



(Photo illustration by Spc. Ashley Arnett)

Preventing and responding to sexual assault

By Jennifer Mattson

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The Army is being more proactive about dealing with sexual assault — both responding to it and preventing it within its ranks.

Sexual assaults typically occur within the first 90 days of a Soldier reporting to his or her new unit and by someone they know or are at least familiar with. In the past year, the Army saw a one percent increase in cases reported, though it's hard to tell if that was because victims were more comfortable reporting the incidents or if sexual assaults increased.

Army leadership remains dedicated to providing resources and support to victims as it works to eradicate sexual assault within the ranks, said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III.

First-line responders help

At all military installation hospitals, specially trained sexual assault nurse examiners are on hand to examine victims at any time. These professionals offer emergency contraception, take a verbal record of what happened

to the victim and perform a total physical exam to both collect evidence and to investigate any medical issues resulting from the sexual assault.



A forensic scientist at the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory at Gillem Enclave, Ga., processes evidence in one of the DNA extraction rooms. (Photo by Colby T. Hauser)

Letty Sprinkle, the sexual assault nurse examiner coordinator for William Beaumont Army Medical Center at Fort Bliss, Texas, oversees the more than 70 hours of training and clinical practice required of the sexual assault nurse examiners.

“Many times, a patient comes in and just wants to be tested for STDs or injuries, and to make sure that they’re OK physically,” Sprinkle said. “[The care] is victim-centered. The victim will decide how far they want to go with the experience in the ER and what to do.”

A sexual assault examination can include a head-to-toe examination as well as the victim’s verbal recollection of what happened. The nurse examiner will also ask for any evidence, including articles of clothing — preferably brought in a paper bag — for forensic testing. Victims can stop the process at any time if they do not wish to continue, Sprinkle said.

“They have 120 hours for us to provide forensic services,” Sprinkle said. “The longer they wait, the less of a chance there is for us uncovering any evidence. But we will still do a head-to-toe assessment. As far as [getting] medical care, the sooner after you have a [non-consensual] sexual encounter, the better.”

When the victim gives his or her account of what happened, the nurse examiners will record verbatim what the victim says. That verbal recount can be used in a court-martial, Sprinkle said.

“It’s important to tell us as much as you can, because that’s what we’ll testify to in court,”

Sprinkle said. “When it goes to court, it’s often a year later, and we’re reliant on the notes we take verbatim. We write what they said and move to the medical part to figure out what needs to be examined.”

Investigating charges

When a sexual assault involving a member of the military occurs, the sworn federal law enforcement officers of the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, known as CID, use their extensive training to try to get to the truth.

“A typical investigation normally involves interviewing and obtaining statements from all persons involved in or knowledgeable about the incident, the processing of the crime scene and the collection of physical evidence (if available), the forensic analysis of the evidence at the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory, and then the follow-up

investigative steps to confirm or refute the information that comes from the interviews and the analysis of the evidence,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Seaman, command sergeant major of CID. “The result of the investigation are presented to the supporting trial counsel or prosecutor to obtain a legal opinion concerning the crime and the alleged offender.”

CID does not prosecute the case. Its job is to collect as much information as possible about the potential crime.

“CID investigations are routinely and successfully prosecuted in military and federal judicial forums, as well as in state courts and foreign judicial venues across



Sgt. 1st Class Erin James (right) coaches Spc. Paulette A. Henry in securing an attacker after subduing him during a self-defense class at a gym in Basra, Iraq. (Photo by Sgt. Debralee P. Crankshaw)



Spc. Jennifer Bogacki, an automated logistical specialist, throws a punch at Capt. Patrick Naughton, a class instructor, during the sexual assault defense class at Camp Liberty, Feb. 9, 2011. Bogacki and Naughton were demonstrating techniques on how a Soldier can get away from an attacker using physical force. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Edward Daileg)

the globe,” Seaman said. “CID’s independence is specifically structured to prevent command influence and allow for unencumbered investigations to take place whenever and wherever required.”

Justice for the victim

CID investigations typically conclude at the beginning of Article 32 hearings, which determine whether a case has enough merit to proceed in the court-martial process. The evidence collected from CID’s investigations is brought forward and if a victim wants to testify, he or she can do so at the Article 32 hearing, but will be subjected to cross-examination by defense.

