these are the separations during the observation period (essentially FYs 2015–2016) that were associated with just the sexual assaults or sexual harassment occurring in FY 2014. There is an unknown number of additional separations during the observation period that were associated with sexual assaults or sexual harassment that occurred either before or after FY 2014. Thus, the percentage of all separations within the period that might be attributable to prior sexual assault or sexual harassment is likely to be considerably higher than the percentages presented here, which were restricted to events in a single year.

In this chapter, we consider implications of this finding and provide recommendations on how DoD might use this information to assess and prevent unnecessary losses.

Separations Associated with Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Are Costly for the Services and the Members

Costs of personnel losses vary depending on the service member's service branch, years of service, and career specialty; whether the service is growing or shrinking; and many other factors. Moreover, although our analyses suggest that sexual assault and sexual harassment were associated with a considerable number of separations over a 28-month period, they do not indicate how much longer members would have served had they

effect of sexual harassment was quite similar whether we included or excluded individuals who were also assaulted.

This observation highlights that sexual harassment itself is a serious threat to readiness, independently of its frequent association with sexual assault. This is consistent with prior research (Murdoch et al., 2006), including research that has found that the experience of sexual harassment may undermine a service member's confidence that the military can provide a safe and supportive workplace (Schneider, Swan, and Fitzgerald, 1997). Whereas civilians—including DoD civilian employees—are covered by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Pub. L. 88-352) and can pursue legal action against their employers if the workplace is not safe from unlawful harassment (Fitzgerald, Swan, and Fischer, 1995; Sagawa and Campbell, 1992), Title VII does not apply to uniformed military personnel, so this response strategy is not available to active-duty service members (Sagawa and Campbell, 1992). Furthermore, service members, unlike civilian workers, are generally unable to switch to a new employer at a time of their choosing. However, victims may choose to avoid extending their current military commitment, thus affecting military retention.

Estimates of Separations Associated with Sexual Harassment and Assault May Be Underestimates

The total number of separations associated with sexual assault and sexual harassment that we estimated in this report likely underestimates the size of the problem. Several factors cause this. First, we examined only separations that occurred in a 28-month period. Some members who were sexually assaulted or sexually harassed in FY 2014 did not have any opportunity to leave the military during that period, even if they wished to do so. However, they may be at high risk of separating when their term of service ends outside of our follow-up window. Thus, our study likely underestimates the total number of separations associated with sexual assaults and sexual harassment that survey results suggest occurred in FY 2014.

A second source of undercounting, and another study limitation, results from the fact that we assessed the effects of sexual assault and sexual harassment experiences that occurred only in FY 2014, yet some of the 217,000 members who separated in our follow-up window may have been influenced by sexual assault or sexual harassment experiences that happened before or after FY 2014. Thus, our estimates represent only a fraction of all of the sexual assault and sexual harassment experiences during the careers of the service members in our cohort.

Third, survey estimates of the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military typically report past-year prevalence rates among the service members who remain in the military by the end of that year (e.g., Hay and Elig, 1999; Breslin et al., 2019). Failure to survey individuals who separated during the year removes a