

SAFVIC ON THE SCENE

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Sexual Assault in the Military

By: Glenna Tinney, MSW

Overview

The United States military is a microcosm of our larger society with all of the same social issues and problems, including sexual assault. There has been a great deal of media coverage of sexual assault in the military in the past few years. This coverage has used words such as “epidemic” to describe the incidence of sexual assault in the military. “Military sexual trauma (MST)” is the term most often used in the media. It is important to clarify that MST is a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) term that describes a range of behaviors that include sexual harassment and sexual assault. It includes sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that occurred while the veteran was in the military. VA statistics include this entire range of behavior. The Department of Defense (DoD) does not use the term MST. DoD separates sexual harassment and sexual assault and has different programs to respond to each. Therefore, caution should be used when comparing VA statistics on MST to DoD statistics on sexual assault.

There are currently 1.4 million men and women on active duty in the U.S. military. Men constitute the majority (85%) of the active duty force. In an interview in January 2012, Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, reported that 3,191 sexual assaults of both men and women were reported in 2011. This includes only sexual assaults. It does not include incidents of sexual harassment. These assaults occurred within the continental United States, in overseas locations, and in combat zones. Acknowledging that underreporting is an issue, Secretary Panetta went on to say that DoD estimates the number of sexual assaults could be as high as 19,000. These statistics suggest that there are significant numbers of men and women leaving the military who are sexual assault survivors. The VA National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder fact sheet on MST reports that one in five female veterans and one in 100 male veterans screen positive for MST when presenting for health care at a VA facility.

Historical Perspective

I entered the Navy as an active duty social worker in 1980. There were no sexual assault programs in DoD at that time. In some locations, there were memoranda of understanding between military medical treatment facilities (MTFs) and civilian hospitals or rape crisis centers to respond to sexual assault survivors who reported to the military.

In 1994, I went to the Bureau of Naval Personnel to manage the Navy’s Sexual Assault Victim Intervention (SAVI) Program, the first sexual assault program in DoD. At that time, I was involved in developing policies for the SAVI Program. In developing the SAVI Program, we were dealing with issues such as: underreporting, victim blaming, re-victimization, failure to hold sexual assault offenders accountable, disciplinary or legal action against sexual assault survivors for any infractions committed related to the sexual assault (underage drinking, fraternization, adultery), and separation of sexual assault survivors from the military for mental health or disciplinary reasons.

DoD now has a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program with institutionalized policies. Each Service has a SAPR Program with sexual assault response coordinators and volunteer victim advocates throughout the world. However, there continue to be reports of scandal after scandal involving sexual assault in the military ranging from Tailhook in the 1990s to Lackland Air Force Base in 2012. There have also been continuous Congressional hearings addressing sexual assault in DoD, including the military academies.

Military and Civilian Similarities and Differences

According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Website, the United States Department of Justice National Crime Victim Survey for 2006 to 2010 found that there were 207,754 vic-

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NO MORE
TOGETHER WE CAN END
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT

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-tims (age 12 and older) of sexual assault and rape every year during that time frame. This translates into a sexual assault every two minutes. According to a recent survey conducted by the Center for Disease Prevention and Control, one out of every five women will be the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime. Obviously, sexual assault is a huge problem in the civilian community also.

Given the frequency of sexual assault in both the military and civilian communities, why is the outcry from the media, Congress, and the public in general focused on the military? Is the crime of sexual assault more egregious when it occurs in a military setting than a civilian setting? Are the outcomes for survivors different? Let's take a look.

Reporting

Sexual assault is a violent crime where sex is the weapon. It involves the most intimate violation a person can experience. Sexual assault survivors,

whether they are military or civilian, experience guilt and shame and often feel responsible for the assault. Many choose not to report the assault to the authorities. Reasons for not reporting vary, but blaming survivors for the assault and revictimization are alive and well in both the military and civilian systems.

