

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

RESEARCH AGENDA FY21-25





Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Research Agenda FY21-25

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Executive Summary

The FY21-25 DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Research Agenda defines key research priorities to synchronize and focus the Department's research on topics and methods that have the potential to result in near-term improvements in sexual assault prevention and response practice and ultimately support sustained reductions in sexual assault and identify benchmarks in excellence for victim assistance. The DoD Research Agenda working group identified the following ten research priorities organized by four overarching categories:

Assessment of Factors Influencing Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

- Ensure prevention and response activities are comprehensive and address individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors – particularly as assessed at the organizational level where less research has been conducted – by developing an empirically validated construct that takes into account climate, and continuum of harm, and identifying how organizational-level constructs influence interpersonal and individual conditions, choices, and behaviors.
- Focus data collection efforts on data from influencers, bystanders, and alleged perpetrators.*
- Identify and validate indicators of sexual assault prevention and response outcomes for use in prevention and response planning, program and policy evaluation.

Institutional Response to Sexual Assault

- Identify the processes of shame, stigma, and institutional betrayal as reported in the victim experience as well as for the unit, and evaluate approaches and processes to mitigate these experience or perceptions.
- Identify barriers to reporting and factors that are associated with retaliation within the unit, support network, and command levels. Evaluate approaches to mitigate barriers and prevent retaliation.
- Identify the policies, procedures, and practices that contribute to the attrition or successful reintegration of victims.

Development and Evaluation of Sexual Assault Prevention Activities

- Develop and evaluate prevention policies, programs, and practices.
- Adapt existing evidence-based and evidence-informed prevention activities for the military.

Dissemination and Implementation Methods

- Identify the optimal delivery mechanisms for sexual assault prevention and response knowledge, skills, and norms across the military career cycle.
- Develop and implement a process to consistently disseminate and archive DoD-funded sexual assault prevention and response research so that such research and related findings are available DoD-wide.

* Within this document, use of the term "perpetrator" refers to a person who has allegations of misconduct made against them by another individual or self-reports acts that would constitute misconduct, and is not intended to convey any presumption about the guilt or innocence of an individual; nor does the use of the terms "experience", "incident" or "report" constitute a legal conclusion that an sexual assault or other misconduct, including retaliation, occurred. Use of the term "victim" refers to a person who has indicated having experienced a sexual assault in a self-report survey or by making an official Unrestricted or Restricted Report of sexual assault to the Department of Defense, and does not imply a finding of fact or guilt.

Introduction

Background and Purpose

The Department of Defense (DoD) continues to work to advance an environment of trust and respect within the force, encourage greater reporting, and stop sexual assault before it occurs. Multiple investments support this enduring commitment, including a program of research across DoD organizations that provides strategic insights to inform leaders' decision-making at all levels to reduce and stop sexual assault, meet the needs of victims, and hold perpetrators appropriately accountable.

Multiple reforms within the Department have brought greater focus and accountability to the research conducted in support of the DoD's mission, including sexual assault prevention and response. Research is necessary, however, to ensure that the prevention and response activities are having the intended impact. Moreover, it is important that any research conducted serves to advance the National Defense Strategy, builds on existing research, and addresses gaps in the field. This document aims to align research on DoD policies, programs, and practices pertaining to sexual assault and other harmful behaviors with the current state of the evidence and advances future efforts by addressing gaps in current military sexual assault prevention and response research. While not directive in nature, this research agenda intends to promote cohesion and prevent duplication of research investments for organizations throughout DoD conducting and sponsoring sexual assault prevention or response research and related forms of violence and abuse. Actual research efforts will require individual evaluation and proper approvals.

The FY21-25 DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Research Agenda defines key research priorities to synchronize and focus the Department's research on topics and methods that have the potential to result in near-term improvements in sexual assault prevention and response practice. Ultimately, research guided by this agenda will support sustained reductions in sexual assault and identify benchmarks in excellence for victim assistance.

