



Sexual Assault Experiences in the Active-Component Army

Variation by Year, Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Installation Risk Level

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Using data from the 2016 and 2018 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members, RAND researchers produced descriptions of the circumstances surrounding soldiers' self-identified most serious sexual assault experiences. The authors provide information on which sexual assault behaviors occurred, characteristics of perpetrators, and the times and places the experiences occurred.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What types of sexual assault behaviors do soldiers in the active-component Army most often experience?
- Who is involved in the sexual assault experiences of active-component soldiers, and when and where do these events typically occur?
- Are there differences in experiences between men and women; between soldiers who identify as heterosexual and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other; and between soldiers at high-risk and non-high-risk installations?



KEY FINDINGS

- The most common types of sexual assault behaviors were intentional touching of private areas of the victim's body and penetrative sexual assaults with a penis. The typical perpetrator was a male enlisted member of the military who was a peer or someone of higher rank and who acted alone. Soldiers' most serious experiences typically occurred at a military installation, and assaults at work, in quarters, and while at a party were equally common. Fewer than half of soldiers' most serious sexual assaults involved the use of alcohol by the victim. Similarly, fewer than half of soldiers' most serious sexual assaults involved the use of alcohol by the perpetrator.
- Male and female sexual assault victims differed in typical types of sexual assault behavior(s)

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experienced, perceived perpetrator intent, professional and personal relationship to the perpetrator(s), time and place the experience occurred, involvement of alcohol, and association with hazing.

- Substantive differences were found between heterosexual; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other; and nonrespondent female sexual assault victims in the typical types of sexual assault behavior(s) experienced, gender of the perpetrator(s), professional relationship to the perpetrator(s), place and time of the experience, and association with bullying.
- Substantive differences were found between (1) heterosexual and (2) sexual minority and nonrespondent male sexual assault victims in the typical types of sexual assault behavior(s) experienced, use of force, gender and military status of perpetrator(s), personal and professional relationship to the perpetrator(s), place of the experience, drug and alcohol involvement, and association with bullying, hazing, and stalking.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Because there are large differences by gender and sexual orientation in the circumstances surrounding sexual assault in the Army, sexual assault prevention training materials should emphasize the most common behaviors and scenarios and be expanded to incorporate the experiences of men, sexual minorities, and others whose experiences differ from those of heterosexual women.
- There is a crucial lack of data on the sexual assault experiences of sexual minorities in the Army. These data would allow for greater understanding of the sexual assault and other potentially discriminatory experiences of sexual minority soldiers. Changes in the way sexual orientation data are collected, used, and protected could remedy this data limitation. However, the Army cannot act alone, and any changes would need to be reflected in DoD-level policy.

