Behind Closed Doors: A Look Into Gender Violence in the Military

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Gender Violence Definition

Duke University Student Affairs:

Gender violence includes rape, sexual assault, intimate partner violence in heterosexual and same sex partnerships, sexual harassment, stalking, prostitution and sex trafficking. The term “gender violence” reflects the idea that violence often serves to maintain structural gender inequalities, and includes all types of violence against men, women, children, adolescents, gay, transgender people and gender non conforming. This type of violence in some way influences or is influenced by gender relations. To adequately address this violence, we have to address cultural issues that encourage violence as part of masculinity.

SAPR Report FY 20

- Increase of 1% from FY19 equivalent to a rate of 5.1 out of every 1,000
- Army SAPR reports state, “The Army believes that the increase in the rate of reporting of sexual assault by SM victims (from 2.3 in FY12 to 5.5 in FY18 through FY20) does not necessarily correspond to an increase in the number of actual assaults. Rather, the priority placed on sexual assault prevention and response by Army leaders since FY12 may have encouraged more victims to come forward and report.” (SAPR 2020)

Presenting The issue

Vanessa Gulliens case was a wake up in how big of an issue this is.

SHARP training still victims blames and does not get to core of the issue.

Stigma is a huge issue in how victims are treated and how these issues are presented to the wider military.

DV is harder to guage due to it being out of the military policies and into a civilian organization.

Impact on the Survivor and Military

Trauma impact on individual:
- Military Sexual Trauma
- Mental Health problems (depression, PTSD, anxiety)
- Not feeling safe
- Engage in risky behaviors
- Suicide Ideation

Trauma impact on Military:
- Everything above
- Not feeling safe enough to report or plausible threats of retaliation
- Military stigma- men can’t be weak and women are making things up

Teamwork in the Army is important and it takes a team to heal from trauma- so why the push back?

Culture of the Military: The Problem with Hypermasculinity

Couldn’t be- men can’t be raped/assaulted.

Women do not belong in the Army so it’s no surprise that they are raped.

Wow you must have let them, you faggot (this was said to a male service member)

Whore, slut, you’re just a barracks bunny.

They were asking for it.

The only thing that women are good for are sexual relief for the real soldiers.

“Can’t speak for entirety of combat arms, but if you’re asking if I could see a female in the ranks with the pipe swinging meat eaters of a Ranger Battalion, hell no. Can’t see them carrying around a mortar tube living the gruntest [sic] dirtiest life in the military possible either. Physically capable is indifferent to me. I have literally watched a group of professionals completely change for the worse, become petty and show offish because 1 attractive female was attached to the platoon. If you want to make a combat unit ineffective, assign some women to it.”

New Policies and Programs in Place

As of 2020, occurrences of SHARP related cases have been removed out of the chain of command and into an investigative unit.

Further change in policy is need to change the face of gender violence in the military such as training leaders on trauma and it’s impact as well as a further dive into the issue.
Lessons Learned About Myself

Worked with clients who have gone or are going through crisis with nowhere to go.

Learned a lot about how trauma events can affect a person’s ability to function.

Gender violence affects everyone differently and should be treated the same across the board.

Hypermasculinity can get in the way of providing effective care to those struggling.

SHARP training is not enough when it comes to discussing this issue. We must stand together and help victims feel not alone.

Acknowledgements

To our service men and women who suffer in silence and to those no longer with us.

To my mentors and professors for all the help and inspiration to take a step forward.

To the UNI ROTC program, for giving me the tools to make a difference in and out of the military.

As a future leader, this issue is something that I will see in my ranks and may even have to hear on a daily basis.

Leaders are the first line defense and are supposed to know the climate in their units in order to prevent gender violence from spreading.

This issue in general makes me angry, sad, and disappointed in an organization that I’m in.

Thoughts on SHARP Training

“When an institution has a blind spot for an issue, it’s hard to create real solutions. One ineffective military policy attempting to address the issue is its risk-reduction training. The practice assumes that all soldiers must take steps to reduce their risk of falling into harm’s way. This mentality places blame squarely on the victim for everything from being shot to being raped” (Crawford 2014).

False Report

What leads to a false report? Why do we assume this happens?

According to the Pentagon in 2020, a case is considered false when evidence either “demonstrates that the accused person did not commit the offense,” or evidence “refutes the occurrence of a crime,” or considered baseless when an incident doesn’t meet the definition of sexual assault.

Difference between False and Baseless claims

“By actual ‘false allegations’ I mean a case where the victim intentionally says they were sexually assaulted or raped knowing that they either consented or no such activity ever occurred,” Christensen said, noting cases of mistaken identity or insufficient evidence that can result in allegations being found unsubstantiated. “But that is different from a false allegation.”

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