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Sexual assault circumstances differ for military men, women

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As the military struggles to combat sexual assault, surveys are uncovering stark differences between the attacks against active-duty female service members and those against active-duty men. The differences are forcing defense leaders to come up with more gender-specific ways to treat victims and address the crimes.

One of the bigger challenges is tallying the number of men who have been sexually assaulted or faced unwanted sexual contact, because in many cases males describe the incidents as hazings rather than attacks.

"We're really trying to get to that point where I think we understand what's inappropriate behavior toward females. But we've not gotten to the what's inappropriate toward males," said Jill Loftus, director of the Navy's sexual assault prevention program.

Some differences in sexual assault against each gender:

Against women

— During 2014, nearly 80 percent of the 6,131 victims who filed sexual assault reports were women.

— According to an anonymous survey, 9,600 women said they had experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2014, or nearly 5 percent of the active-duty female force.

— As many as 57 percent of women who said they had experienced unwanted sexual contact also said they believed they faced some type of retaliation.

— Sexual assaults against women usually occur outside of work hours, away from their duty station and alcohol is often involved.

— Twenty-two percent of active duty women have experienced sexual harassment.

— Women are four times more likely to report a sexual assault than men.

Against men

— During 2014, about 20 percent of the 6,131 victims who filed sexual assault reports were men.

— According to an anonymous survey, 10,400 men said they had experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2014, or about 1 percent of the active-duty male force.

— Sexual assaults against men usually occur during work hours, on their base or duty station and they do not often involve alcohol.

— Men were more likely to experience multiple incidents that often involved multiple attackers. And men were far more likely to describe the incident as "hazing intended to humiliate them" and not as a sexual act.

— The survey also indicated that 7 percent of active-duty men experience some type of sexual harassment.

— Because so few men report or admit being sexual assaulted, retaliation numbers are not readily available.

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