



## OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

MAY 14 2024

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Department's response to section 1631 of the Ike Skelton National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 (Public Law 111-383), "Annual Report Regarding Sexual Assaults Involving Members of the Armed Forces and Improvement to Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program," as amended by section 537 of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry NDAA for FY 2021 (Public Law 116-283), "Modification of Annual Report Regarding Sexual Assaults Involving Members of the Armed Forces," which requires the Secretary of Defense to submit to the Committees on the Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representatives an annual report on sexual assaults involving members of the Armed Forces during the preceding year, including reports from each of the Military Departments, is enclosed.

The *Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military (FY 2023 Annual Report)* presents statistics and analysis of reports of sexual assault and discusses policy and program improvements to the Department's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program. The numerical data and statistics contained in this report respond to reporting requirements outlined in the NDAA's for FYs 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018, and 2021.

This year, the Department also administered the 2023 *Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Military Members (WGR)*, which informed the *FY 2023 Annual Report*. The survey results reflected a significant decrease in the prevalence of sexual assault when compared to the last *WGR* administered in 2021. Specifically, there was an estimated 19 percent decrease for women of unwanted sexual contact during the previous year when compared to the 2021 *WGR* results. There was also a downward trend in the estimated prevalence of unwanted sexual contact for men. The decrease equates to nearly 7,000 fewer Service members indicating they experienced unwanted sexual contact on the survey. Although the decrease in the estimated prevalence rate of unwanted sexual contact is a step in the right direction, the Department must continue to assist our leaders in maintaining this momentum into the upcoming years.

The Department encourages greater reporting to promote more help-seeking by Service members and to hold alleged offenders appropriately accountable. The Department generates estimated reporting rates using prevalence data from the *WGR* and reporting data from the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database. In FY 2023, the estimated reporting rate increased

5 percent, from 20 percent in 2021 to 25 percent with 7,226 Service members reporting sexual assault incidents that occurred while in the military.

Throughout FY 2023, the Department continued to support and execute the Secretary of Defense's initiatives to reduce sexual harassment and sexual assault across the Armed Forces, including implementing 32 of the 82 recommendations made by the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military as approved by the Secretary of Defense. Additionally, the establishment of the Offices of Special Trial Counsel fundamentally changes the disposition of sexual assault allegations in the military. The Department is also making steady progress in the hiring of a dedicated prevention workforce to advise commanders in the development of strategies and actions to reduce sexual harassment and sexual assault and other harmful behaviors.

Thank you for your continued strong support for our Service members. Be assured, the Department remains strongly committed to eliminating sexual harassment and sexual assault from our formations. I am sending similar letters to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashish S. Vazirani', with a stylized flourish extending to the right. The signature is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Ashish S. Vazirani  
Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of  
Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Enclosure:  
As stated

cc:  
The Honorable Roger F. Wicker  
Ranking Member



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

MAY 14 2024

The Honorable Mike D. Rogers  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
U.S. House of Representative  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Sincerely,



Ashish S. Vazirani  
Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of  
Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Enclosure:  
As stated

cc:  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member



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OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

The Honorable John Tester  
Chairman  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

MAY 14 2024

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Ashish S. Vazirani  
Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of  
Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Enclosure:  
As stated

cc:  
The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Ranking Member



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The Honorable Mike Bost  
Chairman  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
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Ashish S. Vazirani  
Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of  
Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Enclosure:  
As stated

cc:  
The Honorable Mark Takano  
Ranking Member





# Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military

Fiscal Year 2023





*Department of Defense  
Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military  
Fiscal Year 2023*

The estimated cost of this report for the Department of Defense is approximately \$3,269,000 for the 2023 Fiscal Year. This includes \$2,425,000 in expenses and \$844,000 in DoD labor.

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Annex 2: Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military: Implementation Update

**Reporting Requirement:**

- Section 1631 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011, as amended, requires the Department to provide an annual report on sexual assault involving members of the United States Armed Forces. This report satisfies that requirement for Fiscal Year 2023. Unless specified otherwise, all periods cited pertain to the Fiscal Year (October 1 to September 30).
- The Department uses the term “sexual assault” to refer to a range of crimes, including rape, sexual assault, forcible sodomy, aggravated sexual contact, abusive sexual contact, and attempts to commit these offenses, as defined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

**This Year’s Findings:**

- In the survey conducted for 2023, 6.8 percent of active duty women and 1.3 percent of active duty men indicated experiencing unwanted sexual contact in the year prior to being surveyed. The 2023 prevalence rate for women represents a statistically significant decrease from the 8.4 percent measured in 2021. The prevalence rate for men in 2023 trended downward from the 1.5 percent measured in 2021, but this decrease was not statistically significant.
- The Department received a total of 8,515 reports of sexual assault in 2023, including 5,536 Unrestricted Reports and 2,979 Restricted Reports.
- Based on survey and reporting data, the Department estimates that about 25 percent of Service members who indicated experiencing unwanted sexual contact in 2023 reported their incident to a Department authority. This estimated reporting rate is an increase from the 20 percent of Service members estimated to have reported in 2021.
- In 2023, the Department had sufficient evidence to take disciplinary action in 1,821 cases of individuals investigated for an allegation of sexual assault.

(Continued on next page)

## Executive Summary

This year’s Annual Report provides an update on Department of Defense efforts to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military, includes sexual assault and sexual harassment reporting data, and details efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assault and sexual harassment in Fiscal Year 2023. Unless otherwise specified, all periods cited in this report pertain to the Fiscal Year (October 1 to September 30).

### Summary of Fiscal Year 2023 Data

The Department assesses progress with sexual assault via two primary metrics:

- Prevalence (i.e., estimated total of Service members experiencing sexual assault during the prior year, as measured by scientific surveys – desired state is *decrease*)
- Reporting rate (i.e., estimated percentage of victimized Service members making Restricted and Unrestricted Reports – desired state is *increase*)

In Fiscal Year 2023, the Department of Defense Office of People Analytics fielded the 2023 *Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Military Members (Active and Reserve Components)*. This congressionally mandated survey is administered every two years and provides the Department with official estimates of the prevalence of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and unwanted sexual contact<sup>1</sup> in the military. Key results from this year’s survey are summarized below.

**The estimated prevalence of unwanted sexual contact for active duty women significantly decreased in Fiscal Year 2023, as compared to survey results from Fiscal Year 2021. The estimated prevalence of unwanted sexual contact trended downward for active duty men.** According to the 2023 survey, the estimated prevalence of unwanted sexual contact for active duty women significantly decreased from 8.4 to 6.8 percent since the survey was last administered in Fiscal Year 2021. The decrease in the estimated prevalence of unwanted sexual contact was mostly driven by lower

<sup>1</sup> “Unwanted sexual contact” is the survey term used to represent the range of penetrative, non-penetrative, and attempted sexual crimes prohibited by military law.

- The 2023 survey also found that rates of sexual harassment significantly decreased for both men and women. The survey found that an estimated 24.7 percent of active duty women (down from 28.6 percent in 2021) and an estimated 5.8 percent of active duty men (down from 6.5 percent in 2021) indicated experiencing an incident of sexual harassment in the year prior to being surveyed.
- To date, significant implementation actions have been undertaken or completed for 32 approved recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military. Implementation of the remaining 50 approved recommendations is in progress.

#### Way Forward

- Sustain implementation of the approved Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military recommendations.
- Complete Command Climate Assessments and Comprehensive Integrated Primary Prevention Plans to promote healthy, ready workplaces.
- Continue actions to hire skilled professionals to build out the Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce.
- Sustain efforts to professionalize and strengthen the Sexual Assault Response Workforce.
- Implement policy updates in initial and annual Sexual Assault Prevention and Response training.

Full report is available at [www.SAPR.mil](http://www.SAPR.mil).

rates for junior enlisted women and those under the age of 21. However, junior enlisted women and younger women still remained at greater risk for unwanted sexual contact, compared to women of greater rank and women over the age of 25.

For men, the estimated prevalence of unwanted sexual contact trended downward from 1.5 percent in Fiscal Year 2021 to 1.3 percent in Fiscal Year 2023. However, the observed decrease for men was not statistically significant.

Based on these rates, the Department estimates that about 29,061 active duty Service members (15,201 active duty women and 13,860 active duty men) experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact in the year prior to being surveyed, which is a decrease of 19 percent from the 35,875 active duty Service members (19,255 active duty women and 16,620 active duty men) estimated to have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact in the 2021 survey.

