

**NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives Conference
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U.S. Army, Director, DoD SAPRO**

The U.S. military is unique because we have taken steps to understand and articulate the extent of the problem.

- Thank you, Ms. Broderick. I'm delighted to be here today to discuss an important issue.
- Sexual assault is a pervasive crime across society and the only way to address it is to fully understand the extent to which it occurs.
- Our Department of Defense sexual assault prevention and response program is unique in that we can articulate the problem and where we need to improve. We can do so because we are committed to collecting data from the force and being transparent with what we find, and have been doing so for years.
- The most recent data tells us that in 2014 an estimated 4.3 percent of military women and 0.9 percent of military men experienced sexual assault.
- While this rate is unacceptable, it is a significant decrease from the 2012 rate and evidence of progress from the work we are doing.

Sexual assault is a public concern that impacts choices of future recruits and has implications on the retention of our current force.

- In the military, our people are our single most important asset. In order to sustain our vast capability, we are focused on attracting the best and brightest, and keeping those who demonstrate a strong commitment to our core values.
- Unfortunately, far too many members of our military have been stripped of their dignity and respect at the hand of a sexual assault perpetrator.
- This is a safety issue that impacts the well-being of our people. It is also a public concern that can influence the choices of those considering a career in the military.
- Our data also show that military victims who have experienced sexual assault and/or sexual harassment are more likely to have the desire to leave the military following the incident.
- As a parent, I understand the emphasis on the safety and welfare of our daughters and sons in their career choices.
- As a member of the U.S. Military, I can tell you we take this issue very seriously and are focused on preventing sexual assault within the ranks and supporting victims in every way.

Sexual assault is an underreported crime that takes a severe toll on both male and female victims. Everyone has a role in creating a climate that prevents sexual assault.

- As you can imagine there are challenges associated with combatting such a complex crime.
- First, it's important to understand that sexual assault is vastly underreported in the military and in society. Sexual assault can take a severe physical and emotional toll on a victim. And a victim's decision to report can be a difficult process.
- Second, this is a cultural issue that demands individuals at all levels of the organization take ownership – from my level and above, down to our newest recruits. Everyone has a role in creating a professional work environment that promotes dignity and respect.
- And third, despite what you see in the media and on TV, sexual assault is not just a women's issue. Our data show men are victims too. Because there are significantly more men in our military than women, the estimated number of men who experienced a sexual assault last year outnumbers the estimated number of women.

Sexual assault prevention and response is a top priority of our leadership.

- With these challenges in mind, our Department of Defense has dedicated considerable time and energy to learning more about the crime of sexual assault and implementing meaningful policies and solutions.
- Our program has gained traction because our most senior defense leader, the Secretary of Defense, has made addressing sexual assault a top priority. Our program also benefits from involvement by all levels of government – to include the Congress and the President of the United States.
- To illustrate, there have been 54 specific sexual assault prevention and response initiatives directed at the highest level of defense and over 100 provisions of law directed by Congress – intense focus and oversight.
- We now have many options in place to help victims recover and address their safety; and to hold those who commit the crime appropriately accountable.

The intense focus and level of oversight has led to progress in addressing sexual assault.

- In 2014, an estimated 6,000-7,000 fewer sexual assaults occurred in the military and reporting increased by 70 percent - less crime and more opportunities to care for victims.
- Estimates show, we now receive a report from 1 in 4 victims, an improvement from two years ago when it was 1 in 10.
- I firmly believe these positive signs are due to unprecedented leadership focus and our laser focus on implementing meaningful policies and lasting reforms.
- It's also due to the steps we've taken to institutionalize our efforts through detailed strategies and tasks to prevent the crime and care for victims.
- But there is still much more work to do to protect our men and women from sexual assault and we continue to be a learning organization.

Data show we must focus on retaliation associated with reporting and acknowledge important gender differences in experiences of sexual assault.

Retaliation

- We are concerned with what we have learned about victims' perceptions of retaliation after reporting sexual assault – We have intensified our attention to this issue and are taking a number of steps to better understand the problem and to address it.
- Supporting victims not only ensures that we are upholding our commitment to them, but also can encourage other victims to come forward and get help.

Gender Differences

- Recent survey data has also shed more light on how the experience of sexual assault in the military differs by gender.
- Our ongoing analysis of the differences experienced among men and women has important implications for our training, prevention, and treatment efforts – and our force of the future.

We are committed to maintaining a healthy work environment for our men and women who serve and sexual assault prevention and response remains a top priority.

- We have dedicated significant energy and resources to help us understand the problem and implement meaningful solutions.
- We have made a lot of headway in our ability to support victims and prosecute perpetrators of this horrendous crime. But our ability to recruit and retain the best and brightest will suffer if we don't continue to address this issue.
- Our new recruits join the military to be a part of something greater than themselves. They should never fear for their safety within the ranks.
- Protecting those who serve from sexual assault certainly is and will continue to be a top priority for the U.S. Military.
- For more information about our program, please visit our website at www.SAPR.mil.