

# Annex 2: The Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault and Career Outcomes among Active Duty Service Members: Executive Summary



## The Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault and Career Outcomes among Active Duty Service Members: Executive Summary

### Introduction

Sexual harassment and sexual assault threaten military readiness via their potential impact on military members' career progression. Previous research on this topic has tended to rely solely on survey data reflecting Service members' self-reported experiences with these behaviors and career progression. Further, there has been limited research on the impact of these harmful behaviors on Service members' careers over longer periods of time. Using a combination of survey and administrative data, this study addressed this gap by examining the career trajectories of Department of Defense (DoD) active duty members over a five-year period after experiencing sexual harassment and/or sexual assault.

### Key Takeaway

Active duty members who indicated having experienced sexual harassment and/or sexual assault on the *2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members (2016 WGRA)*<sup>1</sup> tended to have a greater risk for adverse career outcomes (e.g., separation, demotion) compared to those who did not, particularly in the first two years following the survey. Similar results were observed for those who disclosed sexual harassment and/or reported their sexual assault compared to those who had not.

### Methodology

We leveraged data from the *2016 WGRA* (Davis et al., 2017) to create predictors capturing differences in DoD active duty members' experiences with sexual harassment, sexual assault, disclosure of sexual harassment and type of disclosure, and reporting of sexual assault and type of report in the 12 months prior to completing the survey. These active duty members' career trajectories were captured over five years following the *2016 WGRA* (2016–2021).<sup>2</sup> We examined five career outcomes using administrative data: separation from active duty service, characterization of service at separation, promotion, demotion, and derogatory clearance action.<sup>3</sup> For each combination of predictor and outcome, we conducted a logistic regression for each year of analysis<sup>4</sup> to understand how experiencing

<sup>1</sup> Prior to 2025, Office of People Analytics (OPA) research products used the term “gender” to describe men and women. These groups have been defined using survey items and/or administrative data categories for “male” and “female” and therefore references to gender should be understood to mean “sex.”

<sup>2</sup> The administration of the *2016 WGRA* (versus, for example, date of sexual harassment disclosure or sexual assault report) was used to provide a consistent reference point across all models, including those active duty members who did not disclose or report their experience. Although the *2016 WGRA* included a follow-up question that collected the month and year in which respondents' sexual assault experiences occurred, a similar follow-up question was not available for respondents who indicated having experienced sexual harassment, therefore we did not use this item.

<sup>3</sup> Separation from active duty service and characterization of service at separation were captured using the Active Duty Transaction File. Promotion and demotion were captured via changes to paygrade in the Active Duty Master File. Derogatory clearance action was captured via the Joint Personnel Adjudication System and the Defense Information System for Security.

<sup>4</sup> We did not have the statistical power necessary to detect differences in characterization of service at separation in the fourth or fifth year of analysis due to low rates of this outcome among the active duty members who had not separated in the prior years, thus, we only examined this outcome for the first three years of analysis.

sexual harassment and/or sexual assault and how disclosing/reporting those experiences were associated with active duty members' careers over time. All analyses used unweighted data and controlled for active duty members' demographic characteristics.<sup>5</sup>

## Results

We describe key findings below and provide odds ratios from each model associated with these results at the end of this report.

### Experience of Sexual Harassment

Active duty members who indicated experiencing sexual harassment on the *2016 WGRA* had greater odds of separation from active duty in each of the five years of analysis, demotion in each of the first two years of analysis, and derogatory clearance action in the first three years of analysis, as well as lower odds of honorable characterization of service at separation from active duty in the first year of analysis and promotion in each of the first two years of analysis and compared to those who did not.

### Experience of Sexual Assault

Active duty members who indicated experiencing sexual assault on the *2016 WGRA* had greater odds of separation from active duty in each of the five years of analysis, demotion in each of the first two years of analysis, derogatory clearance action in the first, second, third and fifth year of analysis, as well as lower odds of promotion in the first, second, and fourth year of analysis compared to those who did not.