**A greater proportion of Service members reported their incident of sexual assault in 2023.** In Fiscal Year 2023, the Military Services received 7,266 sexual assault reports from active duty Service members for an incident they experienced during military service. Based on 2023 survey prevalence rates, this indicates a reporting rate of 25 percent. In other words, about 1 in 4 Service members reported their sexual assault to a Department of Defense authority. This estimate is up from the 1 in 5 Service members estimated to have reported their incident of sexual assault in Fiscal Year 2021.<sup>2</sup>

**The estimated prevalence rate of sexual harassment decreased significantly for both men and women.** This year's survey found that an estimated 24.7 percent of active duty women (down from 28.6 percent in the 2021 survey) and an estimated

5.8 percent of active duty men (down from 6.5 percent in the 2021 survey) indicated experiencing an incident of sexual harassment in the year prior to being surveyed. Sexual harassment complaints also decreased. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Department received 2,975 sexual harassment complaints, down from 3,174 in 2022.

**Climate factors associated with sexual assault and sexual harassment showed modest improvements indicating some progress.** Survey results found that Service members held more positive perceptions of their immediate leadership, perceived their organization's climate

<sup>2</sup> The Department also receives reports from other persons about Service members alleged to have committed sexual assault. All told, the Department received 8,515 reports of sexual assault this year, a 5 percent decrease from the 8,942 received in 2022.

as less tolerant of sexual harassment, and expressed greater levels of trust in the military's response to sexual assault, as compared to similar measurements obtained in the 2021 survey.

## **Implementing Recommendations by the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military as approved by the Secretary of Defense**

Secretary of Defense Austin directed the establishment of a 90-day Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military in February 2021 to drive meaningful change in how the military prevents, responds to, and ensures accountability for sexual assault and sexual harassment. In July 2021, the Commission published its report, making recommendations to improve climate and culture, prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment, provide better care for victims, and hold perpetrators appropriately accountable. In September 2021, the Secretary of Defense approved a tiered implementation roadmap for implementation of the Commission's recommendations, as approved by the Secretary of Defense.

In 2023, the Department continued to build on the progress it made in 2022 by completing implementation of 32 of the 82 approved recommendations outlined in the roadmap. Implementation of the remaining 50 approved recommendations is in progress.

## **Executing Department-Directed Sexual Assault Prevention and Response and Sexual Harassment Initiatives**

In Fiscal Year 2023, the Military Departments and National Guard Bureau completed, or are making progress on implementing initiatives responsive to actions directed by the Department. This report includes an overview of the progress being made by these organizations.

### **Way Forward**

Further progress in countering sexual assault will only come through continued focus on creating healthy climates, expanding integrated primary prevention efforts, improving victim assistance, and holding alleged offenders appropriately accountable. Over the past year, the Department of Defense has continued the implementation of the approved recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military. The Department will continue implementation of the approved recommendations as rapidly as possible, in accordance with the implementation roadmap.

The Department will also continue to assess organizational climate using tools such as On-Site Installation Evaluations and the *Defense Organizational Climate Survey*.

The Department will continue the hiring of skilled professionals to build out its Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce and ensure the workforce completes required training and necessary credentialing.

The Department will also continue efforts to strengthen and professionalize the Sexual Assault Response Workforce to support the Military Services and the National Guard Bureau.

The Department is committed to providing leaders with the resources to combat sexual assault and sexual harassment.

## Introduction

The Department of Defense (DoD) is required by Section 1631 of the Ike Skelton National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, as amended, to submit a yearly Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military to the Committees on Armed Services and Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives.

### Report Focus Areas

This report summarizes key data and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) efforts by the Department. This year's report provides updates on actions the Department has taken in the following focus areas:

- Prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment;
- Executing Department-directed SAPR initiatives;
- Preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment; and
- Providing a quality response.

### Report Appendices

This report contains information on sexual assault reports made during FY23 and also serves as the Department's assessment of the Military Services' prevention and response efforts from October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. The SAPR program addresses unwanted sexual contact (USC) and penetrating sexual crimes by adults against adults, as defined in Articles 80, 120, and 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

Additional accomplishments, activities, and outreach conducted by the Department can be found in Appendix A. Detailed statistical data and analysis is located in Appendices B, C, and D. A summary of data from the Department's Safe Helpline (SHL) is at Appendix E. Appendix F contains FY23 data concerning formal, informal, or anonymous sexual harassment complaints, which falls under the purview of the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Appendices G and H contain data on sexual assault of a spouse or intimate partner and child sexual abuse, reported to the Family Advocacy Program (FAP). A list of acronyms used in this report is in Appendix I.

### Report Enclosures

Enclosed with this report are the reports from the Department of the Army (Enclosure 1), Department of the Navy (Enclosure 2), Department of the Air Force (Enclosure 3), and the NGB (Enclosure 4), as required by Section 1631 of the NDAA for FY11, as amended.

### Report Annexes

#### ***2023 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey (WGR) of Military Members***

Section 481 of title 10, United States Code, requires the Department to conduct the *WGR* every two years. The Office of People Analytics (OPA) administers the survey to estimate past-year prevalence of unwanted sexual contact, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination in the Active and Reserve Components. Military members complete the survey online and respond to survey questions about their experience of USC, outcomes associated with reporting an incident of USC, and gender-related Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) violations. The *2023 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Military Members (2023 WGR): Overview Report*, which

describes the survey methodology and presents prevalence data for both Active and Reserve Component members, can be found at Annex 1 of this report.

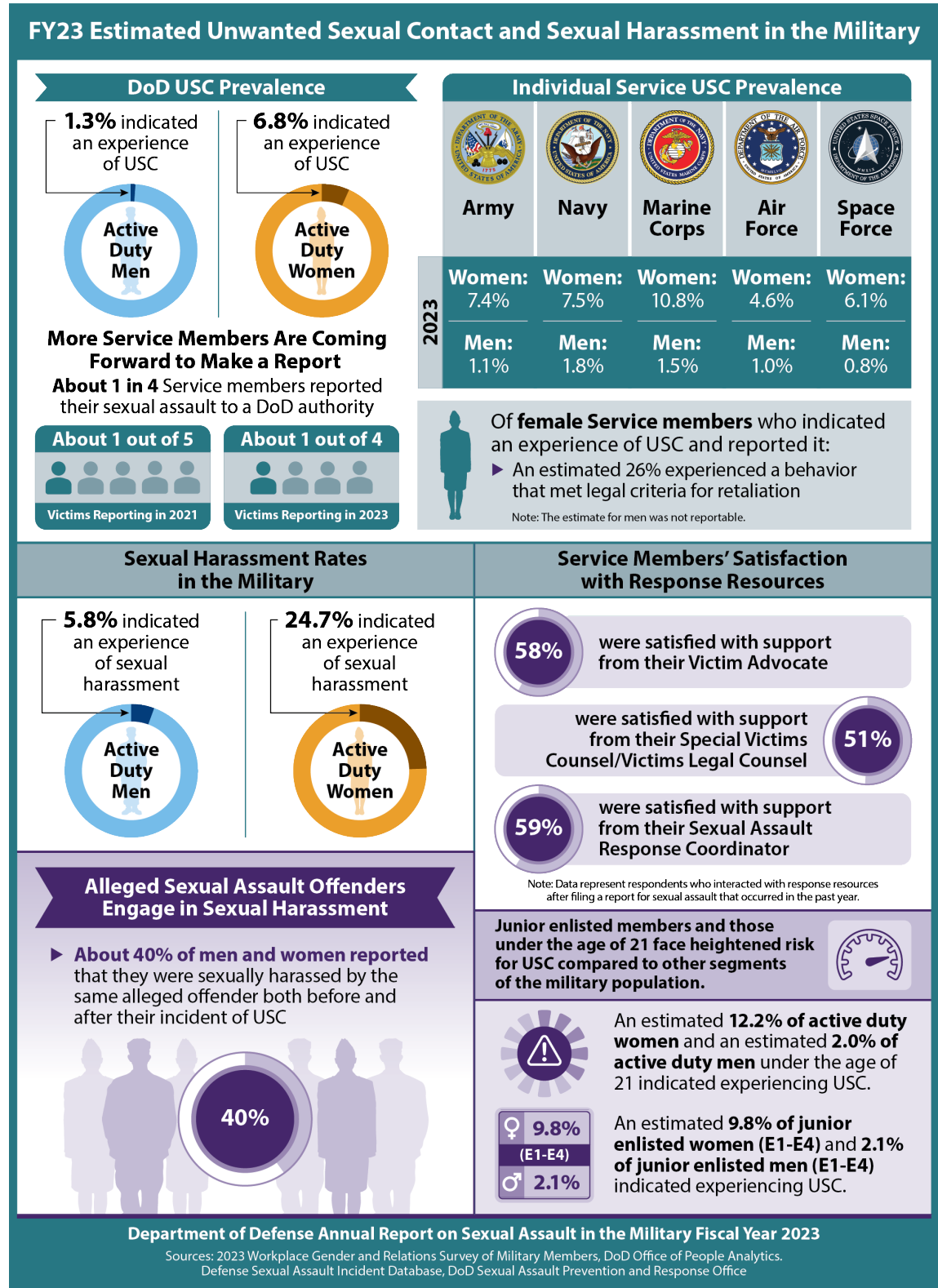
### **Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC): Implementation Update**

The Department continues to implement historic reforms to fundamentally change how sexual assault is addressed in the military. In February 2021, Secretary of Defense Austin launched the IRC to recommend new approaches to sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response. In July 2021, the Commission published its report, providing the Department with 83 recommendations to improve accountability, prevention, culture and climate, and victim care. In September 2021, the Secretary of Defense approved a tiered implementation roadmap for implementation of the IRC recommendations, as approved by the Secretary of Defense. A summary of DoD's actions to date to implement the approved recommendations is at Annex 2.