Development Process

A working group of DoD prevention and response stakeholders developed the research agenda. The process included a review of sexual assault prevention and response research of civilian, military, and veteran populations. Summaries of research gaps identified in these reviews are found in Appendix A.

The findings from the gap analyses were synthesized into a comprehensive list of research priorities. From the comprehensive list, working group members identified those priorities that had the greatest potential to impact sexual assault prevention and response practice within five years and aligned to the most pressing prevention and response needs within the Department. Priorities that represented general gaps in the sexual assault research literature but did not have the potential to result in proximal change within a military context were not selected for the research agenda.

Current State of DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Research

DoD research over the past decade supported advancements in sexual assault prevention and response activities. Future efforts would benefit from a research agenda that continues to advance sexual assault prevention and response practice and leverages research on sexual harassment, domestic violence, and other forms of violence and abuse that threaten the health of the Force. External factors, such as Congressional mandates, substantially influenced the existing portfolio of DoD funded research. Limited data from response personnel, convicted sex offenders of adult sexual assault, influencers, bystanders, survivors' support networks (e.g., friends and family members), and other stakeholders narrows current understanding of the full spectrum of sexual assault prevention and response. The majority of current research would benefit from a greater understanding of the effect of unit or organizational characteristics – assessed at the unit or organizational level – on individual and interpersonal factors as well as more regular evaluation of DoD's sexual assault prevention and response actions. Such research would support the improvement of promising efforts and the prioritization of effective efforts. As DoD's program of research grows and evolves, consistent translation and dissemination of research findings will ensure that research contributes to evidence-based changes in practice and reduces duplication of investments across organizations. A research agenda has the potential to increase the cohesion of research conducted across multiple DoD organizations, provide senior leaders with actionable research findings by which to effect decisive change across the Department, and increase dissemination of findings from research investments. The ten research priorities described support these aims.

Research Priorities

The DoD working group identified ten research priorities organized by four overarching categories: Assessment of Factors Influencing Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Institutional Response to Sexual Assault, Development and Evaluation of Sexual Assault Prevention Activities, and Dissemination and Implementation Methods.

Assessment of Factors Influencing Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Ensure prevention and response activities are comprehensive and address individual, interpersonal, organizational factors – particularly as assessed at the organizational level where less research has been conducted – by developing an empirically validated construct that takes into account climate, and continuum of harm, and identifying how organizational-level constructs influence interpersonal and individual conditions, choices, and behaviors.

Evidence from epidemiological studies and other literature supports the critical role of command climate in preventing and responding to sexual assault; however, the current understanding of the factors that contribute, positively or negatively, to command climate is limited. In addition, research in military settings has exclusively focused on individual level perceptions of climate, rather than using network analysis, human-centered design, or other methods to assess unit-level or organization-level factors, such as mission and ops tempo, and their independent or interactive effects with individual level factors. Measurement and analysis of these constructs beyond aggregating individual perceptions of climate is needed.

Military leaders are the cornerstone of sexual assault prevention and response and an expanded understanding of factors that influence climate and tools to mitigate those

factors would enhance their ability to take decisive action. Research supporting this priority would develop and validate a concept of command climate as it pertains to prevention and response to behaviors on the continuum of harm. Using novel methodologies to identify opportunities for action at the individual, unit, and organizational levels will better equip leaders to establish and maintain healthy command climates where sexual assault and the behaviors that lead to sexual assault are actively deterred.

Focus data collection efforts on data from influencers, bystanders, and alleged perpetrators.

Data from the full range of individuals involved in sexual assault prevention and response is needed to identify opportunities for prevention and improvements in response. Current data almost exclusively focus on a report by a victim. Measures and methods to collect data from influencers (e.g., leaders), bystanders (e.g., unit members of the perpetrator or victim), and perpetrators¹ as well as disaggregating information on the nature of the victim and perpetrator relationship when possible, are needed. The critical role of bystanders and influencers from a victim perspective has been highlighted in past prevalence surveys, but a deeper understanding of the risk and protective factors as influencers and bystanders is needed, as well as methods to engage these unique audiences in order to best shape tools and interventions that equip individuals, leaders, units, and Services for prevention and response.