### Experience of Sexual Harassment Only, Sexual Assault Only, and Both Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Active duty members who indicated experiencing sexual harassment but not sexual assault on the *2016 WGRA* had greater odds of separation in each of the five years of analysis, demotion in each of the first two years of analysis, and derogatory clearance action in each of the first three years of analysis, as well as lower odds of receiving an honorable characterization of service at separation in the first year of analysis and promotion in the first year of analysis compared to those who indicated experiencing neither sexual harassment nor sexual assault. Active duty members who indicated experiencing sexual assault but not sexual harassment on the *2016 WGRA* had greater odds of derogatory clearance action in the first and fifth year of analysis compared to those who indicated experiencing neither sexual harassment nor sexual assault.

Active duty members who indicated experiencing both sexual harassment and sexual assault on the *2016 WGRA* had greater odds of separation from active duty in each of the five years of analysis, demotion in each of the first two years of analysis, and derogatory clearance action in each of the first three years of analysis, as well as lower odds of honorable characterization of service at separation in the third year of analysis and promotion in the first two years of analysis compared to those who indicated experiencing neither sexual harassment nor sexual assault.

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<sup>5</sup> Demographic covariates included paygrade, age, Service, sex, race/ethnicity, years in service, marital status, and, for enlisted Service members, Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score.

## Disclosure of Sexual Harassment

Active duty members who indicated having disclosed sexual harassment to a DoD authority<sup>6</sup> on the 2016 WGRA had greater odds of separation from active duty in each of the first two years of analysis and lower odds of promotion in the second year of analysis compared to those who experienced sexual harassment and did not disclose it. No statistically significant differences were observed between officially or unofficially<sup>7</sup> disclosing sexual harassment.

## Reporting of Sexual Assault

Active duty members who indicated having reported (restricted or unrestricted) sexual assault on the 2016 WGRA had greater odds of separation from active duty in the second and third years of analysis, as well as lower odds of promotion in the second year of analysis compared to those who experienced sexual assault and did not report. No statistically significant differences were observed between filing an Unrestricted Report or Restricted Report of sexual assault.

## Conclusion

Although this research does not chart the causal pathways through which sexual harassment and/or sexual assault experiences result in differences in career trajectories, these results highlight how these experiences are associated with adverse career outcomes over time. Findings from this research can inform the Department's systems for supporting the careers of Service members who experience sexual harassment or sexual assault.

## References

Davis, E., Grifka, A., Williams, K., & Coffey, M. (2017). *2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members: Overview report* (Report No. 2016-050). Alexandria, VA: Office of People Analytics. [https://dhra.deps.mil/sites/OPA/opa-survey/Gender%20Relations%20Surveys/Active\\_Duty\\_Members/2016/WGRA1601\\_Overview-Report.pdf](https://dhra.deps.mil/sites/OPA/opa-survey/Gender%20Relations%20Surveys/Active_Duty_Members/2016/WGRA1601_Overview-Report.pdf)

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<sup>6</sup> Including both informal and formal complaints of sexual harassment to leadership, military equal opportunity (MEO) officials, and the Inspector General's office (IG).

<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of these analyses, respondents indicated that they disclosed the situation officially to a DoD authority if they discussed it with a supervisor/chain of command with the expectation of corrective action or they officially reported the situation as possible harassment or sex discrimination. Respondents indicated they disclosed the situation unofficially to a DoD authority if they discussed it with a supervisor/chain of command to get guidance on what to do.



## Model Results

The following tables present the odds ratios for the key predictors of interest in the logistic regression models described in this report, organized by career outcome. Odds ratios less than 1 indicate a negative association and odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association. Table 1 provides the odds ratios associated with the predictors of interest in the models examining separations.

