



DoD's Training of Junior Enlisted Service Members

*An Analysis of Sexual Assault and
Sexual Harassment Training for
DoD's Most At-Risk Population*

Executive Summary

June 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Defense Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct (DAC-PSM) was established in November 2020 by the Secretary of Defense under authority directed in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20 NDAA). Per the DAC-PSM (herein referred to as the “Committee”) Charter, the Committee is charged with providing “independent advice and recommendations on the prevention of sexual assault involving members of the Armed Forces and the policies, programs, and practices of each Military Department for the prevention of sexual assault.” As laid out in the DAC-PSM Membership Balance Plan, the Committee is composed of 13 members with expertise in “the prevention of sexual assault and behaviors on the sexual assault continuum of harm; adverse behaviors including the prevention of suicide and substance abuse; change of culture of large organizations; and implementation science.”

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22 NDAA) directed the Department of Defense (DoD; herein referred to as the “Department”) to conduct a review of training related to eight training subjects, including sexual assault and sexual harassment. To assist with the Department’s response, the Committee was directed to conduct a review of training on sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Given that junior enlisted ranks (E1-E4) are at greatest risk for experiencing sexual assault and sexual harassment (herein referred to as “sexual misconduct”), the Committee focused its analysis on training during that early career stage. In addition, in 2021, there were more than 470,000 active duty personnel E1-E4s who were 25 years or younger, and if the relevant statistic for Reserve/National Guard (R/NG) is added, the total of E1-E4s 25 years or younger was nearly 700,000. Thus, the success of efforts focused on this particular subgroup has the potential to directly impact nearly three-quarters of a million Service members.

By focusing on these newest Service members, the Committee hopes that its efforts will have two critical impacts at the individual level:

1. Help reduce the number of incidents of sexual misconduct that they might experience early in their military career; and
2. Equip these future leaders with the appropriate knowledge and skills to effectively guide Service members who enter the military behind them.

The Committee recognizes that addressing the problem of sexual misconduct within the Department is much broader than just this junior demographic – e.g., leaders at all levels need to take appropriate action. Further, addressing training issues is not seen by the Committee or the Department as the sole solution to this problem; instead, a comprehensive approach to prevention is required for a lasting impact. By recognizing the short- and long-term potential impacts of effective training woven into a comprehensive prevention approach, the Committee believes the Department can have a significant and lasting impact on these challenges.

This report addresses five topics identified in the FY22 NDAA study requirements: approaches to behavior change, metrics, incentives and accountability, engagement with non-Departmental entities, and costs. The Committee gathered study input on those topics through a variety of sources, including direct Requests for Information (RFI) to the Services and at public meetings held in December 2022 and in March 2023.

Drawing on that input, this report is organized to:

- Explore the relevant research on each of the five topics;
- Consider the general applications of that research to the military environment;
- Discuss Service submissions relative to the research; and
- Offer improvement recommendations and supporting rationale.

The recommendations and overarching observations summarized below were approved by the Committee members at a public meeting on March 31, 2023.

DAC-PSM Training Study Recommendations and Observations

Recommendations by Topic

Approach Recommendation 1: Where there are gaps in trainings developed specifically for target subgroups, the Services should tailor trainings now designed to serve the broader military, and where possible, focus on customizing the content to specific subgroups and training settings, and where feasible, share these final product with other Services. If there are research gaps on what kind of training works best with particular situations or populations, then the Department should support research to close those gaps.

Approach Recommendation 2: The Services should depict and utilize a full career-cycle approach (such as used by the Army) to capture the desired progression of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to this topic. Detailed mapping should be done to depict training activities within the first four years in uniform for enlisted members and officers.

Approach Recommendation 3: The Services' efforts to train and field the prevention workforce should be prioritized to help ensure that appropriately trained personnel are in settings most likely to support junior enlisted Service members.

Approach Recommendation 4: The Department and Services should ensure that the prevention workforce has appropriate skills, knowledge, and access to resources to address the unique needs of junior enlisted Service members, and where appropriate, that these demographic-specific requirements are reflected in the prevention workforce credentialing process.

Metrics Recommendation 1: The Department and Services should expand consideration of training metrics beyond assessing individual-level knowledge to include unit and leader attitudes and behaviors; utilize multiple methods and measures to assess key outcomes; and capture metrics of training delivery and environment.

Metrics Recommendation 2: The Department and Services should collaborate with outside experts to develop a Service-level “lessons learned” document to capture past, current, and future plans for developing training metrics, and from that, implement a plan to address gaps.

Metrics Recommendation 3: Evaluation should consider attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors to allow for full understanding of the extent of progress with each, and where to focus attention if desired outcomes are not observed. The mapping of evaluation appropriate for the experiences of the newest Service members should be a priority.

Incentives/Accountability Recommendation 1: The Services should use the socioecological model as a framework for identifying, implementing, and evaluating the use of accountability within the actual training setting, as well as across different echelons of the military.

Incentives/Accountability Recommendation 2: The Department and Services should advance the use of training techniques and related messaging that foster engagement and learning, with a collateral benefit of removing the negative perception that “mandatory” training cannot be useful and effective.

Incentives/Accountability Recommendation 3: The Services should focus on holding leaders accountable as a critical level of influence in the military environment.

Engagements Recommendation 1: The Department should consider if additional collaboration guidance would be a helpful next step to advance existing integrated prevention efforts. That consideration should also include review of Department guidelines on the timely dissemination of research findings.

Engagements Recommendation 2: The Department should develop a collaboration framework to share with the Services, and then use that framework to identify and close gaps, as well as foster sharing where relationships already exist.

Engagements Recommendation 3: The Charter of the Council on Recruit Basic Training (CORBT) should be revised to include similar-level Office of the Secretary of Defense participation (and signature), and the CORBT should consider formation of an enduring subcommittee focused on preventing harmful behaviors

Cost Recommendation 1: Starting with a research-informed approach, the Department and Services should collaborate to develop a model with the goal of establishing a consistent approach to cost evaluation (especially cost effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses that are increasingly used in prevention science and that provide more context

to data on costs) and identification of opportunities for cost-sharing or leveraging existing efforts.

Cost Recommendation 2: The Department and Services should collaborate to identify their current investment in training evaluation, and from there, expand that investment to rapidly advance Department-wide training evaluation efforts.

Overall Recommendation: The Committee supports the Department's extensive efforts to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC); however, the Committee suggests that many of the recommendations – and especially those related to training – receive specific consideration focused on the needs of the junior enlisted demographic.

Observations

Observation 1: Theory, research, and data should drive the selection, implementation, and evaluation of prevention efforts, which require sufficient time to observe behavior change.

Observation 2: While this study is concentrated largely on prevention training efforts for junior enlisted Service members (E1-E4), a focus on this specific population should take place within the broader context of leadership, establishment of culture and appropriate norms, and training across the life of a Service member's career.