

Markers of Sexual Violence in the Military and Institutional Failure to Punish

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This poster discusses markers for interpersonal sexual violence in the military, the potential for institutionalized systemic biases including the effect of legal mandates for prioritizing mission, and clarification on strict rules protecting due process in justifying court-martial proceedings in the military (Kimerling et al., 2007; Morris, 2010; Warner & Armstrong, 2020).
- ❖ Particular attention is given to characteristics of the complainant's interactions with command as well as the utility of screening measures used by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) (Swecker et al., 2020; Kimerling et al., 2007; SAPRO, 2014, 2020; Warner & Armstrong 2020).

RELEVANT RESEARCH

- ❖ Current literature suggests that military tries to punish cases of sexual assault to prevent sexual assault, however, there is often insufficient evidence for the prosecution of these crimes (Swecker et al, 2020; SAPRO, 2014, 2020; Warner & Armstrong, 2020).
- ❖ Low conviction rates might indicate systemic problems: legal mandates for mission prioritization, inconsistent level of engagement from the chain of command, and the way that sexual crime is addressed internally (Warner & Armstrong, 2020).

RELEVANT RESEARCH

- ❖ There are conflicting opinions that argue that the military has followed a judicial system of law and that the media portrays it negatively (Warner & Armstrong, 2020).
- ❖ A recent report of the Fort Hood independent review committee assessed the impact of Fort Hood command concerning sexual/harassment assault response and prevention and culture regarding safety, welfare, and readiness of soldiers and units (Swecker et al, 2020).

RELEVANT RESEARCH

- ❖ The report found critical mistakes involving both the health and the safety of soldiers. Military readiness seemed to have been prioritized over respect and integrity of military personnel (Swecker et al., 2020).
- ❖ As a result of this negligence, victims of sexual assault have demonstrated significant deleterious health and mental health concerns correlated with sexual assault (Kessler, 1995; Kang et al., 2005 as cited in Kimerling et al., 2007).
- ❖ Graphic below from DoD (2020).

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Among significant mental health concerns, data has demonstrated that rapes have the highest conditional risk for PTSD, which is compared to "as high or higher than combat exposure" (Kessler, 1995; Kang et al., 2005 as cited in Kimerling et al., 2007).

Systemic Biases in the Military

- ❖ Service personnel feel pressure and fear of retaliation.
- ❖ US Military is highly gendered institution.
- ❖ US military often tries to adjudicate and punish reported cases of sexual assault yet lacks grounds for prosecution due to multiple systemic issues (e.g., skepticism, blame, not enough evidence).
- ❖ Socioeconomic and political context of criminal justice system and roles.

Utility of Current Screening Measures

- ❖ VHA MST screener (Kimerling et al., 2007), CAPS-5, PHQ9

Programs in place for Accountability, Advocacy, and Victim Assistance

- ❖ CATCH a Serial Offender Program
- ❖ SAAITF Sexual Assault and Accountability and Investigation Task Force
- ❖ Safe Unit Climate; Beyond MST mob. App
- ❖ Safe Helpline (SAPRO, 2020)

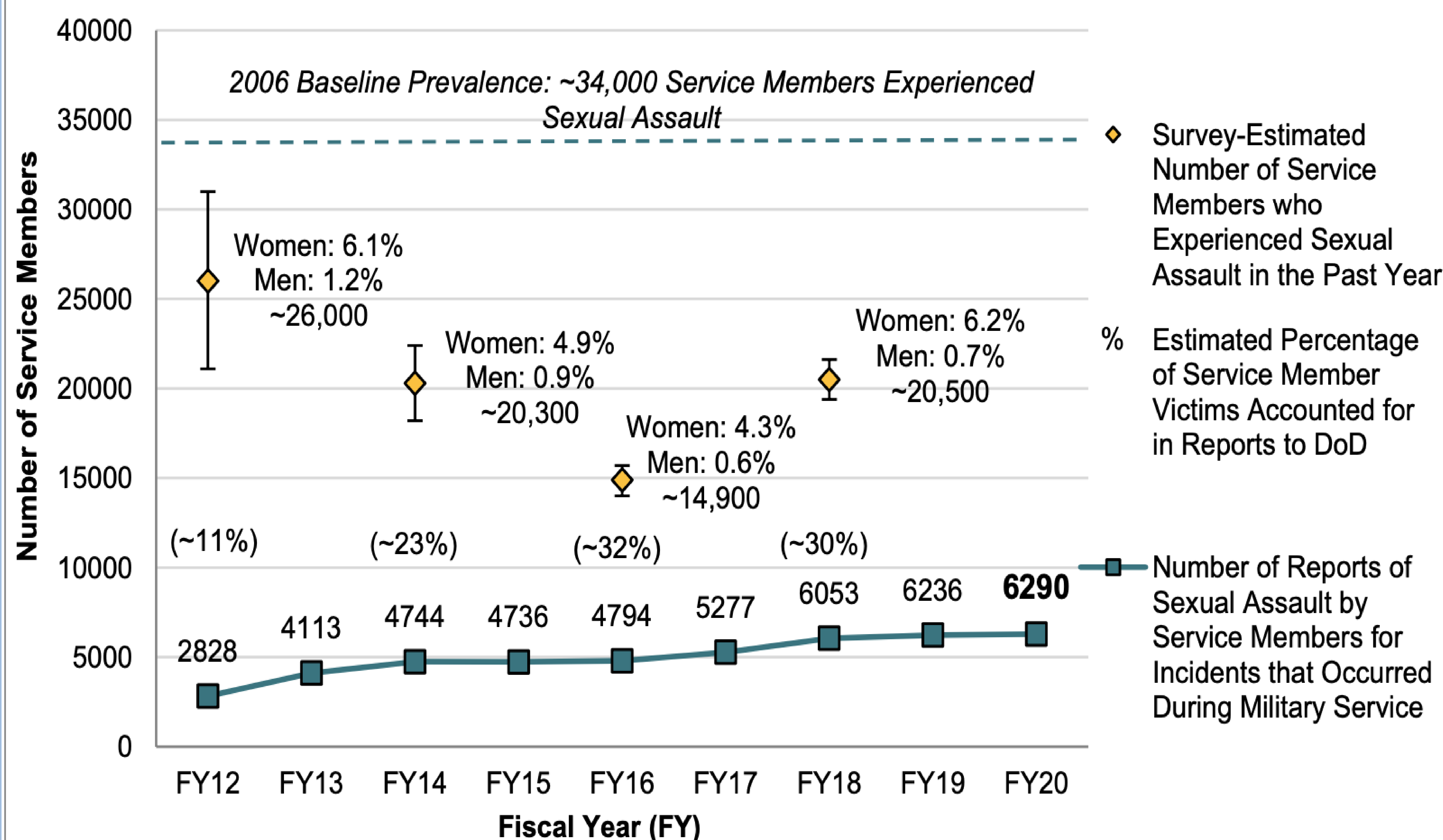


Figure 1. Active Duty Estimated Biennial Prevalence Compared to Annual Reporting of Sexual Assault

References

