

Odds of leaving military double after sexual assault, report finds

9 February 2021



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Exposure to sexual assault in the U.S. military doubled the odds that a service member would leave the military within 28 months, and sexual harassment was associated with roughly 8% of all military separations during this same time period, according to a new report from the RAND Corporation.

Specifically, the report estimates that sexual assaults were associated with 2,000 more separations than would normally be expected, and another 8,000 separations were associated with sexual harassment.

"Sexual assault and sexual harassment are associated with a wide range of harms to individual service members, but this study highlights another negative impact of these crimes—higher rates of attrition and associated harms to force readiness." said Andrew Morral, senior behavioral scientist at nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND and lead author of the report. "We estimate that [sexual assaults](#) and harassment of service members that occurred in a single year were associated with the premature loss of at least 16,000 person-years of service over

the following 28 months."

The researchers found that separations from the military following sexual assault or sexual harassment are disproportionately voluntary, meaning the service member opts not to reenlist of their own volition. This trend harms military readiness as well as the wallets of affected service members, according to the report. Because military compensation is weighted toward retirement and deferred benefits, those who leave the service early may forego considerable compensation.

Further, while separations from the military following sexual assault or sexual harassment are disproportionately voluntary for both men and women, the research shows that men are especially likely to seek voluntary separations following a sexual assault or sexual harassment.

To combat these separation and force readiness issues, the authors recommend that the Department of Defense prioritize sexual harassment training, prevention and response, including highlighting its prevalence among both male and female service members. Additionally, the DoD should continue to study how reporting a sexual assault affects separation.

The report, drawing on findings from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study and military separation data from 2015-2016, assesses the effects of sexual assault and sexual harassment on service members' decisions to leave military service. Completed in 2019, and recently cleared for publication by DoD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), the report is the latest in a series of reports that take a more detailed look at specific findings from the initial survey.

It is likely that the actual numbers of military separations caused by sexual assault and sexual [harassment](#) are underestimated because this study

only reflects a 28-month window of time and thus only a fraction of all the sexual [assault](#) and [sexual harassment](#) experiences during the careers of the service members included in the 2014 study.

More information:

www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR870z10.html

Provided by RAND Corporation

APA citation: Odds of leaving military double after sexual assault, report finds (2021, February 9) retrieved 20 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-odds-military-sexual-assault.html>

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