# Spotlight: FY23 Data

Below is key data concerning estimated sexual assault (as measured through the USC metric) and sexual harassment from FY23.



**Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military Fiscal Year 2023**

Sources: 2023 Workplace Gender and Relations Survey of Military Members, DoD Office of People Analytics, Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database, DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office

# Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

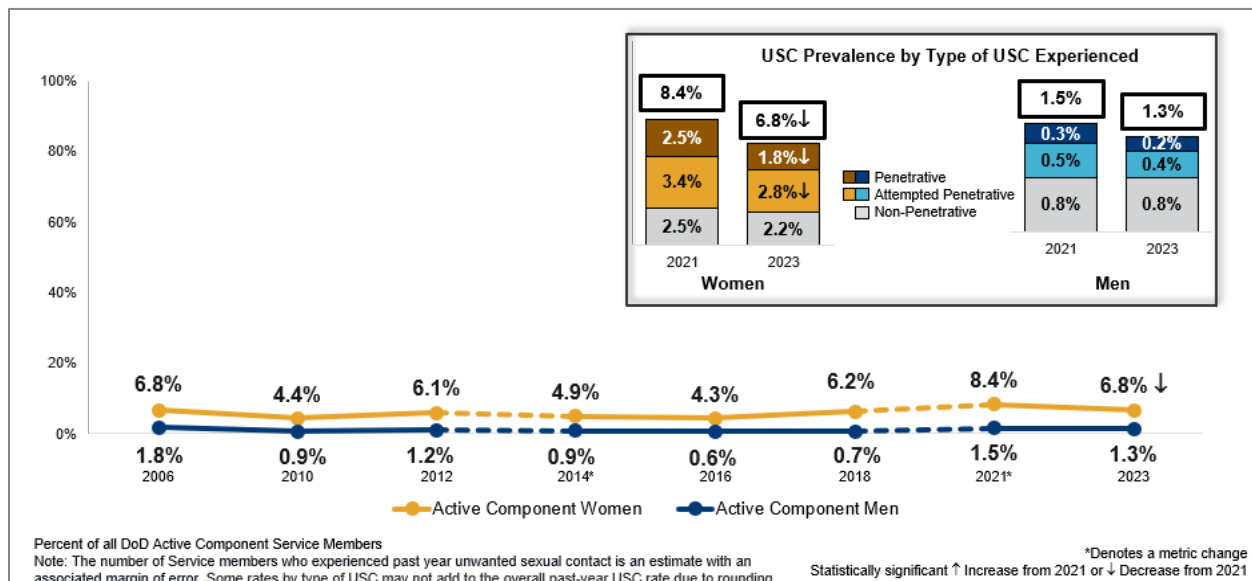
The Department conducts the confidential *WGR* survey so that it can better understand the impact of sexual assault on the military population. These survey data are important because civilian research and the Department's own data show that reports to police and other authorities underestimate the extent of sexual assault in U.S. civilian and military populations. Individuals who experience sexual assault often do not report an incident due to a variety of reasons.

The *WGR* survey results are weighted to be representative of the entire active duty force. This scientific approach allows the Department to estimate the number of active duty Service members who experienced sexual assault in the year prior to being surveyed.

## Prevalence of Sexual Assault in FY23 in the Active Duty Population

The Department's estimates of the percentage of Service members who experienced USC is reflected in Figure 1. An estimated 6.8 percent of active duty women and 1.3 percent of active duty men indicated experiencing USC in the year prior to being surveyed. The 2023 prevalence rate for women represents a statistically significant decrease from the 8.4 percent measured in 2021. The estimated prevalence rate for men in 2023 trended downward from the 1.5 percent measured in 2021, but this decrease was not statistically significant. The decreased rate for women was primarily driven by statistically significant decreases in penetrative and attempted penetrative USC. Based on these estimated rates, the Department estimates 29,061 active duty Service members experienced sexual assault in FY23 (approximately 15,201 women and 13,860 men).

**Figure 1: Sexual Assault/USC Past Year Prevalence Estimates**



## **2023 WGR Reveals Demographics of Victims and Alleged Offenders in the Active Duty**

The 2023 *WGR* found that junior enlisted women (E1-E4) and women under the age of 21 were significantly less likely to experience USC in the prior year, as compared to rates obtained in FY21. An estimated 9.8 percent of junior enlisted women and 12.2 percent of women under the age of 21 experienced USC in FY23, down significantly from 12.9 percent and 19.3 percent, respectively, measured in FY21. While rates decreased, junior enlisted and younger women (those under the age of 25) remained significantly more likely to experience USC than women of more senior rank and older age. There was no statistically significant change in estimated prevalence of USC for junior enlisted men, though the rates did trend downward from 2.4 percent in FY21 to 2.1 percent in FY23.

The 2023 *WGR* found the characteristics of incidents have not substantively changed since FY21. Ninety-one percent of women and 46 percent of men identified their alleged offender as male. Furthermore, about 11 percent of women and 6 percent of men indicated at least one alleged offender was an intimate partner.<sup>3</sup>

## **Command Climate Factors Associated with Sexual Assault**

The 2023 *WGR* indicated that climate factors associated with sexual assault and sexual harassment showed modest improvements compared to the 2021 *WGR*. The 2023 *WGR* results found that Service members held more positive perceptions of their immediate leadership, were more likely to trust in the military system's response to sexual assault and perceived their organization's climate as less tolerant of sexual harassment. Additionally, the 2023 *WGR* found that perceptions of gender discrimination varied among men and women, with a statistically significant decrease in prevalence of gender discrimination among women but no change for men, compared to rates from the 2021 *WGR*.

### **Service Members Held More Positive Perceptions of Immediate Leadership**

Trust in leadership increased for both men and women in FY23 compared to FY21. Seventy-nine percent of men and 71 percent of women agreed that they trusted their supervisor and their supervisor ensured all assigned personnel were treated fairly. Seventy-eight percent of men and 72 percent of women agreed that their supervisor evaluated their work performance fairly.

### **Service Members More likely to Trust in Military System**

Trust in the military system's response to sexual assault also increased for both men and women in FY23 compared to FY21. Sixty-one percent of men (up from 58 percent in FY21) and 38 (up from 34 in FY21) percent of women trusted the military system to protect their privacy following an incident of sexual assault, while 66 percent of men (up from 64 percent in FY21) and 43 percent of women (up from 40 percent in FY21) trusted the military system to ensure their safety following the incident. Lastly, 66 percent of men (up from 63 percent in FY21) and 43 percent of women (up from 39 percent in FY21) trusted the military system to treat them with dignity and respect.

## **Sexual Harassment**

The 2023 *WGR* found that sexual harassment decreased significantly for both men and women. An estimated 5.8 percent of men (60,330 Service members) indicated experiencing sexual harassment in the year prior to being surveyed, down from 6.5 percent of men in FY21. For

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<sup>3</sup> An intimate partner refers to current and former spouses, someone with whom the victim shares a child, or a current or former dating relationship. Rates of intimate partner USC were unchanged from FY21.

women, an estimated 24.7 percent (55,464 Service members) indicated experiencing sexual harassment in the year prior to being surveyed, down from 28.6 percent in FY21. In FY23, the statistically significant decrease in the estimated prevalence of sexual harassment for women was driven by significant rate decreases among enlisted women and women under 25. For men, in FY23, the statistically significant decrease in the estimated prevalence of sexual harassment was driven by significant rate decreases among junior enlisted men and men under 21.

Most Service members identified the alleged offenders as men and often of the same rank as the victim or some other higher ranking military member in their unit. However, an estimated 44 percent of women and an estimated 35 percent of men identified at least one alleged offender as someone in their chain of command.

