

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104066](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

According to DOD's Harassment Prevention Strategy, incidents of harassment—including hazing—jeopardize combat readiness and weaken trust within the ranks. DOD established a harassment prevention and response program that includes hazing to address these behaviors.

House Report 116-120 accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 included a provision for GAO to review DOD's efforts to implement hazing prevention and response programs. This report addresses the extent to which DOD has: (1) visibility over hazing and reported complete hazing complaint data to Congress; (2) assessed servicemember harassment prevention and response training for compliance, sufficiency, and effectiveness and reinforced training; and (3) provided MEO professionals with required certification training. GAO evaluated the completeness of DOD's hazing reports to Congress, compared training data to billets, and conducted a generalizable survey of MEO professionals, among other things.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making a matter for congressional consideration to require DOD to continue to report hazing complaint data to Congress, including more complete data on all complaints, to Congress. GAO is also making 12 recommendations to DOD, including that it take steps to improve data quality in its reports, assess and reinforce servicemember training, and fill vacant MEO professional billets. DOD generally concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-22-104066](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

December 2021

MILITARY HAZING

DOD Should Address Data Reporting Deficiencies, Training Limitations, and Personnel Shortfalls

What GAO Found

From fiscal year 2017 through fiscal year 2020, the Department of Defense (DOD) was required to report information on hazing incidents to Congress. However, its reports did not contain complete information. Specifically:

- DOD reported there were between 183 and 299 hazing complaints in a given year from fiscal years 2017- 2020. However, data from a 2018 DOD survey suggests this significantly understated the number of hazing incidents by potentially tens of thousands of incidents. Prevalence is important because decision makers can use it as a starting point to determine if efforts to prevent and respond to hazing are effective. In 2016, GAO recommended DOD evaluate the prevalence of hazing. DOD concurred, but has not yet implemented it and GAO still believes this recommendation is valid.
- DOD's reports to Congress did not include information on informal hazing complaints or required information on complaints from National Guard personnel operating under the command of the Governor, but funded by the federal government. Its reports also did not have data required by DOD policies, and the congressional requirement that it submit reports has lapsed.

Better data that accurately reports the number of hazing incidents, includes data on informal hazing complaints and complaints from National Guard personnel in Title 32 status, and complete data will better position DOD and Congress to make decisions on how to prevent and respond to hazing in the military.

The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) has not assessed servicemember harassment prevention and response training. DEOMI officials told GAO that they did not proactively review the services' training plans because DEOMI did not have the resources to execute this responsibility. As of October 2021, a DOD official said funding had been approved, but did not provide information on how or when DEOMI would review the training plans. Additionally, the services may not be reinforcing this training frequently enough and officials said they have not assessed the effectiveness of this training. Until DOD ensures that servicemember training is reviewed for sufficiency, reinforced at a minimum frequency, and assessed for effectiveness, it will be limited in its ability to ensure that training achieves its objectives.

DOD certifies Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) professionals by training them to respond to harassment complaints, among other things. As of 2021, approximately 76 percent (1,459 of 1,924) of MEO professional billets in DOD were filled with MEO professionals. However, as of July 2021 the Army National Guard had filled 226 of 408 billets (55 percent) and the Army Reserve had filled 120 of 266 billets (45 percent). Army and Army Reserve officials said that vacant billets are a result of commanders not providing soldiers, or submitting the documentation needed, to staff their MEO programs. Additionally, neither component has developed a plan for filling their vacant MEO billets. Until commanders in the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve provide soldiers for MEO professional positions, and the Army National Guard and Army Reserve plan to address shortfalls in MEO professionals, these organizations will be limited in their abilities to support commanders and respond to harassment complaints.