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By **Mr. Robert P Johnson (Leonard Wood)** ([http://www.army.mil/search/articles/index.php?search=Mr.+Robert+P+Johnson+\(Leonard+Wood\)](http://www.army.mil/search/articles/index.php?search=Mr.+Robert+P+Johnson+(Leonard+Wood)))

If you think you can identify a sexual predator within your unit based on looks alone, think again.

"Most people think they can identify the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' very easily, but the fact is that sexual predators hide among us," said David Markel, Sexual Assault Highly Qualified Expert for the U.S. Army Military Police School, during an Officer Professional Development session, Nov. 7 in Abrams Theater.

Rather than identify sexual predators before they strike, the Army is adapting a program to combat sexual assaults by changing the culture within the organization, Markel said.

"Can we eliminate sexual assaults? No, but we can mitigate and reduce them by changing how we think about sexual assaults. It is a cultural change that shifts the emphasis from the attacker to the attacked, Markel said.

Markel went on to describe that sexual assault within the military is an insider threat and is more dangerous than those outside the wire because of trust.

"We trust them. They are the Soldiers standing next to us -- and it's far more dangerous. Within any demographic group within the military, 95 percent are not sexual predators, but 5 percent are," Markel said.

"In a crowd this size, (referring to the ODP session), there is at least one," Markel said.

In fiscal year 2012, there were a total of 3,374 reports of sexual assault Department of Defense-wide involving service members as victims or subjects, an increase from the 3,192 reports received in fiscal 2011. These reports involved offenses ranging from abusive sexual contact to rape.

"This is a defining time for our entire military community," said Maj. Gen. Gary Patton, DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response director, in a DoD news release. "Our continuing focus is on the health and safety of our service members. Our troops take care of each other on the battlefield better than any military in the world, and now we must extend that same ethos of care to combating sexual assault."

One of the ways to reduce sexual assaults is through the response leaders give to the victim, said Russell Strand, U.S. Army Military Police School and Family Advocacy Law Enforcement Training Division chief.

Strand said that the average sex offender has about a 3 percent chance of getting caught and some have more than 300 victims. Elimination of the offender begins when a victim reports an incident.

"When a victim comes to you, take all reports serious, regardless of reputation or credibility," Strand said. "Then take the appropriate actions."

Insights into the psychology, trauma and dynamics of a sexual assault are changing the way investigators are looking at victims.

Often in the past, the trauma of the attack, combined with alcohol use, caused the victim to change parts of their story as they remembered it, which caused law enforcement and medical personnel to doubt the victim's version.

Today, the culture needs to change to better understand the effects of an attack on a victim and to treat every report as serious, officials said. With better response, reports are more likely to be filed allowing investigators to find patterns in the offender's past.

"Roughly 30 percent of all assaults in the military are reported compared to only 22 percent in the civilian sector," Markel said. Without adequate reporting, the offender can stay hidden and find addition victims.

Offenders tend to operate in three worlds, Strand said.

"There is the public -- which is what we all see every day. Then there is the uninhibited persona, which is what the person shares with ones very close to them, such as a spouse. And finally, offenders operate in the private, where their actions are held in secret to themselves and the sexual offender thrives," Strand said.

"We cannot judge character, we can only judge what we see," Strand said.