Of those reporting sexual assault, approximately 40 percent of women and 36 percent of men reported they were sexually harassed by the same alleged offender before and after the USC incident. Among those who were sexually harassed prior to the USC incident, 7 percent of women and 6 percent of men made a sexual harassment complaint before the alleged USC incident occurred.

### Gender Discrimination

The 2023 *WGR* found that an estimated 13.2 percent of women (29,610 Service members) indicated experiencing gender discrimination in the year prior to being surveyed, a statistically significant decrease from 16.1 percent in FY21. The decrease in the estimated prevalence of gender discrimination was driven by a significant decrease among enlisted women and those under the age of 36. However, senior enlisted and junior officer women were significantly more likely than other women to experience gender discrimination.

The 2023 *WGR* found that an estimated 1.4 percent of men (14,452 Service members) indicated experiencing gender discrimination in the year prior to being surveyed, unchanged from FY21. Moreover, statistically significant increases in the estimated prevalence of gender discrimination were observed for men who were officers and 36 years and older.

### Prevalence of Sexual Assault in FY23 in the Reserve Component

Results from the 2023 *WGR* provided prevalence estimates for USC, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination for members of the Reserve Component.

The 2023 *WGR* found that the estimated rates of USC for women trended downward from 4.6 percent in FY21 to 3.9 percent in FY23, although this was not a statistically significant change. For men, the 2023 *WGR* found that an estimated 0.7 percent of men experienced USC, a rate unchanged from FY21.

According to the 2023 *WGR*, rates of sexual harassment decreased among members of the Reserve Component. An estimated 13.8 percent of women experienced sexual harassment in FY23, a statistically significant decrease from 16.4 percent in FY21. For men, the estimated rates of sexual harassment decreased from 3.5 percent in FY21 to 2.9 percent in FY23, although this was not a statistically significant decrease.

The 2023 *WGR* showed that the estimated rates of gender discrimination decreased significantly among women. Data from the 2023 *WGR* reflects that an estimated 8.5 percent of women (down from 9.9 percent in FY21) indicated experiencing gender discrimination, whereas an estimated 0.8 percent of men indicated experiencing gender discrimination, unchanged from FY21.

# Executing Department-Directed SAPR and Sexual Harassment Initiatives

The Department is dedicated to advancing a military culture free from sexual assault and sexual harassment. All Service members should be able to work and live in a respectful, inclusive environment while serving and defending our Nation. To that end, this section summarizes Department efforts in FY23 responsive to the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R))-directed actions.

## **Memorandum 1: “Actions to Address and Prevent Sexual Assault in the Military” (dated September 1, 2022)**

Following the release of the FY21 Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, the Secretary of Defense directed the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the NGB to execute the following actions:

1. Ready the Offices of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC);
2. Hire, train, and empower the prevention workforce;
3. Professionalize and strengthen the sexual assault response workforce;
4. Conduct new On-Site Installation Evaluations (OSIEs); and
5. Support the 2023 Force-wide climate assessment.

FY23 progress on the implementation of the above action items is provided below.

### **Action item 1: Ready the OSTCs**

To provide expertise in prosecutorial decisions and improve Service member trust in the military system, the Secretaries of the Military Departments ensured that the OSTCs were fully operational by December 28, 2023. To do so, the Military Departments recommended a Lead Special Trial Counsel (STC), issued Standard Operating Procedures, executed training and education policy, and approved a joint memorandum of understanding with all other Service OSTCs.<sup>4</sup>

### **Action Item 2: Hire, Train, and Empower the Prevention Workforce**

The mission of the Integration Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW) is to reduce the prevalence of sexual assault, domestic abuse, child abuse, harassment, retaliation, and suicide. This workforce, while relatively new, is having a practical impact on the ground, supporting leaders through the Command Climate Assessment (CCA) process, and wielding existing resources to address known risk and protective factors. To date, nearly 1,000 prevention workforce personnel are on board and over 650 have been credentialed.

Military Department and NGB progress on carrying out this Secretary of Defense-directed action is detailed below.

**Department of the Army:** The Army published orders that outlined a phased approach to hiring for the integrated prevention advisory groups (I-PAGs). The Army also provided Phase II hiring

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the OSTCs do not make prosecution decisions for non-federalized National Guard Service members.

guidance, prioritized tactical level workforce hiring, clarified position grades, communicated workforce distribution, and addressed initial operating capability roles and responsibilities.

**Department of the Navy:** The Navy continued establishing a dedicated IPPW. Ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders clarified the roles and responsibilities of the IPPW, created clear command and control processes, and identified optimal staffing allocation. All dedicated IPPW personnel at strategic, operational, and tactical levels fall into credentialing levels three through five<sup>5</sup> and were required to complete SPARX training and continuing education requirements as outlined in DoDI 6400.11, “DoD Primary Prevention Policy for Prevention Workforce and Leader.”

The Marine Corps incorporated an integrated primary prevention approach in collaboration with Primary Prevention Integrators (PPIs) and Embedded Preventive Behavioral Health Capability personnel for command training initiatives. Headquarters Marine Corps, and Marine and Family Programs Division developed training to onboard newly hired PPIs.

**Department of the Air Force:** The Air Force continued hiring of IPPW staff and employed a tracking system to ensure IPPW personnel received appropriate training needed for credentialing.

**National Guard Bureau:** The NGB made strides in IPPW hiring and held three IPPW training events with presenters from the Office of the Secretary of Defense experts in prevention research. The NGB also published the Integrated Primary Prevention Strategy/Framework to provide direction on the National Guard integrated prevention system. The NGB also released implementation guidance to support the states in hiring their prevention workforce, using updated position descriptions.

The Department continues to capitalize on a suite of tools to further prepare its prevention workforce, as well as expand university and community engagements, and collaboration with DoD and the Military Services.

### **Action Item 3: Professionalize and Strengthen the Sexual Assault Response Workforce**

The Department continued efforts to professionalize and standardize the Sexual Assault Response Workforce (SARW). Additional information on this effort is included in the “Providing a Quality Response – Response Workforce Implementation” section of this report.

### **Action Item 4: Conduct New OSIEs**

In September 2022, Secretary of Defense Austin authorized the Department to conduct OSIEs, which are coordinated site visits to a select group of military sites/ships to assess the development of capabilities to effectively prevent harmful behaviors, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, suicide, retaliation, domestic abuse, and child abuse. OSIEs aim to support command climate improvements and identify best practices and current gaps in prevention efforts.

DoD conducted the second biennial OSIEs from January to May 2023 at 13 sites and 12 ships. Sites were selected using a five-factor risk index that assessed a range of risk and protective factors across the social ecology that may impact an installation or ship’s risk for harmful behaviors. The visits culminated in the 2023 OSIE Summary Report, which was released on November 9, 2023.

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<sup>5</sup> Integrated Primary Prevention Levels 2-5 must hold the DoD Credentialing Program for Prevention Personnel (D-CPP) credential to perform IPP duties. For more information, see [www.prevention.mil/workforce/](http://www.prevention.mil/workforce/).

### **Action Item 5: Support the 2023 Force-Wide Climate Assessment**

In support of the 2023 Force-wide climate assessment, the administration of the 2023 *WGR* overlapped with the first annual *DEOCS* fielding period. To maximize participation, Service members were provided the opportunity to seamlessly transition to the 2023 *WGR* after completing the *DEOCS*.

### **Memorandum 2: “Actions to Address and Prevent Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military” (dated April 26, 2023)**

Following the release of the FY22 Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, the USD(P&R) directed the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the NGB to execute the following actions:

1. Continue executing the approved IRC recommendations according to the implementation guidance issued in 2021;
2. Employ tracking mechanisms which identify civilian positions in prevention, sexual assault response, and military justice workforces and facilitate reporting on their staffing levels;
3. Develop strategies to support the 2023 Force-wide climate assessment; and
4. Implement new measures to enhance victim care and support.

FY23 progress on the implementation of the above action items is provided below.

### **Action Item 1: Continue Executing the Approved IRC Recommendations According to the Implementation Guidance Issued in 2021**

Implementation of the approved IRC recommendations represents the most historic and substantial changes to the Department’s efforts to better address and eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment. In FY23, the Military Departments and the NGB continued to build on the progress made in FY22 to implement the approved IRC recommendations. To date, significant implementation actions have been undertaken or completed for 32 approved IRC recommendations. Implementation of the remaining 50 approved recommendations directed to DoD is in progress. For more information, see Annex 2: IRC Implementation Update.

### **Action Item 2: Employ Tracking Mechanisms which Identify Civilian Positions in Prevention, Sexual Assault Response, and Military Justice Workforces and Facilitate Reporting on their Staffing Levels**

To ensure sustained progress on staffing the civilian positions established to address sexual assault in the military, the USD(P&R) directed the Military Departments and the NGB to utilize position designator codes for these positions.