Currently, legal, methodological, and other barriers exist to understanding perpetration in a military context. Understanding the nature, magnitude, and factors that are associated with perpetrating behaviors on the continuum of harm against other Service members, DoD civilian personnel, non-DoD civilians, and family members, is needed to guide the selection, adaptation, or development of prevention approaches. Prevalence surveys consistently demonstrate that sexual harassment and sex discrimination continue to occur at unacceptable rates within the military. Many individuals who perpetrate these behaviors may be held appropriately accountable in ways other than separation. In addition, the context of their behavior, including the nature of their relationship with the victim, may necessitate unique responses.

Relying on reports by victims of characteristics or data from suspected and/or convicted perpetrators paints an incomplete picture of a subset of those affected and will continue to limit proactive, timely, and effective action. Understanding modifiable risk and protective factors from Service members who perpetrate behaviors on the continuum of harm that could lead to sexual assault is required to inform targeted prevention and rehabilitation efforts. While challenges exist with conducting this sensitive research, the cost of failing to stop lower level behaviors that create an environment in which sexual assault can take place is significant.

Identify and validate indicators of outcomes of sexual assault prevention and response for use in prevention and response planning, program and policy evaluation.

Traditionally, the key metrics for sexual assault prevention and response have relied on the prevalence of sexual assault victimization estimated through biennial prevalence surveys, the annual number of restricted and unrestricted reports filed, and the

¹ Given the significant policy and legal implications presented in this area, before any research is undertaken regarding perpetration experiences or risk factors, including behaviors, or characteristics, such research must be coordinated with the appropriate stakeholders.

difference between the two (i.e., the reporting rate). Existing indicators of change are derived from cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to understand if the risk factor was present before the assault occurred and if mitigating the risk factor could have prevented the assault. Although existing metrics provide periodic snapshots of the culmination of prevention and response actions at the Department of Defense, Military Department or Service level, validated metrics that are more specific and actionable indicators of progress at the local, Service, and Department levels would provide more frequent snapshots amenable to intervention.

Currently, limited data exist that are available at the local level (e.g., unit, installation, ship). The lack of data specificity on indicators of sexual assault and outcomes associated with prevention and response activities limits leaders' ability to understand local needs and impacts and target resources to the localities with the greatest demand. Research methods and measures are pivotal in developing, validating, and disseminating localized data on key indicators of sexual assault prevention and response outcomes. Once identified either through existing or new data collections the Department must also establish methods to facilitate data sharing at all levels to advance sexual assault prevention and response activities.

Given the role of leadership and command climate in preventing and responding to sexual assault, metrics that assess the impact of prevention effects at the unit or organizational level are instrumental in identifying and mitigating harmful behaviors. The majority of research within and outside of the military has focused on risk for destructive behaviors. While it is critical to understand risk, the Department is taking a strengths-based approach to prevention and response and requires an understanding of the modifiable protective factors for sexual assault at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels to better tailor prevention and response activities. Although resilience and empathy are often part of sexual assault prevention efforts, it is unclear if these protective factors are modifiable or if they are associated with lower levels of behaviors on the continuum of harm.

Institutional Response to Sexual Assault

Identify the processes of shame, stigma, and institutional betrayal as reported in the victim experience as well as for the unit and evaluate approaches to mitigate these experiences.

