

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-284](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Females have long been viewed as the primary victims of sexual assault but, based on survey data, RAND estimated that in 2014, about 9,000 to about 13,000 male servicemembers were sexually assaulted. The House report accompanying the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act mandated that GAO review DOD's efforts to address sexual assaults of male servicemembers.

This report addresses the extent to which (1) DOD has taken actions to prevent and respond to sexual assaults of male servicemembers, (2) DOD's sexual assault prevention and response program is meeting the medical and mental health-care needs of male servicemembers, and (3) the culture of the U.S. military poses distinct challenges for preventing and responding to sexual assaults of male servicemembers. GAO reviewed DOD reports and strategies; analyzed data on sexual assaults from surveys and reported incidents from fiscal years 2008 through 2014; and interviewed DOD officials with related program responsibilities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that DOD develop a plan for using its data to inform program development; systematically evaluate whether male victims have gender-specific medical and mental health-care needs; develop goals and metrics; and revise training to address male victims. DOD concurred with all recommendations.

View [GAO-15-284](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

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MILITARY PERSONNEL

Actions Needed to Address Sexual Assaults of Male Servicemembers

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to address sexual assaults of servicemembers generally, but it has not used all of its data, such as analyses that show significantly fewer male servicemembers than females reporting when they are sexually assaulted, to inform program decision making. In 2014, DOD data show that 1,180 males and 4,104 females reported a sexual assault to DOD. GAO's analysis of sexual assault prevalence estimates using the results of a study conducted for DOD by the RAND Corporation shows that at most 13 percent of males reported their assaults, whereas at least 40 percent of females reported. DOD has recently begun to develop ideas for increasing male reporting, such as further outreach. DOD has reported data on the gender of military sexual assault victims since 2008, but it has not used all these data to inform program decision making or established a plan to do so. Since 2008, GAO has reported on limitations in DOD's use of data to inform decision making in its sexual assault prevention and response program, and recommended that DOD take action in response, but problems persist. Thus, without a plan for how it will use data in making decisions about program development, DOD risks leaving important issues, such as those related to male victims, unaddressed.

DOD has taken steps to provide and improve the availability of medical and mental health care for all sexual assault victims, but DOD's Health Affairs office has not systematically identified whether male victims have any gender-specific needs. DOD sexual assault policies specify that care be sensitive to gender-specific issues. Care providers and experts said that male victims may have different responses to the trauma than females, such as questioning their masculinity and their sexuality. In 2008, DOD recognized that more information was needed on the needs of males who are sexually assaulted but did not identify those needs. DOD stated in its April 2014 prevention strategy that it intends to research the situations leading to male victimization and the needs of male victims, and has begun to collect information toward this objective with its 2014 Military Workplace Study. However, until DOD's Health Affairs office systematically evaluates the medical and mental health-care needs of male victims, it will be difficult for DOD to help its providers maximize the effectiveness of the care that they provide to male sexual assault victims.

DOD has recognized that a cultural change is needed to address sexual assaults, but has not yet taken several key steps to further this change. In reports and interviews, DOD has identified that military culture can pose challenges to effectively implementing a program to prevent sexual assault. For example, in 2008, DOD acknowledged that it would need to address the "unofficial" culture that is defined by exaggerated characteristics of stereotypical masculinity, among other things, and is linked to values and customs that perpetuate rape. Key practices for implementing organizational transformations, such as cultural changes, include establishing and measuring progress toward performance goals and training employees as a means to effect the desired change. DOD has not established goals or metrics to gauge sexual assault-related issues for male servicemembers, and has also generally not portrayed male sexual assault victims in its sexual assault prevention training material. Actions to address these issues could help DOD effect the change it states is needed to effectively prevent and respond to sexual assaults of male servicemembers.