Military Department and NGB progress on carrying out this USD(P&R)-directed action is detailed below.

**Department of the Army:** The Army established additional personnel tracking capabilities using the business management capabilities in the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database (DSAID) to give Lead Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs), Program Managers, and the Army SHARP Director visibility of caseloads. It also prioritized prevention workforce hiring. I-PAG position descriptions included parenthetical labels in accordance with Department guidance to support full transparency and visibility of civilian pay by position and by location.

**Department of the Navy:** The Navy classified strategic, operational, and tactical level IPPW positions; used position designator codes to facilitate timely and accurate tracking of workforce

staffing levels; and used monthly spreadsheets and data analysis results to track the progress and challenges in hiring the prevention and response workforce.

The Marine Corps used a specific project code as a position designator code to track SAPR-funded civilian positions and staffing levels and used project management and project managers to ensure that workforce staffing levels are reaching the agreed upon end strength in a timely manner.

**Department of the Air Force:** The Air Force continued to track hiring, which included utilizing Manpower Position Control Numbers for every billet to ensure timely and accurate tracking of workforce staffing levels and conducting a bi-weekly review of hiring progress.

**National Guard Bureau:** The NGB established a bi-weekly call schedule with State Human Resources personnel to maintain visibility of the IPPW program, review vacancies, track job postings, and current hiring status; used monthly reports to verify the availability of funds in the correct line of accounting to hire prevention personnel; and used position designator codes to help ensure the NGB received prompt and accurate tracking of workforce staffing levels.

### **Action item 3: Develop Strategies to Support the 2023 Force-Wide Climate Assessment**

The Departments employs multiple tools to assess organizational climate, such as the *DEOCS* and *WGR*. This year, the Military Departments and the NGB encouraged Service member participation in the 2023 *WGR* and annual *DEOCS* using social media platforms, email communications, flyers, posters, webinars, teleconferences, and briefings.

### **Action Item 4: Implement New Measures to Enhance Victim Care and Support**

The safety and treatment of Service members deciding to report an incident remains one of DoD's top priorities. To standardize and facilitate oversight and management of the support rendered to Service members making Unrestricted Reports of sexual assault and associated retaliation allegations, the USD(P&R) directed the mandatory use of three DoD Forms.

Military Department and NGB progress on carrying out this USD(P&R)-directed action is detailed below.

**Department of the Army:** During Quarterly Case Management Group (CMG) meetings, the Lead SARC reviews Defense Department (DD) Forms 2910-5, 2910-6, and 2910-7 with the Sexual Assault Review Board (SARB) Chair, SARB Board Members, and all Command Teams to support full implementation of the forms. Across the Army, Installation Commanders and SARB Chairs implemented use of all three forms and store them in DSAID.

**Department of the Navy:** The Navy hosted webinars on the DD Form 2910 series for SAPR personnel. DD Forms 2910-5 and 2910-6 were used as checklists and verification for SARCs and installation commanders, ensuring that all meeting requirements are met for each Case Management Group meeting. DD Form 2910-7 is currently being utilized as a checklist for High-Risk Response Team (HRRT) meetings. The Department of the Navy is using DSAID to store the completed documents.

**Department of the Air Force:** The Air Force provided direction and notification on the updated DD Form 2910 series; provided virtual and recorded training sessions available to all SAPR personnel on the new forms; and held a recurring monthly call to discuss any new or ongoing challenges that may arise. The appropriate use of forms and compliance with SAPR processes and procedures are integrated into foundational SARC and SAPR Victim Advocate (SAPR VA) courses.

**National Guard Bureau:** The NGB disseminated the forms and information on their use to SAPR personnel. The NGB Joint Initial SAPR Course was updated to ensure all newly



assigned SARCs would receive the current information on how to complete the forms and store them safely until DSAID started capturing the forms.

## Preventing Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Preventing sexual assault remains one of the Department's top priorities. When instances of sexual assault occur, they leave lasting, harmful effects on Service members, erode unit cohesion, and undermine mission readiness. The Department works to significantly reduce, with the goal to eliminate, sexual assault in the military. The following section includes significant DoD efforts to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment during FY23:

1. IPPW;
2. Training the Prevention Workforce;
3. Support to the Defense Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct (DAC-PSM); and
4. Integrated Prevention Research Agenda.

### 1. IPPW

Based on approved recommendations from the IRC, DoD created the IPPW to prevent multiple harmful behaviors—including sexual assault, harassment, domestic abuse, child abuse, and suicide. The IPPW works with leaders to build healthy climates and create environments free from abuse and harm.

The Department is in the process of hiring over 2,000 skilled professionals to make up this new workforce at military installations around the world. The new IPPW will (1) be staffed with skilled professionals trained in primary prevention, (2) promote the health of their military community, (3) partner with leaders to implement prevention activities, (4) evaluate potential options and advise leaders on data-driven decision making, and (5) collaborate with other program specialists and offices focused on harmful behaviors. Other activities accomplished in FY23 include:

- The DoD Credentialing Program for Prevention Personnel (D-CPPP) was launched in July 2023, and over 600 integrated primary prevention personnel are now credentialed. The D-CPPP is the first of its kind integrated prevention credential designed to standardize and professionalize this workforce across the Department.
- To facilitate outreach and hiring, the Department conducted several outreach events and activities at universities and professional organizations. It also launched prevention.mil, a LinkedIn page.

### 2. Training the Prevention Workforce

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Training and Education Center of Excellence (SAPRTEC) became operational in January 2023, addressing approved IRC recommendation 4.4.a, "Establish a Defense Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Center of Excellence that administers a core curriculum of trauma and response training for all SAPR VAs, SARCs, chaplains, and other response personnel." SAPRTEC also facilitates IPPW onboarding training. Below are prevention-focused education and training efforts that occurred in FY23:

- **IPPW Training:** SAPRTEC assumed responsibility for and continued the monthly delivery of the Prevention of Harmful Behaviors in the Military course. This instructor-led course provides foundational knowledge to perform integrated primary prevention core functions, including conducting needs assessments, planning and implementing an integrated and

comprehensive prevention approach, and evaluating processes and outcomes. Per DoDI 6400.11, all IPPW personnel Levels 2-5 are required to take this course.

- **Webinars:** SAPRTEC hosted a series of ten webinars addressing three main content areas:
  1. Prevention and Intervention Strategies – Addressing suicide, intimate partner violence, and other harmful behaviors, particularly through community and organizational approaches;
  2. Research, Evaluation, and Planning – Involving community-based research, evaluation techniques, and developing integrated prevention plans;
  3. Safe Environments and Policy Implementation – Emphasizing the creation of secure online spaces, applying policies to practice, and conducting organizational climate assessments to foster safe and supportive communities, both digitally and within military contexts.

The ten webinars provided approximately 23 hours of prevention education to the Department. Hundreds of personnel attended the live webinars and the recordings received approximately 1,400 page views resulting in more than 1,300 certificates of completion. These certificates provided documentation of continued education for the DoD Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program (D-SAACP) and the D-CPPP.

- **SPARX Connection.** In accordance with DoDI 6400.09, SPARX Connection provides a community of practice to foster collaboration and learning among DoD prevention professionals. Service members and DoD civilian employees who are members of SPARX Connection have access to prevention resources from a variety of policy areas, including child abuse and neglect, domestic abuse, harassment, sexual assault, and suicide. During FY23, the community grew to over 2,500 members with participation from all Military Departments, the National Guard, and the Coast Guard. Community content includes nearly 200 curated resources, recorded webinars on key prevention concepts, and a discussion forum in support of new integrated prevention personnel, program specialists, and individuals seeking to learn more about prevention efforts within the Department.

### 3. Support to the DAC-PSM

FY23 was the first full year of operation for the DAC-PSM, an independent Federal Advisory Committee for the prevention of sexual misconduct. During FY23, the DAC-PSM held four public meetings, which included sessions in December, two meetings in March and September, at which the Committee received briefings by the Office of the Secretary of Defense policy offices and the Military Services on issues related to the Committee’s mission.

In January 2023, the USD(P&R), the DAC-PSM sponsor, requested the Committee undertake a training study. In that study, the Committee reviewed sexual assault and sexual harassment training provided to junior enlisted Service members because those Service members are at greatest risk for experiencing sexual misconduct and also comprise the largest overall segment of the DoD population. In June 2023, the Committee published its report (“The Department of Defense’s Training of Junior Enlisted Service Members: An Analysis of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Training for DoD’s Most At-Risk Population”).<sup>6</sup> Also in January 2023, the USD(P&R) approved the establishment of two subcommittees: Metrics and Performance Subcommittee and Prevention Training and Activities Subcommittee.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on this report and other DAC-PSM documentation and reports, see: <https://www.sapr.mil/?q=dac-psm>.