When a person is active duty military, there is little to no separation between her/his private and professional lives. Active duty sexual assault survivors are hesitant to report for fear her/his commanding officer (employer) will find out about the assault. Survivors who report an assault in the civilian system do not usually have to be concerned that her/his employer will be informed of the assault or that it will impact her/his job. Although there is now an option in DoD to make a restricted report, which does not require a report to command or law enforcement, many survivors are still hesitant to report. If the survivor and offender are in the same command, it increases the probability that others will find out.

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For additional information and assistance on sexual assault in the military, please visit the following resources:

[Department of Defense, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office](#)

[Department of Veterans Affairs, Military Sexual Trauma](#)

[Department of Veterans Affairs, Women's Health, Military Sexual Trauma](#)

[Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, DoD Safe Helpline](#)

[Military Rape Crisis Center](#)

UPCOMING CONFERENCE



2013 SAFVIC Statewide Conference on Violence Against Women

STATEWIDE CONFERENCE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
PRESENTED BY SAFVIC

The 2013 SAFVIC Statewide Conference on Violence Against Women will be held in Irving, Texas July 22-24, 2013 at the Omni Mandalay Hotel. This conference is **FREE** for law enforcement personnel (patrol officers, investigators, detectives, etc.) and telecommunicators/9-1-1 Dispatchers to attend.

Selected attendees will receive **FREE LODGING, TRAINING**, and 12 hours TCLEOSE general credit. The conference staff has some AMAZING speakers and training sessions lined up!

Rural counties and counties with a domestic violence fatality are given first priority but we encourage **EVERYONE** to apply! Every application will be considered. There are plenty of seats available!! Submit your application today; space is limited to 200 attendees! <http://www.safvic.org/SAFVIC-VAWT-Info.aspx>

For more information please contact Jennifer Ygnacio or Emely Cordon at (512) 454-8900.

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System Response to Sexual Assault

When reporting a sexual assault, survivors in both the military and civilian systems often feel as if they are treated like offenders instead of crime victims. The approach to investigation seems to begin with the premise that the survivor is lying about what happened. They are often re-victimized by the very people defined to help them. Victim advocates are available in both systems to provide support and assistance. This assistance helps many survivors maneuver the difficult legal maze and connects them with ongoing medical and mental health services but does not usually offset the negative experiences survivors have in both systems.

From day one in the military, a service member is told that she/he can trust other service members, that "they've got your back." This type of trust is fostered because in a combat situation, they have to depend on each other for survival. The dynamic that is encouraged is one of family, "We take care of our own." When a sexual assault occurs involving a service member offender, the sense of betrayal is similar to that which occurs in incest when the offender is a family member. This is especially strong if the offender is someone senior in rank, a supervisor, or even the survivor's commanding officer. When the system then responds by blaming, re-victimizing, and not holding the offender accountable, this has a devastating effect on the survivor's sense of safety, trust, and well-being.

In the military system, a sexual assault survivor may face disciplinary or legal action for infractions that she/he may have committed in the course of the sexual assault. This could include violations such as underage drinking, fraternization, adultery, etc. A sexual assault survivor in the civilian system may be charged with breaking laws such as use of illegal substances, prostitution, making a false police report, etc. The disciplinary or legal action taken against a military sexual assault survivor is documented in her/his service record and can affect future promotions and selection for some positions, which can have a detrimental effect on a person's military career. It is less common in the civilian system for legal action (short of incarceration) to affect a survivor's career or job. In addition, in both systems, action may be taken against the survivor while all too often the offender is not held accountable for the sexual assault.

A military sexual assault survivor may also find that she/he is ostracized, harassed, or assaulted

again within her/his unit and/or command. This is especially true if both the survivor and offender are in the same command. Sometimes factions may form in terms of who believes whom. This type of re-victimization in addition to the initial trauma of the sexual assault can have a detrimental effect on the survivor's physical and mental health to the point that it interferes with her/his ability to function. When that happens, it is not uncommon for a sexual assault survivor in the military system to find herself/himself separated from the military for behavioral or disciplinary problems or because of a mental health diagnosis, even if she/he would like to remain in the military. When separated from the military, veterans often return to the community from which they entered the military where there may or may not be resources to address the trauma.