**Table 1.**

***Summary of Logistic Regression Models of Separation from Active Duty Following the 2016 WGRA***

Model	Independent Variable	Groups Tested	Odds Ratio				
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
1	Experienced Sexual Harassment	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment	1.57	1.45	1.29	1.25	1.23
2	Experienced Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Assault	1.70	1.48	1.47	1.30	1.45
3	Experiences of Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment or Assault	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment <i>Only</i>	1.52	1.42	1.26	1.24	1.21
		Experienced Sexual Assault <i>Only</i>	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced <i>Both</i> Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault	2.07	1.76	1.58	1.36	1.43
4	Sexual Harassment Disclosure	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	0.76	0.77	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	0.56	0.59	0.77	0.83	0.83
5	Sexual Harassment Disclosure Type	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to Leadership Unofficially	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	0.75	0.75	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	0.55	0.58	0.76	0.81	NS
6	Sexual Assault Reporting	Experienced Sexual Assault and Reported	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	0.54	0.53	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	0.47	0.44	0.42	NS	NS
7	Sexual Assault Report Type	Filed an Unrestricted Report	Ref				
		Filed a Restricted Report	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	0.57	0.49	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	0.48	0.46	0.39	NS	NS

*Note.* Bolded odds ratios are significant at the  $p < .01$  level. NS = Not Significant. Ref = Reference Category. 2016 WGRA = 2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members. DoD = Department of Defense. Models controlled for active duty members' demographics.

Table 2 provides the odds ratios associated with the predictors of interest in the models examining honorable characterizations of service at separation from active duty.

**Table 2.**

***Summary of Logistic Regression Models of Honorable Characterization of Service at Separation From Active Duty Following the 2016 WGRA***

Model	Independent Variable	Groups Tested	Odds Ratio		
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1	Experienced Sexual Harassment	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	Ref		
		Experienced Sexual Harassment	<b>0.66</b>	NS	NS
2	Experienced Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	Ref		
		Experienced Sexual Assault	NS	NS	NS
3	Experiences of Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment or Assault	Ref		
		Experienced Sexual Harassment <i>Only</i>	<b>0.65</b>	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault <i>Only</i>	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced <i>Both</i> Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault	NS	NS	<b>0.39</b>
4	Sexual Harassment Disclosure	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref		
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	NS	NS	NS
5	Sexual Harassment Disclosure Type	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref		
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to Leadership Unofficially	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	NS	NS	NS
6	Sexual Assault Reporting	Experienced Sexual Assault and Reported	Ref		
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	NS	NS	NS
7	Sexual Assault Report Type	Filed an Unrestricted Report	Ref		
		Filed a Restricted Report	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	NS	NS	NS

*Note.* Bolded odds ratios are significant at the  $p < .01$  level. NS = Not Significant. Ref = Reference Category. 2016 WGRA = 2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members. DoD = Department of Defense. Models controlled for active duty members' demographics.

Table 3 provides the odds ratios associated with the predictors of interest in the models examining promotions.

**Table 3.**  
**Summary of Logistic Regression Models of Promotions Following the 2016 WGRA**

Model	Independent Variable	Groups Tested	Odds Ratio				
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
1	Experienced Sexual Harassment	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment	<b>0.91</b>	<b>0.91</b>	NS	NS	NS
2	Experienced Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Assault	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.79</b>	NS	<b>0.74</b>	NS
3	Experiences of Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment or Assault	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment <i>Only</i>	<b>0.93</b>	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault <i>Only</i>	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced <i>Both</i> Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault	<b>0.74</b>	<b>0.74</b>	NS	NS	NS
4	Sexual Harassment Disclosure	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	<b>1.18</b>	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	<b>1.14</b>	<b>1.21</b>	NS	NS	NS
5	Sexual Harassment Disclosure Type	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to Leadership Unofficially	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	<b>1.23</b>	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	<b>1.16</b>	<b>1.26</b>	NS	NS	NS
6	Sexual Assault Reporting	Experienced Sexual Assault and Reported	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	<b>2.07</b>	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	<b>1.48</b>	<b>2.24</b>	NS	NS	NS
7	Sexual Assault Report Type	Filed an Unrestricted Report	Ref				
		Filed a Restricted Report	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	<b>2.24</b>	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	<b>1.58</b>	<b>2.43</b>	NS	NS	NS

Note. Bolded odds ratios are significant at the  $p < .01$  level. NS = Not Significant. Ref = Reference Category. 2016 WGRA = 2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members. DoD = Department of Defense. Models controlled for active duty members' demographics.