In late summer 2023, the Prevention Training and Activities Subcommittee began a study to examine the delivery of prevention instruction in professional military education for junior noncommissioned officers and junior officers. The members of the Metrics and Performance Subcommittee spent late FY23 building their understanding of the Department's approach to evaluation.

#### **4. Integrated Prevention Research Agenda**

In FY23, the Department published its annual research agenda as required by Section 549A of the NDAA for FY22. The research agenda focuses on primary prevention of harmful behaviors, such as sexual assault, harassment, domestic abuse, child abuse and neglect, and suicide.

### **Providing a Quality Response**

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When Service members report a sexual assault, the Department strives to provide a quality response that includes crisis intervention and trauma-informed, gender-responsive recovery services. The following section provides a discussion on:

1. FY23 Reporting Data;
2. Sexual Assault Response-Related 2023 *WGR* Results
3. Strengthening, resourcing, and professionalizing the Response Workforce;
4. Victim Assistance Offered through DoD SHL;
5. Response-Related Policies; and
6. Launch of the Sexual Violence Support and Experiences Study (SVSES).

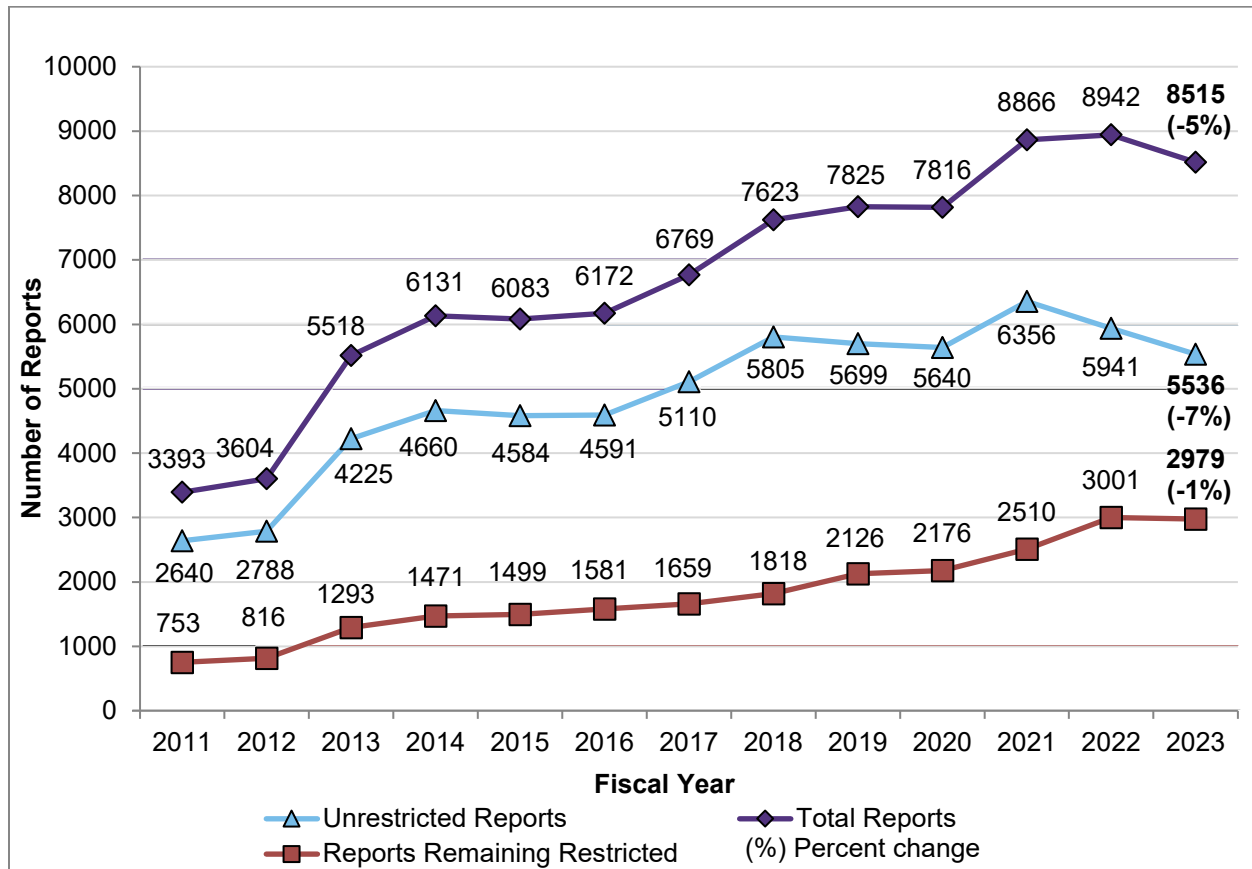
#### **1. FY23 Reporting Data**

DoD encourages greater reporting to promote help-seeking among Service members and to hold alleged offenders appropriately accountable. Overall, reports of sexual assault decreased in FY23. The Department received 8,515 reports of sexual assault involving Service members as either victims or subjects, which is a 5 percent decrease from reports made in FY22 (Figure 2 below). Reports of sexual assault are categorized as either Restricted or Unrestricted. Of the 8,515 reports received in FY23, 2,979 reports remained Restricted at the end of the year, approximately a 1 percent decrease from the number remaining Restricted in FY22. Of the 2,979 reports remaining Restricted, 309 reports (10 percent) involved incidents that occurred prior to Service members' military service. Of the 8,515 reports, 5,536 reports were Unrestricted, a 7 percent decrease from the number of Unrestricted Reports in FY22.<sup>7</sup> Of the 5,536 Unrestricted Reports, 232 reports (4 percent) involved incidents prior to military service. Figure 2 displays the trend in Unrestricted and Restricted Reporting from FY11 to FY23.

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<sup>7</sup> Beginning with the implementation of DSAID in 2014, DoD has extracted and analyzed data six weeks after the end of each FY to allow sufficient time for data validation. DSAID is a "live" database, and its records change daily to reflect case status. During this six-week period, 39 additional Restricted Reports converted to Unrestricted. After a report converts from Restricted to Unrestricted, all data associated with the report is then counted in the Unrestricted Report category. These 39 reports that were made during the FY converted to Unrestricted in the six-week period after the end of the FY and are therefore included with the 621 report conversions.

**Figure 2: Reports of Sexual Assault Made to DoD, FY11-FY23**



However, data from the 2023 *WGR* show that the estimated reporting rate in FY23 trended upward. The 7,266 reports from Service members represents about 25 percent of the Service members indicating an experience of sexual assault in FY23 (Figure 3 below). This is an increase from the 20 percent reporting rate measured in FY21. In other words, an estimated 1 in 4 Service members reported their experience of sexual assault to DoD authorities in FY23, compared to 1 in 5 Service members in FY21.

**Figure 3: Estimated Number of Service Members who Indicated an Experience of USC or Sexual Assault in the Past Year Compared to the Number of Service Members Who Made Reports of Sexual Assault for Incidents that Occurred during Military Service, FY11-FY23**

