

## **Combating Sexual Assault in the Air Force**

The study was chartered to examine the multidisciplinary scientific work and data related to sexual assault in order to help “the Air Force use that work to combat the sexual assault problem”. The study was motivated both by the stated DoD goal for combating sexual assault – “a culture free of sexual assault, through an environment of prevention, education and training, response capability, victim support, reporting procedures, and appropriate accountability that enhances the safety and well-being of all persons...” (DoDI 6495.02) – and by the Air Force’s desire for addressing this problem by gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of sexual assault and its victims and perpetrators. The study was organized along theme areas of prevention, detection, reporting and treatment. The study team reviewed a large body of research literature across a variety of scientific disciplines. The insights gained through the study’s science review were put into context of Air Force operations through site visits and interviews with a host of personnel in a variety of Air Force operational elements. Additionally, information was gathered from individuals and organizations that have programs, projects and roles in combating sexual assault in US civilian life and in college settings. The results of the study’s analyses identified 1) areas for science-informed improvement to the Air Force’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) policies and programs in both the near and mid-term that would improve prevention, detection, reporting and treatment options as well as 2) recommendations for key research initiatives that would further a deeper understanding of sexual assault in military settings. There were both theme-specific recommendations as well as three key cross-cutting recommendations. The latter include enabling SAPR programs at AF Bases by developing a coordinated and co-located environment for their planning and response communities such that the various response organizations (e.g., Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, police, Equal Opportunity, medical, legal, and Family Advocacy Program) can assist supervisors and leaders with empirically validated tools for implementing culture change and assessing results. Additionally, it is recommended that the Air Force create a SAPR research program addressing gaps identified in the theme area analyses by leveraging and extending the current science base. This will require that the AF establish or sponsor a research infrastructure for new initiatives addressing the full spectrum of SAPR. The final cross cutting recommendation is for the AF to charter a “SAPR Assessment Program” with the goal of understanding the effectiveness within the Air Force of ongoing and new SAPR programs, to establish a “continuous assessment process” of SAPR prevention and treatment initiatives, and to specifically gain a deeper understanding of SAPR for male, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) victims. From the four theme areas, recommendations included:

- implement a pilot program to educate and empower first line supervisors to proactively develop/maintain a unit culture where the training and education provided should be tailored with evidence-based content and consistently carried out at a frequency relevant to adult learning (prevention)
- develop a knowledge management strategy and AF-wide system to capture and appropriately share incidents (e.g., EO, SARC, OSI data) to enable system wide situation understanding (e.g., to deter across-base perpetrators; to support research) (detection)
- enable SAPR system changes such that sexual assault victims do not lose the ability to file restricted reports based on to whom they talk (reporting)
- create an Air Force-wide longitudinal cohort study on enlisted personnel and officers to develop a deeper understanding of all aspects of sexual assault across time and to determine long term health effects throughout their career (treatment)

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