The Law Enforcement Response

Why is it important for civilian law enforcement personnel to have an understanding of sexual assault in the military? There are over 22 million veterans in the United States with 1.8 million women veterans (8% of the total veteran population). They live in every state and jurisdiction in the country. If one in five female veterans and one in 100 male veterans are survivors, the odds are high that civilian law enforcement personnel will come into contact with military sexual assault survivors in the course of their work.

We know that rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are higher for sexual assault survivors in general than for combat veterans. Of course, it is possible that a military sexual assault survivor may also have had combat trauma and/or some other type of trauma in her/his life. (Research conducted by the Services has shown that military recruits often have trauma backgrounds prior to entering the military.) In addition to PTSD, sexual assault survivors also experience high levels of depression and substance abuse. Their anger, guilt, shame, inability to trust, and self-blame can interfere with the ability to have healthy relationships with others or to maintain steady employment. This constellation of problems can lead to chronic unemployment, homelessness, and potentially run-ins with the legal system.

It is important for law enforcement personnel to screen everyone for military experience. It is also important to screen military personnel and veterans to determine if they are military sexual assault survivors and have protocols in place for more in-depth trauma-informed assessment and/or referral when there is a positive screen.

SAVE THE DATE

13th Annual International Family Justice Center Conference The Power of HOPE

April 16 - 18, 2013
Worthington Renaissance Fort Worth Hotel
Fort Worth, Texas
Featuring: [One Safe Place Tarrant Regional Family Justice Center](#)

Register Today!




One Safe Place



**FEATURED
DVD**



A one night stand far from home goes terribly wrong. As the filmmaker unravels her experience, she decides to confront her attacker.

Told through a “sex-positive” lens, *The Line* is a 24 minute documentary about a young woman – the filmmaker- who is raped, but her story isn’t cut and dry. Not a “perfect victim,” the filmmaker confronts her attacker, recording the conversation with a hidden camera. Sex workers, survivors and activists discuss justice, accountability and today’s “rape culture.” The film asks the question: where is the line defining consent? Shown in film festivals around the world, *The Line* was released in September 2009, and is a top selling film with educational distributor, the Media Education Foundation.

Preview *The Line* [here](#).

This video is available in the [SAFVIC Library](#) for SAFVIC Instructors only.

Featured Agency

Family Crisis Center of the Big Bend

Mission and Service Area

The Family Crisis Center of the Big Bend (FCCBB) is a **non-profit organization serving** victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and violent crime as well as offering other services in support of community well-being. The FCCBB mission is “**Strengthening communities through empowering individuals**”. The primary focus of FCCBB is the elimination of family violence and sexual assault through community education, advocacy for survivors of violence, and crisis intervention services.

The FCCBB has been in existence for more than thirty years, is the only agency of its kind between El Paso, Eagle Pass, Odessa/Midland, the Mexico Border, and is the only Frontier Center in Texas. The service area is very large, covering 22,000 square miles and encompasses Brewster, Presidio, Jeff Davis, Pecos, and Terrell counties in Far West Texas. There are three FCCBB offices in the service area: Alpine and Presidio - full service, emergency shelter facilities, and Terlingua – a non-residential, full service outreach office. The FCCBB also operates the Déjà Vu Resale Shop in Alpine, which supplements revenue for agency operations.

Victim Services

At the FCCBB, highly trained, dedicated staff and volunteers assist clients by assessing individual needs, providing education, information, and identifying options that are best suited for the clients’ circumstances. The FCCBB meets victims with acceptance, non-judgment, and compassion in a supportive process designed to empower them in making their own decisions. Services are always client-centered.

All services are provided free of charge by the FCCBB and include: a **24-hour hotline**; **24-hour emergency shelter** and safe haven for individuals and families in danger; **legal assistance** with trained legal advocates and through agreement with **Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid (TRLA)**; individual and group **counseling**; **emergency transportation**; **crisis intervention**; **safety planning**; **court and medical accompaniment**; **support groups**; **referrals** to services outside the agency; and **personal advocacy**.

