

RAND Study on Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination in the Active-Component Army

By Army Resilience Directorate 02 August 2021



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A new study will help the Army better understand the most common circumstances under which soldiers face sexual harassment or gender discrimination, and allow the service to pinpoint response and prevention efforts, officials said today.

The Rand Arroyo Center report, *Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination in the Active-Component Army: Variation in Most Serious Event Characteristics by Gender and Installation Risk*, was commissioned by the Army in 2020. RAND used data from the most recent (2018) Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Service Members (WGRA). The WGRA is the Department of Defense's official survey to estimate prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. This effort is an example of the Army's enduring commitment to better understand the characteristics of these harmful behaviors.

As part of the study, RAND described the circumstances surrounding sexual harassment and gender discrimination experienced by some Soldiers in the Active-Component Army. The information identifies the types of behaviors that most commonly occur for Soldiers, characteristics of alleged perpetrators, and when and where the experiences occur.

“In order to provide our Army Team members with a world-class prevention and response program, we continually look for ways to gain better understanding of the factors that detract from unit cohesion and lead to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual assault, sexual harassment and associated retaliation,” said Dr. James A. Helis, Director of the Army Resilience Directorate. “The findings of this study provide significant actionable information for the Army, which will enable us to better focus our prevention efforts.”

Some of the key findings from the study:

- In their most serious experience of sexual harassment or gender discrimination, female Soldiers most commonly experience gender discrimination (being ignored, mistreated, or insulted on the basis of gender; sexist comments about women’s abilities to do the respondent’s job); repeated attempts to establish an unwanted intimate or sexual relationship; and sexual comments about their appearance or body.
- In their most serious experiences, male Soldiers most commonly experience insults to their masculinity, sexual orientation, or gender expression.
- Both male and female Soldiers typically also experience repeated sexual jokes and offensive or persistent discussions of sex.
- Nearly half (48 percent) of female Soldiers indicate that at least one of the alleged perpetrators was either their supervisor or someone in their chain of command. Male Soldiers are less likely to report being harassed by a supervisor or another member in their chain of command (39 percent).
- Female and male Soldiers experience multiple forms of sexual harassment and gender discrimination at one time, but female Soldiers experience significantly more types of sexual harassment/gender discrimination behaviors, on average, than male Soldiers do.
- Female Soldiers’ experiences of sexual harassment and gender discrimination are more likely than male Soldiers’ to be persistent and to cut across more times and places.
- Female Soldiers experience more types of sexual harassment/gender discrimination behaviors, on average, than male Soldiers do.
- Regardless of whether victims are male or female Soldiers, experiences of sexual harassment and gender discrimination are primarily committed by

male service members, especially enlisted members, and frequently occur at the Soldiers' place of duty during the duty day (rather than during Soldiers' off hours).

The researchers recommend that the Army tailor prevention efforts to address the most common sexual harassment and gender discrimination behaviors and scenarios Soldiers might encounter. They also recommend that prevention efforts focus on the workplace, during duty hours, as the most common environment for the most serious sexual harassment and gender discrimination events.

"The Army remains committed to the" prevention of gender discrimination and sexual offenses and continually assesses programs and initiatives to determine how to provide the safest environment for our Soldiers, Army Civilians, and Family members," said Lt. Gen. Gary M. Brito, the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (G-1).

According to Army SHARP Director Jill Londagin, these findings show that "gender discrimination and sexual harassment are more pervasive and insidious than originally thought and are oftentimes too easily dismissed as 'just water cooler talk' or 'just locker room jokes'. While both male and female Soldiers do experience inappropriate sexual jokes and regular discussions of sex in the workplace, we also see very common occurrences of more egregious behavior. All of this behavior is unprofessional and disrespectful."

In the past two years, the Army has implemented policies, programs and initiatives that aim to improve sexual violence prevention, response, and accountability efforts, such as:

- Published the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Annex to the Army People Strategy. This guidance set the Army's prevention framework and unified action from strategic to tactical levels across all components.
- Updated Army Regulation 600-20, Army Command Policy, which updated the guidance and requirements for implementation of the Army SHARP program.
- Introduced new prevention curricula for all SHARP professionals, unit-level training products enabling interactive learning, and enhanced SHARP training in the Army's Pre-Command Course.
- Implemented the This is My Squad (TIMS) initiative to build cohesive teams and encourage prevention and intervention at the grassroots level. A

principle of TIMS is that the leader of a squad is the most influential leader for its members.

- Launched the Command Assessment Program (CAP), a component of the Army's Talent Management initiatives designed to select the best officers to serve as commanders and key billet holders at the lieutenant colonel and colonel levels. CAP's premise is that the Army is better able to select the right people for command and key billet positions using more relevant data.

The Army efforts will continue to nest efforts, such as the People First Task Force and the Army People Strategy, with findings from the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee, the Secretary of Defense 90-Day Independent Review Commission and the Secretary of Defense Immediate Actions 1 to 3 to counter sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Army.

In addition, the Army has implemented training opportunities designed to improve unit cohesion by enhancing first-line leader skills through the Junior Leader Development Program, and communication and intervention skills through Engage training. Both of these initiatives are intended to foster healthy command climates at all echelons of the Army, especially at the grassroots level.

“These findings are critical to more precisely tailor and most effectively target training, prevention, and response. The Army will continue to study gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault to ensure we understand the specific characteristics of gender-based harm and sexual misconduct, focusing in particular on the most common behaviors and scenarios Soldiers continue to encounter” according to Dr. Jenna Newman, social science advisor at ARD and the Army's project lead for this study.