Existing research with civilian and veteran participants has documented a persistent link between feelings of shame and perceptions of stigma by victims of sexual assaults with adverse outcomes such as increased rates of PTSD, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. While feelings of shame can occur for many different reasons, increased shame occurs when friends and family react to the disclosure of the incident with victim-blaming views and attitudes. Similarly, stigma can occur as rumors, and gossip regarding the incident circulate throughout the individual's social network. Negative or skeptical reactions can contribute to feelings of betrayal by the institutions they once trusted and supported. Civilian studies have shown that these reactions to the incident are critical to a victimized individual's ability or inability to recover. However, more research is needed to assess these interlinked processes and the range of factors that can contribute to feelings of shame, stigma, and institutional betrayal. A continued need exists to understand how these factors interact over time to impact the victim experience.

In the military context, feelings of shame, stigma, and betrayal can develop beyond the individual level. The perpetrator and the entire chain of command involved in the incident may also undergo feelings of shame, perceptions of stigma, and/or a sense of betrayal. The person accused of the sex-related offense may also experience disruption in social support due to involvement in the investigative process and/or the criminal justice system, which may put him or her at risk for additional undesirable outcomes. Leaders may feel shame that an incident occurred under their watch. Stigma may emerge as leaders up the chain of command scrutinize or judge the unit wherein the incident occurred. Junior leaders may feel betrayed by the lack of support from senior leadership regarding their actions after an incident. These internal unit politics are poorly understood but deeply relevant to other important post-reporting processes and retaliation and potential barriers therein. Research is needed to better understand and mitigate these experiences not only for victims but also for the broader network of those involved in the response process.

Identify barriers to reporting and factors that are associated with retaliation within the unit, support network, and command levels. Evaluate approaches to mitigate barriers and prevent retaliation.

In the military, specific contextual factors – such as the risk of social ostracism or the risk of being labeled a troublemaker – constitute significant barriers to reporting. While a cohesive, tight-knit community is expected in a military environment, the closeness of Service members in a unit is simultaneously a challenge for victim confidentiality and privacy. More research is needed to understand the factors associated with unintentional disclosures, breaches of confidentiality, and the spread of rumors and misinformation within the support network, unit, and command levels. In addition, understanding whether assaults in the context of relationship/dating violence involve different barriers and require different approaches is needed. Problems maintaining confidentiality are tightly linked with the emergence of ostracism and other retaliatory behavior, which are increasingly taking place online and through social media.

The Department would benefit from additional, effective tools to mitigate retaliation within units, support network, and command levels. In order to develop and evaluate approaches to prevent retaliation, DoD needs to identify and analyze the factors that increase or decrease the risk for retaliation and ostracism. Additional, non-victim centric methods of measuring retaliation would strengthen retaliation prevention efforts.

Identify the policies, procedures, and practices that contribute to attrition or successful reintegration of victims.

Substantial research in studies that included military, veteran, and civilian participants has documented the short- and long-term economic, social, physical, and mental health consequences of sexual assault victimization. However, the organizational policies, procedures, and practices that could mitigate these consequences are not well understood. Additional research is needed to identify and evaluate response actions that improve social, career, and health outcomes for victims. Moreover, evaluation of response actions should not be restricted to a single response sub-system. Understanding policy implications for victim health alone will not give a comprehensive picture of recovery or lack thereof. The legal-investigative process, the response from the victim's chain-of-command, and the response from the victim's support network all factor into the "victim experience" and are of great importance when understanding long-term outcomes like attrition or reintegration. Analyzing tensions and gaps within and

between the response sub-systems will highlight the military policies and practices that are still in need of refinement.

Development and Evaluation of Sexual Assault Prevention Activities

Develop and evaluate prevention policies, programs, and practices.

Evaluation Sub-Priority #1: Novel Methodologies

Investments in policies, programs, and practices that are expected to have the largest impact on the most people must be prioritized in addition to those efforts focused on “at risk” groups. However, very few sexual assault prevention activities have been evaluated in military contexts. In addition, the military context provides unique opportunities for prevention that may require the development and evaluation of military-specific policies, programs, or practices.