Table 4 provides the odds ratios associated with the predictors of interest in the models examining demotions.

**Table 4.**  
**Summary of Logistic Regression Models of Demotions Following the 2016 WGRA**

Model	Independent Variable	Groups Tested	Odds Ratio			
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
1	Experienced Sexual Harassment	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	Ref			
		Experienced Sexual Harassment	<b>1.56</b>	<b>1.65</b>	NS	NS
2	Experienced Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	Ref			
		Experienced Sexual Assault	<b>1.69</b>	<b>2.16</b>	NS	NS
3	Experiences of Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment or Assault	Ref			
		Experienced Sexual Harassment <i>Only</i>	<b>1.53</b>	<b>1.47</b>	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault <i>Only</i>	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced <i>Both</i> Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault	<b>1.84</b>	<b>2.90</b>	NS	NS
4	Sexual Harassment Disclosure	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref			
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	<b>0.54</b>	NS	<b>0.57</b>	NS
5	Sexual Harassment Disclosure Type	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref			
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to Leadership Unofficially	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	<b>0.55</b>	NS	<b>0.52</b>	NS
6	Sexual Assault Reporting	Experienced Sexual Assault and Reported	Ref			
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	NS	<b>0.30</b>	NS	NS
7	Sexual Assault Report Type	Filed an Unrestricted Report	Ref			
		Filed a Restricted Report	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	NS	<b>0.27</b>	NS	NS

Note. Bolded odds ratios are significant at the  $p < .01$  level. NS = Not Significant. Ref = Reference Category. 2016 WGRA = 2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members. DoD = Department of Defense. Models controlled for active duty members' demographics.

Table 5 provides the odds ratios associated with the predictors of interest in the models examining derogatory clearance actions.



**Table 5.**  
**Summary of Logistic Regression Models of Derogatory Clearance Actions Following the 2016 WGRA**

Model	Independent Variable	Groups Tested	Odds Ratio				
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
1	Experienced Sexual Harassment	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment	<b>1.66</b>	<b>1.52</b>	<b>1.64</b>	NS	NS
2	Experienced Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Assault	<b>2.40</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>1.91</b>	NS	<b>2.10</b>
3	Experiences of Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment or Assault	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment <i>Only</i>	<b>1.56</b>	<b>1.42</b>	<b>1.62</b>	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault <i>Only</i>	<b>2.71</b>	NS	NS	NS	<b>3.76</b>
		Experienced <i>Both</i> Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault	<b>2.57</b>	<b>2.38</b>	<b>2.02</b>	NS	NS
4	Sexual Harassment Disclosure	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>0.52</b>	NS	NS
5	Sexual Harassment Disclosure Type	Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to DoD Authority	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Disclosed to Leadership Unofficially	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Harassment and Did Not Disclose to DoD Authority	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Harassment	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.52</b>	NS	NS
6	Sexual Assault Reporting	Experienced Sexual Assault and Reported	Ref				
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	<b>0.36</b>	<b>0.38</b>	NS	NS	NS
7	Sexual Assault Report Type	Filed an Unrestricted Report	Ref				
		Filed a Restricted Report	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Experienced Sexual Assault and Did Not Report	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Did Not Experience Sexual Assault	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.34</b>	NS	NS	NS

Note. Bolded odds ratios are significant at the  $p < .01$  level. NS = Not Significant. Ref = Reference Category. 2016 WGRA = 2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members. DoD = Department of Defense. Models controlled for active duty members' demographics.