Capt. Faith Coutier is one of the 23 special victim prosecutors in the Army. She prosecutes cases within the court-martial system that deal with sexual assault. If the victim goes through the 32 hearing, testify and then decide he or she would rather not testify at the actual court-martial trial, the prosecution can still use the 32 testimony. However, the prosecution can’t use the testimony if the victim is not cross-examined by the defense, she said.

Coutier said she encourages victims to take advantage of the court-martial process.

“When people are sexually assaulted, their power has been taken away from them,” Coutier said. “And when they’re able to participate in the process and see that this guy has been convicted — he’s a registered sex offender, he’s potentially serving jail time — it’s almost their way of taking the power back. It was their voice that was

heard by the panel or a judge, and it was their courage in coming forward to make sure that this guy wasn’t going to do it to anyone else.”

The Army takes prosecution of sexual assault cases very seriously, Coutier said. Only a colonel can say that there isn’t enough evidence or just cause to move a case forward. Furthermore, the Army’s justice system will often prosecute cases civilians wouldn’t, she said. For instance, if a victim comes forward and says she was raped in the barracks, but knows only a first name or some vague information, the case will still be investigated and prosecuted to the best of the Army’s abilities, Coutier said.

“Sexual assaults are normally under-reported,” Coutier said. “So when you hear that the number of cases has increased, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the number of sexual assaults is going up. It may mean that women are more comfortable reporting it to law enforcement because they are no longer judged or blamed for something they had no control over.”

Article 120 is the section in the Uniform Code of Military Justice related to sexual assault; however, most sexual assault cases involve more than one charge because more than one criminal act is usually committed, Coutier said. In addition, there isn’t a statutory minimum or maximum punishment for sexual assault. Under UCMJ, the accused could get no punishment or up to life in prison if convicted of rape by force. Typically, though, rape by force is a 10 to 20 year confinement, depending on how much force was used. It’s almost always higher if a child is involved, Coutier said.

Helping the victim

At installations across the Army, behavioral health specialists are reaching out to victims to provide them with care.

Lorena Valles, a licensed clinical social worker at William Beaumont Army Medical Center, provides treatment to victims of sexual assault as well as those who commit sex offenses. She works with both populations to help them understand and re-shape their experiences.

Behavioral health specialists provide victims with resources to cope with their experiences. In addition, behavioral health specialists can provide documentation to help victims move to a different installation if it is determined that moving to another unit or installation would help them, Valles said.

Victims control when they would like behavioral health services and how much they want.

“It’s up to them to continue treatment,” Valles said. “If they do want to continue treatment at a different installation, we can put them in touch with another victim advocate to help them receive support, but this is all voluntary.”



Kyle Terry and Sharyon Culberson engage the audience during a “Sex Signals” presentation at Fort Lee, Va., in one scene that attempts to draw distinct lines between consensual sex and sexual assault. (Photo by T. Anthony Bell)

Responding when deployed

When units deploy, the victim support system often lags behind what is provided in-garrison. To counter this, the Army has deployed sexual assault response coordinators.

Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Harrison deployed to Iraq in 2009 with the 3rd Infantry Division as a sexual assault response coordinator for the division.

“During my last deployment, I had a couple instances where I was the first person to whom it was reported,” Harrison said. “The sexual assault victims came to me ... so I was the first responder.”

Sexual assault response coordinators work with the victims and the victim advocates as a liaison with the

commanders. They keep commanders informed about the instances of sexual assault and provide support to the victim and victim advocate by linking them with the resources they need, Harrison said.

“Every case that I had while I was deployed, we were able to assist the victim,” Harrison said. “We were able to get him or her to the appropriate agency — whether it was medical, behavioral health or CID. We were able to provide assistance to them, even in an austere environment out in the middle of nowhere. We were able to help them because we communicated with all of our first-line responders.”

Before deployment, Harrison worked with the equal opportunity office at each of the division’s brigades to implement training prior to deployment.

They used the I. A.M. Strong campaign, or ‘intervene, act, motivate,’ during their training, Harrison said. I. A.M. Strong is the Army’s campaign to prevent sexual assaults by encouraging Soldiers to provide a safe and supportive environment for all Soldiers.