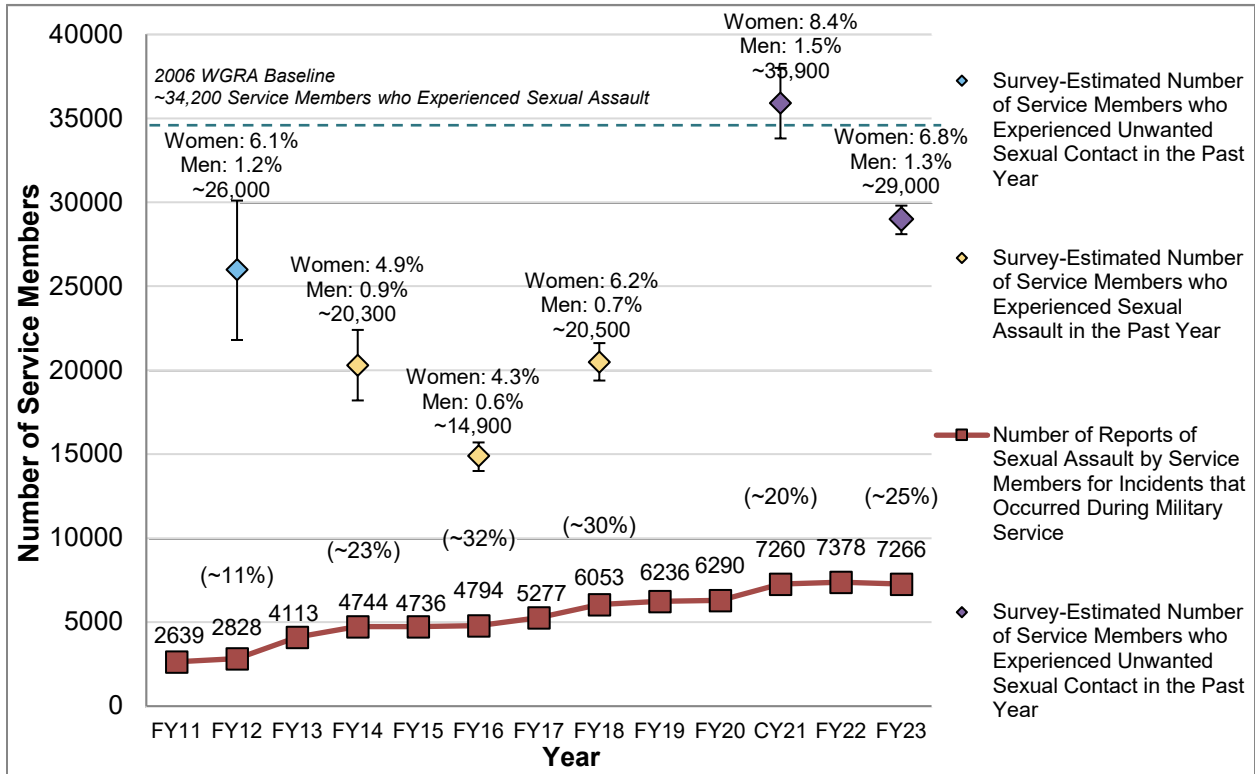


Table 1 provides a breakdown of reports by who reported, type of report, and whether the report was for an event that occurred prior to military service. Equivalent tables by Military Service can be found in Appendix B: Statistical Data on Sexual Assault.

**Table 1. Sexual Assault Reports by Victim and Military Status, FY23**

	Unrestricted Reports	Restricted Reports	Total Reports
<b>Total Reports of Sexual Assault</b>	<b>5,536</b>	<b>2,979</b>	<b>8,515</b>
Reports Made by Service Members	4,887	2,920	7,807
Service Member Reports for Incidents that Occurred <b>Prior</b> to Military Service	232	309	541
Service Member Reports for Incidents that Occurred <b>During</b> Military Service	4,655	2,611	7,266
Reports Made by Non-Service Members	610	49	659
DoD Civilian	40	11	51
DoD Contractor	14	1	15
Other U.S. Civilian	519	37	556
Foreign National/Military	37	0	37
Relevant Data Not Available	39	10	49

The Department offers Service members the opportunity to make an Unrestricted or a Restricted Report of sexual assault. About a fifth of Service members making Restricted Reports converted to Unrestricted Reports and participated in the military justice process. The

Military Services initially received 3,600 Restricted Reports from Service members in FY23. Of the 3,600 Service members who made initial Restricted Reports, 621 (17 percent) chose to convert to an Unrestricted Report in FY23. These 621 converted Restricted Reports are now counted in the 5,536 Unrestricted Reports received in FY23. The other 2,979 reports remained Restricted at the end of the year.

Commanders had sufficient evidence to take disciplinary action in 63 percent of accused members' cases. Every decision to take disciplinary action is based on evidence gathered during an independent investigation by a Military Criminal Investigative Organization (MCIO) and the preferences of the victim, to include their willingness to participate in the legal process. This year, the Department had sufficient evidence to take disciplinary action in 1,821 cases. Disciplinary action was not pursued in 1,013 cases due to command action being precluded or command respecting victims' desired non-participation. About two percent of subject cases were unfounded, meaning evidence existed to find that a crime did not occur or that the accused did not commit the crime.

On December 28, 2023, the OSTCs reached full operational capacity and assumed responsibility for making prosecution decisions for specified crimes, including sexual assault, domestic abuse, and child abuse. Outcomes for cases adjudicated by the OSTCs will be reported in the FY24 Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military.

## **2. Sexual Assault Response-Related 2023 WGR Results**

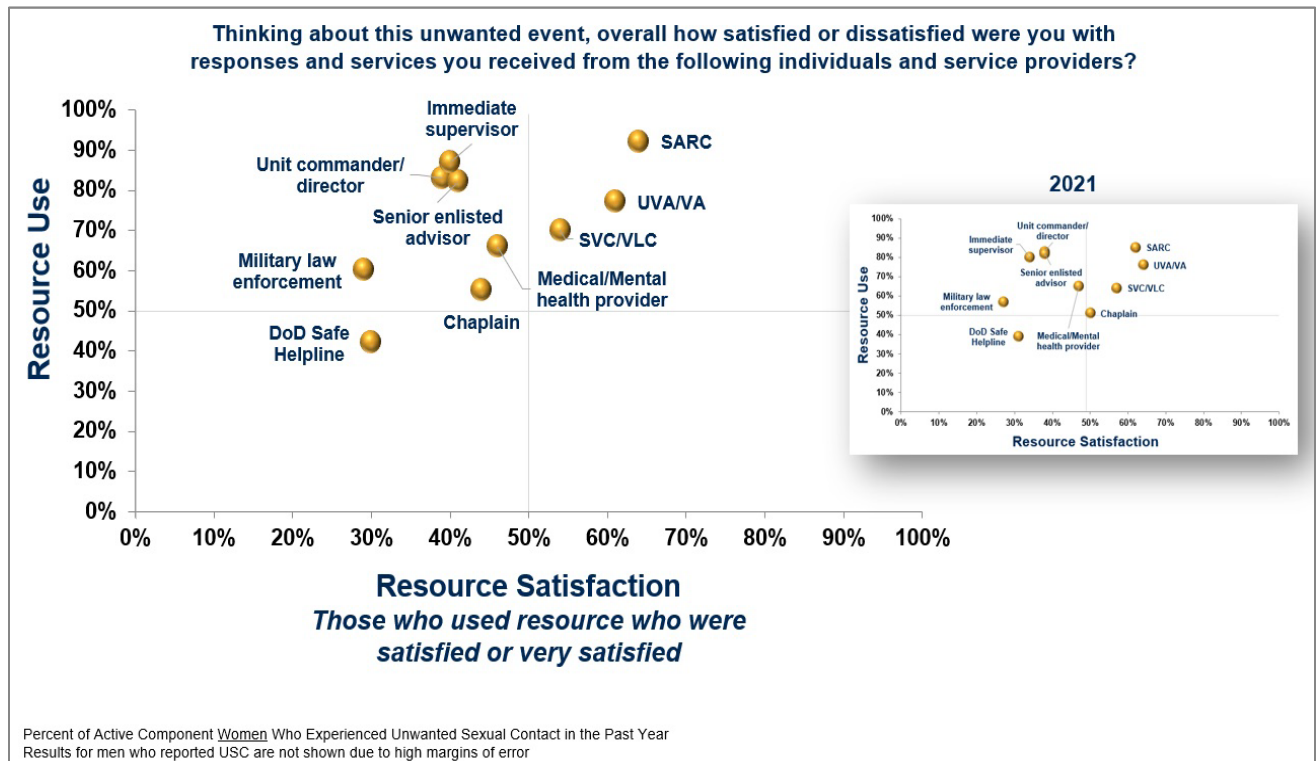
### **Service Members' Reasons for Not Reporting**

The 2023 *WGR* found that the most common reason provided for not reporting USC differed for women and men. Half of women (50 percent) indicated they did not think anything would be done by reporting the incident while over half (52 percent) of men thought the incident was not serious enough to report. Despite these differences, the top three reasons provided for not reporting were consistent between men and women: (1) did not think anything would be done; (2) thought it was not serious enough to report; and (3) worried about potential negative consequences from military coworkers or peers. Reasons for not reporting in FY23 were consistent with FY21 survey results. However, the 2023 *WGR* found that aspects of the climate related to reporting, including trust in leadership, trust in the military system, and perceptions of tolerance for sexual harassment, significantly improved from FY21 to FY23.

### **Service Members Indicated No Overall Change in Satisfaction with Support Services this Year**

The Department aims to provide gender responsive, culturally competent, recovery oriented support and care to Service members reporting an incident of sexual assault. In FY23, 92 percent of active duty women who indicated experiencing sexual assault and made a report indicated interactions with SARCs, with 64 percent indicating they were satisfied with the support they received, which is similar to usage (85 percent) and satisfaction (62 percent) ratings received in FY21. Moreover, 77 percent indicated using Unit Victim Advocate (UVA)/Victim Advocate (VA) services, and 61 percent indicated their satisfaction. The services of Special Victim Counsel were also highly used and rated. Other support service use and satisfaction ratings are included in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Satisfaction with Responses/Services Received**



### 3. Strengthening, Resourcing, and Professionalizing the Response Workforce

Of the 82 Secretary of Defense-approved IRC recommendations for the Department’s implementation, several recommendations drive critical changes to the Sexual Assault Response Workforce (SARW). In the past year, the Department and the Military Services worked to further develop, field, and sustain a highly skilled, specialized response workforce capable of providing high quality victim assistance to Service members.