Despite the priority to evaluate specific prevention activities, conducting rigorous evaluations in military settings poses immense difficulties. Challenges and limitations include survey fatigue, extrapolation of sexual assault rates versus actual sexual assault perpetration, lengthy and confusing institutional and survey review processes; frequent leadership turnover and Service member mobility – key components to maintaining local engagement and long-term follow-up; and, the inability to assess outcomes, such as self-reported risk behaviors and sexual assault perpetration, which are considered gold standards for evaluating prevention efficacy in the civilian sector. As such, novel evaluation methodologies are required to facilitate rigorous evaluation and data collection in these environments. Therefore, this sub-priority focuses on the evaluation of prevention activities as well as the development of methods to conduct evaluation within the Department.

Evaluation Sub-Priority #2: Leadership Tools

A need exists to develop and evaluate approaches that leaders may implement to improve command climate and interrupt the organizational level (e.g., unit, installation, ship, etc.) factors that contribute to behaviors on the continuum of harm that may lead to sexual assault in personal or professional relationships.

Evaluation Sub-Priority #3: Cross-Cutting Approaches

Military and civilian organizations utilize an integrated approach to violence prevention in which shared risk and protective factors are addressed through cross-cutting prevention activities that target social norms, emotion regulation, or mindfulness, for example. However, at this time, evaluations of integrated approaches in military or civilian settings are scant, limiting the Department’s ability to implement proven, integrated prevention policies, programs, and/or practices. Either through evaluating existing or integrated activities for cross-cutting effects, research activities should focus on providing leaders and prevention personnel with prevention tools that have demonstrated effectiveness across multiple destructive behaviors, such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, suicide, and substance misuse.

Evaluation Sub-Priority #4: Tailored Prevention

Prevalence surveys consistently identify young enlisted Service members, particularly those with pre-military sexual assault experiences, as those at highest risk for sexual assault victimization during military service. However, the Department of Defense,

Military Department and Services have tailored few prevention activities for these groups. In addition, evaluations often do not conduct subgroup analyses to determine if the prevention activity had differential effects for at-risk subgroups, such as sexual minorities or those who experience assault in relationships. Providing targeted interventions to large populations, while avoiding stigmatized perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment issues, is a key methodological concern. Leaders and prevention personnel lack a robust toolkit to deliver targeted prevention to those individuals or groups at highest risk. Research to tailor and evaluate policies, programs, and practices for at-risk groups will aid the Department in measurably and systematically preventing sexual assault.

Adapt existing evidence-based and evidence-informed prevention activities for the military.

The adoption and implementation of comprehensive, evidence-based and evidence-informed primary prevention programs, policies, and practices are important for sexual assault prevention; however, there are currently few effective approaches that have been evaluated for effectiveness in the military. Moreover, many of the evidence-based and evidence-informed programs designed for preventing sexual assault (and that have evidence of effectiveness) are being implemented earlier in the life cycle, with younger populations. Many of these programs also require substantial time to implement, which may not be possible in the military setting without significant adaptation. Likewise, there is little information to demonstrate how to translate and evaluate prevention activities tested in voluntary settings into military settings where training participation is largely mandatory. As the number of prevention programs, policies, and practices that are proven to prevent sexual assault grows, ongoing adaptation to the age and context, including time constraints for implementation, of the military will be needed to ensure they are relevant and feasible.

As the prevention field hones in on primary prevention efforts that intervene and prevent harmful behaviors earlier in the life cycle, efforts targeted at young adults has declined. Subsequently, a gap between the larger prevention field and the unique needs of the military environment may grow. While the Department's aim is to prevent sexual assault and harmful behaviors from occurring in the first place, prevention efforts must also accommodate or acknowledge the impact of prior trauma, such as adverse childhood experiences, of young adults accessing into the military. Such adaptations will require research to assess program effects with the adapted approach and specific military groups for which the program was adapted.