“NCOs are the cornerstone to preventing sexual assault and harassment,” Harrison said. “As NCOs, we set the standard, maintain the Army Values and instill those values in our Soldiers. So by doing that and having a strong leadership team who model what is right and wrong and set the culture of the company, by them empowering the NCOs, we set the culture of our unit through training, through on-the-spot corrections and empowering Soldiers through the I. A.M. Strong campaign.”

Though Harrison said the division prepped prior to deployment with extensive training, sexual assaults did occur once the units were downrange.

“The majority of sexual assaults were by someone the victims knew,” Harrison said. “We train up and get to combat and have a trust level among

each other. Most of the time, in the instances I dealt with, it was someone they knew and trusted.”

Downrange, the commands take steps to help the victims, including relocating them or the accused to a different unit, Harrison said.

Preventing sexual assault

To aid in preventing sexual assaults, the Army is rolling out its Sexual Harassment/Assault Prevention and Response Program, which aims to stop sexual assaults by creating a culture in which sexual harassment is discouraged.

Carolyn Collins is the SHARP program manager for the Department of the Army. She oversees the training

materials that are distributed Armywide — down to the platoon level — on how units can stop sexual harassment and sexual assault.

“Our overarching goal is to change the culture within our ranks,” Collins said. “To do that, we had to get ‘left of the boom’ and address that at the earliest possible point in our command climate. Where we address this issue, we don’t have an issue of sexual harassment, much less an instance of sexual assault.”

To address the issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault, the SHARP team rolls out training that starts in basic training and continues through the courses for general officers. Operational training is required annually as well as during unit orientation and deployment training, Collins said. In addition, the program is building an additional 40 hours geared toward senior NCOs.

To deal with instances of sexual assault, the program deploys unit victim advocates to each brigade. These victim advocates have had 80 hours of instruction on how to handle the reporting of sexual assault and how to link victims to the resources available to them. They are often the first-line responders who will visit the victim in the ER and remain with the victim as he or she goes through behavioral health appointments and the court-martial process.

“We see a lot of assaults happening within the first 90 days of a new Soldier reporting to a new unit,” Collins said. “How we orient our Soldiers into our units and how we take care of them while they’re assigned there — no matter where the unit is, in-garrison or deployed — is a critical aspect. It is certainly NCO business to ensure that no sexual assaults occur within our ranks.”

Key leaders speak out

NCOs are on the front lines as recent legislation has given the Army a renewed focus on eliminating sexual assault within the ranks, Chandler said.

“Until the day that we have no Soldier-on-Soldier violence, one assault is too many,” Chandler said. “In 2011, we had 1,701 cases of sexual assault. That’s a 1 percent increase from the number reported the previous year. I’m discouraged by that, but I believe that with the secretary of defense and the chief of staff of the Army’s

renewed focus on this, we can prevent sexual assaults from occurring within our ranks.”

Working in the profession of arms means being a professional and creating a professional working environment that is free of sexual harassment, Chandler said.



Command Sgt. Maj. Frank Leota, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Pacific, addresses senior NCOs about sexual assault response and prevention during an NCO professional development session Sept. 13 at Fort Shafter, Hawaii. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Robinson)

“It’s important to our Army because we owe every Soldier in our Army a safe and secure workplace and place where they live,” he said. “If we are the professionals that we say we are, then we have to be committed to eliminating or eradicating this within our formation.”

Eliminating sexual assault

To stop sexual assault, perpetrators must be prosecuted, Collins said.

“How we handle these cases tells the victim that we have their back and that we’ll support them throughout the process,” Collins said. “This is not a comfortable position to be in— as we work through the investigation and eventually a prosecution. But it reinforces within the command climate that we encourage reporting, that we care for the victims and that we’re working to reduce these instances. Part of reducing these instances is holding those offenders accountable for their actions.”

Sgt. Maj. Carl Downey, the NCO in charge of Forces Command’s equal opportunity office, said his command is working to, at a minimum, ensure that it is training to prevent, respond and care for victims of sexual assault.