Community Education

The FCCBB is a dynamic group with a rich history in taking risks to influence individual and social change. Community education is the most important tool there is for effecting change and creating safe homes and communities. To raise awareness, the FCCBB conducts/hosts **presentations, trainings, and structured**

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WELCOME NEW SAFVIC INSTRUCTORS!



Front Row - Left to Right:

Dennis James, Gonzales CO. Sheriff's
Jeremy Black, Smith CO. Sheriff's Office
Toby Caviness, Northlake College Police Dept.

Middle Row - Left to Right:

Kristy Whitley, Cedar Park Police Dept.
Marian Culver-Kingsbury, Brownsville Police Dept.
Kasey Marshall, Leon Valley Police Dept.
Alvaro Garcia, Palm Valley Police Dept.

Back Row - Left to Right:

Antonio Zarzoza, Hidalgo CO. Sheriff's Office
Darla Fuller, Travis CO. Sheriff's Office
James Womack, Paris Police Dept.
Peter Alvarado, Missouri Police Dept.

We would like to congratulate and welcome our 11 new SAFVIC 24hr Instructors! They recently completed the 40 hour SAFVIC Instructor Course in Austin, Texas on March 18th - 22nd, 2013.

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education for a variety of groups including law enforcement, medical personnel, educators, students, church groups, social service providers, employers/employees and the public in general. Presenters are available by request to groups wanting education about the dynamics and effects of domestic violence or sexual assault on communities and individuals, victim's rights, services, legal information, community dynamics, and a variety of other community health related topics.

Rural Dynamics and Profile in the Community

The FCCBB service area is a diverse expanse of mountains and desert containing scattered small communities and a dispersed, rural population. Within the area are the international border with Mexico, Big Bend National Park, several state parks and lands, Sul Ross State University and units of the state prison system. A variety of federal, state, local, even foreign law enforcement, and criminal justice jurisdictions cover the area. Cultivating contacts and developing close working relationships with these agencies as well as with other social, legal, and medical service providers has been a strong focus of the FCCBB efforts. The competence of and confidence in these relationships is evident in the well-coordinated responses of the partner agencies together in emergencies. The Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), initiated by the FCCBB, is an example of such a successful collaborative effort which includes federal, state, local law enforcement, and criminal justice members, medical professionals and Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE's), mental health agencies, other social service, and victim advocacy groups.

Serving a large rural population requires special effort, creativity, and long distance traveling to get the message out and provide services. For the local communities, the FCCBB offers other essential services not generally funded by our primary grants. Providing outreach services to the community in general raises awareness of the FCCBB by creating opportunities to educate, discuss, and address current community issues such as crime, victims' plight, prevention, health, and other community needs with large, varied groups of people. An example of the many other community services offered is the distribution of USDA/Food Bank commodities at offices and in outreach to the small communities along the border. These activities expose larger numbers of isolated people to the FCCBB and forward the goal of domestic violence/sexual assault education/awareness while helping families and individuals with strained budgets to maintain stability and tranquility.

The FCCBB elevates safety, security, self-sufficiency, independence, and lessens isolation in individuals to achieve a larger goal of creating tranquility, security, and safety in the communities of West Texas.

Family Crisis Center of the Big Bend
Strengthening Communities through
Empowering Individuals
 1 (800) 834-0654
www.familycrisiscenter.homestead.com



"Piecing together the tools needed to effectively investigate and prevent sexual assault, family violence, stalking, & human trafficking."

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Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

The month of April has been designated Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) in the United States. The goal of SAAM is to raise public awareness about sexual violence and to educate communities and individuals on how to prevent sexual violence.

Find out how you can join the conversation! Visit www.nsvrc.org/saam/sexual-assault-awareness-month-home for more information.



IT'S TIME ... TO TALK ABOUT IT!
 Talk early, talk often. Prevent sexual violence.