

SHARP Leadership Summit delivers education on prevention and intervention to senior leadership

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Nothing is more significant for leaders than the welfare and safety of those under their command. USAWC resident students, faculty, and staff attended a SHARP Leadership Summit here August 24. This summit served as the foundation for leadership to gain the knowledge and learn from researchers, policy advocates, and first person experiences about this challenge that needs to improve within the Armed Forces.

Commandant Maj. Gen. Bill Rapp opened the summit, describing the day as “an investment in future of the well-being of the Army.” The principles of the Army SHARP program are to intervene, act and motivate. This summit focused on educating leaders, as SHARP training for leadership is not something that needs to be ignored but rather embraced to build actionable leaders that can prevent future incidents from occurring. A series of professionals educated and motivated the audience with respect to cultivating change within the ranks while continuing the momentum to improve statistics.



Jennifer Storm, Victim Advocate for Pennsylvania, uses her past experience as a victim to stress the importance of victim advocacy and resources available during the leaders' Call to Action at the USAWC SHARP Leadership Summit, Aug. 24

Jennifer Storm, Victim Advocate for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, presented the cycle of victimization and the importance of providing advocacy and resources to victims of sexual assault. Out of every 100 rape incidents, 98 of the alleged perpetrators receive no punishment. She followed that statistic by noting that false accusations represent less than 7 percent of allegations. Storm, a victim herself as a child, was candid in her description of the victim's experience and described the leader's

opportunity to break the cycle of victimization. Rape is the second leading cause of Post Traumatic Stress, with war being the top cause. “The problem of PTSD has been confronted very well but it is now time to shift gears to improve a victim’s situation,” according to Storm. She urged awareness of “victim’s rights to dignity, sensitivity and respect, that recovery is based on empowering the survivor, and -- to be a seed planter.”

Dr. Alan Berkowitz, a subject matter expert on bystander behavior and sexual assault prevention, spoke next on the leader’s role in empowering bystanders to intervene in an effort to eliminate sexual assault incidents. The culture of the military does not create sexual predators and the perpetrators we tend to go after are serial offenders, said Berkowitz. He referenced the US Army War College Press publication “ [Getting to the Left of SHARP](#)” that draws a parallel between how the Armed Forces learned how to combat IEDs and we must develop intervention options with respect to sexual assault/harassment incidents either by shifting the person, shifting the focus or confronting the person. As leaders, “we must train to address retaliation.” Leaders must understand and address the underlying issues of victim trauma, the modus operandi of the perpetrator, and the false fear of false accusations. The best option for leaders to intervene starts with education.



Dr. Alan Berkowitz, subject matter expert on bystander intervention, spoke candidly about strategies to reduce sexual assault incidents during the USAWC SHARP Leadership Summit, Aug. 24.

“If you think that we’ve solved sexual assault/harassment problem, you’re wrong.....at the end of the day it’s about the climate we set up to treat everyone with dignity and respect,” said Rapp, to open the afternoon session.

USAWC students and faculty joined the afternoon session.

The Honorable Jessica Wright, shared her insights of the top-down perspective of policy and its application. Until March 2015, she served as the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; previously she was the Adjunct General of the Pennsylvania National Guard. She noted the Defense Dept. view of where sexual assault/sexual harassment stood in Armed Forces as a whole, which is no place, and the impact of rape on unit morale and readiness. “The biggest problem is underreporting,” Ms. Wright notes. Underreporting is such an issue because of the misunderstanding in computing what constitutes sexual assault, as there are penetrating offenses, contact offenses and attempted offenses. To combat against the underlying issue in our armed forces, there needs to be visible leadership, engaged throughout the initial report through the end judgment and recovery

of victims.



USAWC student, a former battalion commander, asks the NCO panelists for their perceptions of an engaged commander and thoughts about Commander's Open Door policies. The senior Army NCOs gave insights about their first-person experiences, setting the tone for a leaders' Call to Action at the USAWC SHARP Leadership Summit, Aug. 24.

A personal experience panel proctored by Dr. Berkowitz gave real-life accounts of

Army Soldiers who have dealt with assault and harassment through to recovery. Three senior NCOs recounted their own experience with Soldier-to-Soldier assault, an internet bullying account, and a sexual predator, giving a compelling and, at times emotional, first-person view of the individual's reaction to the assault and to the unit leaders' responses.

"There is a long way to go in correcting this issue," said Berkowitz. "The victims here to tell their stories are the very definition of Army Strong." What can be learned from these stories is that leadership needs to be engaged in spite of the process; a leader needs to believe those that are making a claim until proven wrong, and to suspend disbelief even if the alleged assaulter may be someone that could have never done such a thing.

"What can you do in your command to make it easier for victims to come forward?" Berkowitz closed the question-answer session with a final question to the audience.

Deputy Commandant Col. David Funk and Command Sgt. Major Christopher Martinez offered final comments from their experiences in brigade leadership positions. "It's all about the command climate that leaders establish, how subordinate leaders will take its cues from leadership and how they support those victim advocates in your unit" said Martinez. Funk emphasized that we are all stewards of the profession. "With SHARP, it's no different. The bottom line is that leaders are here to serve the nation and if SHARP issues become the focal point for American society we can lose the trust of our citizens and members of our profession, while ultimately losing our charter to operate as the world's best armed forces."

The Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program, or SHARP, is the Army's commitment to eliminate incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault through awareness and prevention, training, victim advocacy, reporting, and accountability. For more understanding, go to <http://www.preventsexualassault.army.mil/>