“Leaders at all levels are committed to eliminating sexual assault throughout our ranks,” Downey said. “We’re going to great measures to eliminate sexual assault. If one does occur, we’re really doing everything we can to ensure the individual or individuals are



Soldiers from D Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 172nd Infantry Brigade, hold a banner during the “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes” event to raise awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault Oct. 1, 2011, in Vilseck, Germany. (Photo by Cristina M. Piosa)

prosecuted. Our number one focus right now is the preventative measure with the understanding that, if it does happen, justice will be served for all parties.”

NCOs are at the forefront as leaders work to combat sexual harassment and sexual assault, Chandler said.

“It’s completely up to that battalion level sergeant major and those company, troop or battery first sergeants to ensure that we are protecting our Soldiers,” he said. “We’re enforcing the standard that we are in fact creating a culture within our Army that says that this is not acceptable, that we’re going to hold people accountable and that we’re going to take care of the victims of sexual assault. [We’re going to] ensure that we change the attitude that this behavior is OK. It’s counter to our Army Values. It’s counter to our NCO Creed.” ■

Warning signs

Below are some key identifiers that the person you’re with might pressure you for unwanted sex later. If he or she:

- Ignores, interrupts or makes fun of you.
- Sits or stands too close to you or stares at you.
- Has a reputation for being a “player.”
- Drinks too much or uses drugs; tries to get you to drink or use drugs.
- Tries to touch or kiss you, or gets into your “personal space” when you barely know him or her.
- Wants to be alone with you before getting to know you, or pressures you to be alone together.

- Does what he or she wants without asking what you want.
- Gets angry or sulks if he or she doesn’t get what he or she wants.
- Pressures you to have sex, or makes you feel guilty for saying “no.”

Source: www.sexualassault.army.mil

Reducing risk in a deployed environment

Deployed environments can present particular risks for Army personnel. Below are a few tips to keep in mind when downrange:

- Sleeping areas (tents, bunkers and other buildings) may be less secure in a deployed environment. Report any unauthorized males or females in sleeping areas.
- Many non-Army personnel are present in deployed unit and working areas.
- Be alert and aware of your surroundings. Deployed environments may have different lighting conditions and facilities than those in-garrison.
- Different cultures may treat females differently than they are treated in the U.S. Be assertive and clearly state if you feel uncomfortable with how someone is treating you.
- To reduce risk in a deployed environment, travel with a buddy.

Source: www.sexualassault.army.mil



I. A.M. Strong Campaign

The I. A.M. Strong Campaign was launched in 2008 as the Army's effort to combat sexual harassment and assault. It stands for intervene, act, motivate. The campaign motto states:

- When I recognize a threat to my fellow Soldiers, I will have the personal courage to intervene and prevent sexual assault. I will condemn acts of sexual harassment. I will not abide obscene gestures, language or behavior. I am a warrior and a member of a team. I will intervene.
- You are my brother, my sister, my fellow Soldier. It is my duty to stand up for you, no matter the time or place. I will take action. I will do what's right. I will prevent sexual harassment and assault. I will not tolerate sexually offensive behavior. I will act.
- We are American Soldiers, motivated to keep our fellow Soldiers safe. It is our mission to prevent sexual harassment and assault. We will denounce sexual misconduct. As Soldiers, we are all motivated to take action. We are strongest ... together.

Resources for reporting a sexual assault

If you are a victim of sexual assault or know something about a sexual assault crime, please report it. Below are different avenues for reporting:

- Report it to your chain of command.
- Visit CID's website at www.cid.army.mil.
- Email usarmy.belvoir.usacidc.mail.crime-tips@mail.mil.

- Report it to a victim advocate or sexual assault response coordinator.

Reporting options

When reporting a sexual assault, the victim has the option to file a restricted or an unrestricted report. To file a restricted report, the victim must not disclose the information surrounding the assault to anyone, including a trusted friend. Anyone who has knowledge of a sexual assault outside the victim is compelled to report it to the authorities, which will result in an unrestricted report being filed.

A restricted report is:

- confidential.
- for the victim to receive medical care without triggering an official investigation.
- maintains the privacy of the individual.
- can only be discussed with chaplains, designated health-care providers, your assigned victim advocate, or a sexual assault response coordinator.

An unrestricted report:

- allows the victim to prosecute their assailant.
- allows for a full investigation into the crime.
- does not remain confidential, though parts may be redacted.
- allows for the victim and/or assailant to be relocated.



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