DoD aims to strengthen the sexual assault response workforce through the use of a Direct Hiring Authority. Hiring qualified, full-time civilian personnel provides the most consistent assistance to victims. Assistance from collateral duty personnel will remain, but use of personnel who are assigned sexual assault response responsibilities as a collateral duty will be limited to ships, submarines, and hard to fill locations.

Finally, implementation of the “No Wrong Door” approach ensures that those who have experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment, or domestic abuse receive the appropriate care, response, and support when seeking assistance. In FY23, the Military Departments and the NGB have implemented the “No Wrong Door” approach or made progress toward implementing it.

### 4. Victim Support Offered through the DoD SHL

The DoD SHL is the Department’s sole crisis support service specially dedicated to members of the DoD community affected by sexual assault. The service is confidential, anonymous, secure, and available at all hours of the day. The availability of SHL ensures that all victims have a place to safely disclose their assault, express concerns, and obtain information. As such, this resource is often a first step in the reporting process for many victims and a key support for

those who might not otherwise reach out for help through face-to-face military channels. The Department leverages SHL as an accessible point-of-entry for the military community that facilitates sexual assault reporting to SARCs and SAPR VAs.

In FY23, 25,783 users (17,080 online users and 8,703 phone users) contacted SHL for services. Of the 833 sessions in which an event was discussed and a user status was disclosed, 81 percent of users disclosed they were victims. Some users called on behalf of victims to learn how they could support and help prevent re-victimization. Additional data on SHL can be found in Appendix E.

### **Expansion of DoD Safe HelpRoom Sessions**

In FY23, the DoD Safe HelpRoom played a crucial role in assessing the viability of virtual peer-to-peer support. This platform offers a secure, moderated space for military sexual assault survivors to engage, share, and support one another, effectively navigating the challenges of geographical, temporal, and stigma-related barriers that limit access to conventional support. An element of the Safe HelpRoom Program is the Local Safe HelpRoom (LSHR). The LSHR uses licensed clinical social workers to moderate Safe HelpRoom sessions using a survivor-centered peer support model. It supports best practices; fosters clear communication between SARCs and SAPR VAs and their communities; and incorporates evidence-informed support into sessions, thus reinforcing a commitment to fostering a safe, private, and nurturing environment for survivors.

## **5. Published Response-Related Policies**

### **Safe-to-Report Policy**

The Safe-to-Report Policy prescribes the handling of alleged collateral misconduct involving a Service member who is the victim of an alleged sexual assault and is applicable to all members of the Armed Forces (including members of the Reserve and National Guard) and cadets and midshipmen at the Military Service Academies. All Military Services and the NGB have Safe-to-Report policies in place.

The Safe-to-Report policy requires the assessment of the victim's alleged collateral misconduct against aggravating and mitigating circumstances in sexual assault cases, which includes:

- Victim's age and military experience level;
- Whether the subject is in a position of authority over the victim or a higher grade than the victim;
- Whether the subject engaged in actions to stalk, haze, harass, coerce, and/or otherwise influence the victim to engage in sexual behavior;
- Whether the alleged collateral misconduct was known to command prior to the report of sexual assault, and if not known, the likelihood that the alleged collateral misconduct would have otherwise been discovered, but for the victim disclosing or reporting the sexual assault; and
- Victim engaging in misconduct after the sexual assault, which may be related to symptoms of trauma.

If the alleged collateral misconduct is assessed to be:

- **Minor collateral misconduct:** Victims will not be subject to discipline for minor collateral misconduct pursuant to this policy.



- **Non-minor collateral misconduct:** Victims can be disciplined, but commanders still have the discretion to not discipline.

With the OSTCs reaching full operational capability on December 28, 2023, the OSTCs now have exclusive authority over “covered offenses” (e.g., sexual assault, retaliation) and may exercise authority over “related offenses,” including collateral misconduct allegedly committed by an adult sexual assault victim.

### **Catch a Serial Offender (CATCH) Program**

Updates in the June 14, 2023, memorandum, “Updated Catch a Serial Offender Procedures and New DD Form 2910-4,” directed needed procedural updates to the CATCH Program and authorized the use of DD Form 2910-4, “Catch a Serial Offender (CATCH) Program Explanation and Notification Form for SAPR-Related Inquiry (SRI) CATCH Entries.” The necessary revisions to the CATCH procedures aligned with the expanded eligibility for CATCH as provided for in the November 10, 2021, Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum, “Updates to Department of Defense Policy and Procedures for the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program and Adult Sexual Assault Investigations.”<sup>8</sup>

The June 2023 memorandum also established a process for eligible adult sexual assault victims to submit a CATCH entry without first having to file an official report of sexual assault. This is in support of an approved IRC recommendation to expand access to CATCH. Only Service members who disclose a sexual assault but do not file an official report will have the option to make a SAPR-Related Inquiry (SRI) CATCH entry in DSAID.

Additionally, in FY23, the CATCH Program received 695 submissions from victims who had previously filed a Restricted Report or Unrestricted Report across the Military Services and NGB, as well as non-reporters engaging with the CATCH program through a SRI as of July 2023. CATCH submissions resulted in 46 matches during FY23. Since its launch in August 2019, the CATCH Program has received 2,309 total victim submissions, resulting in 109 matches as of September 30, 2023.

### **Convalescent Leave Policy for Service Members Recovering from Sexual Assault**

In response to the approved IRC recommendation for “non-chargeable time off,” Manpower & Reserve Affairs released the memorandum, “Clarification of Convalescent Leave Policy for Service Members Recovering from Sexual Assault,” on October 20, 2022. This memorandum clarifies existing policy for convalescent leave and emphasizes that commanders should allow Service members to attend, “in a normal duty status” during “normal duty hours,” any scheduled medical or non-medical appointments, services, or counseling related to their sexual assault incidents in order to support them in their recovery.

Commanders and military treatment facility (MTF) directors are authorized to grant convalescent leave (non-chargeable) to Service members for their treatment and recuperation from an incident of sexual assault based on a recommendation of a medical or mental health care provider or sexual assault medical forensic examiner (SAMFE). Such leave may be approved to start immediately following the release from a medical facility, the completion of a sexual assault forensic examination (SAFE), or the completion of an appointment with a health care provider after a sexual assault incident is reported. Hospitalization is not required to authorize convalescent leave.

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<sup>8</sup> This memorandum is available at <https://www.sapr.mil/latest-policy-updates>.

## 6. Launch of the SVSES

In order to continue improving DoD's support services and accountability processes, it is important to hear from Service members. Traditionally, the Department has collected feedback from Service members at a single point in time. However, perceptions and experiences may change over time. The SVSES, launched during FY23, is a continuous effort to gather information on Service member experiences, attitudes, and satisfaction with the sexual assault response system and military justice processes.

The SVSES allows the Department to learn directly from Service members about their experiences with reporting sexual violence, and, specifically, sexual assault. Service members who join the study take a 30-minute initial survey followed by a series of less than 10-minute follow-up surveys. All surveys are confidential and ask questions about Service member satisfaction with support services, aspects of the military justice process, and questions about Service member health, well-being, and career progression.

By the end of FY23, a total of 931 Service members (770 Active component members and 161 Reserve component members) completed the initial survey. The majority of these respondents had made an Unrestricted Report prior to entering the study. Follow-up surveys began being sent in September 2023, and 291 Service members completed a follow-up survey by the end of FY23. Respondents who entered the study in FY23 and those who are continuing to enter will receive follow-up surveys every 90 days until they opt out of the study.

## Way Forward

Sexual assault and sexual harassment remain a persistent challenge across the Total Force. The Department continues to address these harmful behaviors holistically with a focus on prevention, addressing problematic culture, improving the skills of all leaders at all levels, and evaluating ways to make the reporting of these harmful behaviors easier for survivors.

During FY24, the Department will:

- Sustain implementation of the approved IRC recommendations;
- Complete CCAs and Comprehensive Integrated Primary Prevention Plans to promote healthy, ready workplaces;
- Continue actions to hire skilled professionals to build out the IPPW;
- Sustain efforts to professionalize and strengthen the SARW; and
- Implement policy updates in initial and annual SAPR training.