Dissemination and Implementation Methods

Identify the optimal delivery mechanisms for sexual assault prevention and response knowledge, skills, and norms across the military career cycle.

The military context provides unique challenges and opportunities for disseminating and implementing sexual assault prevention and response knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Oftentimes information and prevention activities are delivered multiple times throughout a Service member's career, usually in mandatory training sessions. Time constraints limit the ability to train skills to proficiency. Delivering prevention and response activities to large populations often results in a suboptimal quality of implementation. DoD would benefit from research to understand the optimal delivery methods and touchpoints in the career cycle for dissemination and implementation of sexual assault prevention and

response activities. Efforts are needed to understand how prior training, such as training prior to military service, impacts the efficacy of current prevention efforts and if “booster” sessions of previous prevention activities would be appropriate. Efforts also are needed to understand effective message framing and delivery across generations or career cycles. Delivery of effective prevention activities outside of annual trainings, and how annual training can best reinforce knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed through research-based prevention activities, are also key considerations. As the Department grows the number of proven tools available to leaders and prevention personnel, understanding the delivery mechanisms that optimize engagement with and the efficacy of those tools is critical.

Develop and implement a process to consistently disseminate and archive DoD-funded sexual assault prevention and response research findings so that findings are available DoD-wide.

Conducting sexual assault prevention and response research involves a significant investment of money, time, and manpower; and thus, summaries of research findings should be maintained and disseminated in a way that facilitates access and action and reduces the potential for inadvertent duplication. A key theme that emerged from the research agenda’s development was the need for the development and implementation of dissemination mechanisms across DoD organizations. This priority focuses on a collaborative effort within DoD to establish dissemination process and location to store and share research findings, such as reports, briefs, and journal articles, as well as secure places to share data. As accountability for research findings increases and funding for research investments decreases, it is critical that DoD leaders are equipped with the findings that feed directly into action.

Conclusion

The DoD working group used a systematic approach to develop a DoD FY21-25 Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Research Agenda. Priorities were identified that address gaps in the research literature and advance sexual assault prevention and response activities in a military context. Different organizations may be poised to execute each of the priorities, but through unity of effort, DoD can avoid duplication of efforts, ensure research findings inform senior leaders’ decisions, and increase effectiveness of sexual assault prevention and response investments. DoD is committed to eliminating sexual assault, supporting victims, and holding perpetrators appropriately accountable. Addressing the FY21-25 research priorities supports these goals.

Appendix A: Gaps Analysis Findings

Response

The response gap analysis found four response subsystems in research with civilian, military, and veteran participants that guided the organization of the gap analysis findings. The **health subsystem** captures the immediate and long-term medical and mental health response. The **legal subsystem** captures the adjudication response, including the actions of the investigation team, set of laws on what constitutes sexual assault, including the definition of consent and rape, the burden of proof required to prove a sexual assault offense, and the policies that govern sexual assault and unwanted sexual contact. The military and civilian **institutional subsystem** research captures the organization's response, including the chain of command, the victim's unit or civilian university. This subsystem includes the impact of sexual assault has on the institution, with downstream effects on the victim and their social networks. The **support networks subsystem** captures response of the victim's social network, including formal and informal responders, with downstream effects on the victim, particularly in terms of facilitating the victim's interactions with the other three subsystems.

The nature of the assault, reporting of the assault notifications, and victim needs and preferences activate specific subsystems. The subsystems often operate independently, making it difficult for researchers, response system personnel, and victims to understand how the subsystems function to complement one another. Tension and disjointedness in response could occur, in part, because subsystems function to fulfill different missions and achieve parallel or competing outcomes.

