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Military Sex Assault Reports Rose by 24 Percent; Army Attributes Increase to New Reporting Programs, Not More Crime

By AP Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Reports of sexual assaults in the military increased by about 24 percent last year and more than twice as many offenders were punished.

There were nearly 3,000 sexual assault reports filed in 2006, compared with almost 2,400 the previous year, a Pentagon report said Wednesday. Action was taken against 780 people, from courts-martial and discharges to other administrative remedies.

The cases involved members of the military who were victims or accused of the assaults. The military counts rape, nonconsensual sodomy, indecent assault and attempts to commit any of those as sexual assault, though the 17-page report contained no data on how many of each were reported.

This is the third year the military has compiled sexual assault statistics. The reporting methods have changed each year, however, making comparisons of the annual reports difficult.

Of the 2,947 sexual assaults reported last year, 756 were initially filed under a program that allows victims to report the incident and receive health care or counseling services but does not notify law enforcement or commanders.
The restricted, confidential reporting program allows the victims to consider pursuing an investigation later; that was done in 86 of the 756 cases last year. Data for 2005 included only the restricted cases for half the year.

**1,400 inquiries completed**

According to the new report, more than 1,400 investigations into sex assault cases dating to 2004 were completed last year. In slightly more than half, commanders took no action, most often because the charges were not substantiated or lacked evidence.

When action was taken, more than one-third — or 292 individuals — were court-martialed. An additional 243 received nonjudicial punishment and 245 either were discharged or received some other administrative action. Nonjudicial punishments can include reprimand letters or demotions.

Pentagon officials have said that sexual assaults often go unreported. They have attributed the rise in number in part to the vigorous effort to encourage victims to report the crime.

The report provided a breakdown of some of the assaults, saying that 756 of the victims were members of the military. Of those, 285 were Army soldiers, 247 were in the Air Force, 144 were in the Navy, 48 were Marines and one was in the Coast Guard.

Army spokeswoman Maj. Cheryl Phillips said, “There is no evidence that the actual number of assaults is increasing in the Army, but there are definite indicators that the Army has created more willingness among Soldier victims to report incidents.”

In the report, the Defense Department said the military services “placed a high priority on training” and that the 2006 report demonstrates the Pentagon’s “commitment to eliminating sexual assault from the military services” through education and by removing barriers that can dissuade victims from reporting the crime.

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