Women lack protection in military
By J.J. Babb

Sexual assaults happen every day, in fact about every two minutes in America someone is sexually assaulted (The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, RAINN).

This fact is well known, yet continues to stain our country. Over the past decades our government and nonprofit organizations have attempted to rid the country of this horrendous fact, yet it remains strong, even in the most protected of places- our country's military.

The military, an agency set up to protect our rights and those of individuals across the world, continues to hide, ignore and continue the abuse of women within its own ranks.

The Senate Armed Services Committee heard the results of an investigation of sexual assaults within the military last Wednesday. During this hearing the committee heard of the lack of a policy for sexual assault victims, complete investigations, medical treatment, victim advocates and counselors and separation from alleged attackers, according to the Denver Post on Thursday.

What makes these assaults so disturbing is that they are not few and far between. In fact according to the New York Times article on Feb. 26, 112 reports of sexual misconduct were reported over the past two years. These are only the assaults occurring outside of the United States including Iraq and Afghanistan. Adding to this number are the two dozen women at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas who reported being assaulted in 2002 and the Colorado Air Force Academy's more than 50 reported assaults and rapes over the last decade.

When service women are assaulted or raped out of the country they often are unable to find medial, emotional or justice services, according to the Times article. This is unbelievable - our government cannot encourage civilian women to report rapes and seek justice on attackers, when the women within their own agencies lack these resources and support.

Sen. Susan Collins, a Marine Republican on the Armed Services Personnel Sub-Committee is quoted in the New York Times article about her concern over this situation.

"No war comes without cost, but the cost should be born out of conflict with the enemy, and not because of egregious by some of our own troops," she said.

Many service women do not have anyone to turn to when assaulted, even within the United States. If they turn to their military leaders they are often put right back into working with their accused
assaulter and may also face negative repercussions from reporting the problem. An officer referred to in the New York Times suggests that women are returned to the same position because comradery is very important to troop moral.

Ahh, I see, sexual assaults occurring aren’t going to hurt the morale, just the reporting of such attacks will.

Women may also become victims again by the military investigator, as Deborah D. Tucker, executive director of the National Center of Domestic and Sexual Violence suggests in the Denver Post article.

"Questions are being asked of them that are not being asked by civilians anymore, such as were you drinking, what were you wearing," she said. "Those kind of old-school strategies."

This is so shocking. Our military and government should set an example for the country. It should practice far ahead in social issues and should not be operating back in the "dark ages" where women were blamed for attacks.

Because of these shortfalls in the military's response in sexual assaults it is worrisome how many women may have not reported assaults. With the chance of no change in assignment, no investigation into the situation and no physical or emotional medical attention, I must wonder why a woman would choose to report an assault. Many must suffer in silence.

The military has begun a review of sexual assault policies, which will end on April 30. During this time many military officials will also receive more training of practices in dealing with sexual assaults.

Isn’t it about time? Leaders in all types of civilian businesses must go through sexual harassment training, even here at The Collegian, yet our military has let this issue slide by. As the number of women joining the military increases, up at least five percent from 1999, according to the U.S. Department of Defense, women's issues within the military should become more prominent.

Women should feel safer within the government agency of the military than anywhere else, but it seems they don’t have that protection. Hopefully with the issue entering the media’s center stage the military and government will change these policies. They must make a mandated system in dealing with sexual assaults including victim advocates, medical attention and a thorough investigation into the accusation.

Until this happens, women within the military will continue to fight for our rights, yet lack their own.

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