

# U.S. Air Force Academy intervention reduces unwanted sexual contact by over 40 percent

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Sexual assault and sexual harassment are significant problems in the U.S. military and military service academies in the United States. In 2018, 15.8% of female and 2.4% of male cadets and midshipmen across the military service academies reported unwanted sexual contact in the past year. This unwanted behavior can contribute to a variety of negative mental and behavioral health outcomes.

While the military service academies have implemented multiple sexual assault prevention programs and social marketing campaigns to improve awareness of and response to sexual assault, prevention initiatives have been hindered by an absence of evidence from rigorous research about what works.

Eliminating sexual assault in the military is a key focus of the Biden Administration's newly confirmed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. As one of his first actions in office, Austin has ordered a review of military [sexual assault](#) prevention programs.

To address the gap in evidence-based interventions, Dr. Kenneth W. Griffin, professor at George Mason University's College of Health and Human Services, worked with colleagues to rigorously test the effectiveness of the Cadet Healthy Personal Skills (CHiPS) primary prevention program. CHiPS was developed by National Health Promotion Associates (NHPA) and tested in a [randomized controlled trial](#) among cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) by a research team led by Dr. Griffin. The results were published online in

the *American Journal of Public Health* January 21, 2021.

Griffin and colleagues found a more than 40% reduction in unwanted sexual contact among U.S. Air Force cadets who participated in the CHiPS [intervention](#) compared to those who did not participate in the intervention.

"CHiPS is a small group preventive intervention, developed by NHPA for the U.S. Air Force Academy. The program is based on Botvin Life Skills Training, an evidence-based program which has proven effective at preventing [substance abuse](#), violence, and sexual risk taking among adolescents," explains Griffin. "The intervention is designed to positively change [social norms](#) and bystander intervention behaviors surrounding sexual violence; increase knowledge and skills regarding obtaining consent for sexual activities; address the relationship between sexual violence and alcohol and substance abuse; and build social, self-regulation, and healthy relationship skills through interactive learning and behavioral rehearsal scenarios."

Their randomized control study included 832 participants, and the new program was implemented in the summer of 2018. About half of the incoming class of 2021 cadets were assigned to receive the prevention program and half were assigned to a control group.

The CHiPS intervention has been sustained at USAFA and implemented with the incoming classes of cadets each summer since the conclusion of this study. This suggests that the [program](#) is both effective and has high potential for institutionalization.

**More information:** Kenneth W. Griffin et al, Prevention of Unwanted Sexual Contact Among Cadets at the United States Air Force Academy: A Brief Small-Group Intervention, *American Journal of Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2020.306050](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.306050)

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