Research on response to sexual assault across the four subsystems identified a number of gaps. The majority of studies utilize data from victims without capturing data from other social actors impacted by the assault, including but not limited to: the victims' families, friends, social networks, leaders, units, institutions, and alleged perpetrators. Many studies utilize data from victims without a comparable or similarly situated set of non-victims. The majority of studies utilize victim-participants that are civilian university students or patients in the VA or civilian health care systems, making the generalizability of findings to active duty Service members unclear. Very little peer-reviewed, publicly available research on the legal system that involves active-duty military populations exists despite the large body of military laws, policies, and programs on sexual assault response. Research findings generally fall into one of the four subsystems, but neglect to address how the sub-systems interact as a whole.

Specific gaps existed in each subsystem. In the **health** subsystem gaps included an analysis of differences in treatment outcomes for subgroups of the population, such as sexual minorities and those who do not label their experience as an assault. In addition, while research has increasingly examined rehabilitation for perpetrators, there were few approaches that had been evaluated and supported for perpetrators and victims. Within the **legal** subsystem, very little research with military participants examined the application of civilian approaches, such as restorative justice, within military populations. Given that the military justice process takes place within a larger context of military life, very little research examined the role of military contextual factors, such as leadership characteristics and unit climate, on command decision-making. Within the **institutional** subsystem, little work examined risk and protective factors for retaliation, applied institutional betrayal to a military context, or examined how victim recovery was associated with institutional outcomes, such as retention and promotion. Research on **support networks** was in the earliest phases of all subsystems. Gaps in this area included how network characteristics and processes, such as social status of victim or perpetrator and

network structure, influence victim outcomes. Finally, given that many victims choose to disclose and receive support from informal responders, such as friends and family, rather than formal responders, such as mental health providers or law enforcement, differences in the nature, utilization, and outcomes for informal and formal response are not well understood.

Prevention

The prevention gap analysis found that the civilian and military prevention literature reflected systematic steps in which research explored the magnitude and burden of sexual assault (**epidemiology**) and the risk and protective factors for sexual assault (**etiology**). Research on **development and evaluation** of programs, policies, or practices identified prevention activities with evidence of addressing risk and protective factors and preventing sexual assault. Research on **communicating, implementing, and disseminating** sexual assault prevention entailed ensuring widespread adoption of evaluated prevention activities. In addition, an emerging literature also focused on **organizational factors**, such as workforce development or data systems, which facilitate the successful implementation of prevention efforts. The following summarizes gaps identified in the prevention literature within these categories.

Civilian and military research on sexual assault prevention within the military context has identified a number of **epidemiology and etiology** gaps. For example, data often only includes reported victims' experiences and do not include perpetrator experiences. Moreover, the data often does not allow for local level analyses or assessing trends over time. The research also is limited in understanding the full range of risk and protective factors at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels and those risk and protective factors that are shared across different destructive behaviors, such as sexual assault and sexual harassment. Given that data on perpetration is limited in the military context, it is also difficult to understand whether there are different patterns of behavior over time.

Development and evaluation research on prevention activities that accommodate the career cycle of Service members to build behavioral skills over time, and that address the unique needs in the military community is limited. This has resulted in few programs, policies, and practices that are applicable for Service members and the military context. The two main targets for current sexual assault prevention programs in the civilian context are adolescents and college students. While programs used for these two groups may have features that will translate to the military setting and may be applicable for the younger demographic, adaptations likely will be needed. Moreover, research-based prevention activities that address multiple outcomes or risk factors for sexual assault remain limited. Few studies have addressed inappropriate sex-related behaviors that are more ambiguous and do not fit within the categories of sexual harassment or sexual assault. More information is needed to understand the spectrum of "gray zone behaviors" that may apply to multiple harmful outcomes as a primary prevention opportunity.

Few evaluations exist of comprehensive, multicomponent prevention programs **implemented** in the military setting and very little research focused on the application of research-based, non-training prevention activities in military contexts. While research-based prevention activities hold promise in preventing sexual assault, they will need support from **organizational factors** for sustainability and continued impacts over time. Limited research exists in the military setting about how to implement a comprehensive, cohesive approach for sexual assault prevention at the system level.