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Sexual Assault, Harassment Less Likely at AFA; Navy, West Point Women Victimized More, Survey Says

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COLORADO SPRINGS – Air Force Academy female cadets are less likely to be victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and more likely to report it than their counterparts at West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy.

The Pentagon issued those findings Friday in its first baseline comparison of the three service schools since a sexual assault scandal rocked the Air Force Academy in 2003 and led to servicewide reforms.

The report was based on surveys in April of more than 2,000 female cadets and midshipmen – nearly all of the women at the three schools – and a representative sample of 3,200 males.

About 4 percent of the Air Force Academy's female cadets said they had been sexually assaulted in the 2004-2005 school year, compared with 5 percent at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md., and 6 percent at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., the survey showed.

It defined sexual assault as rape or other unwanted sexual touching or fondling.

Of the victims, a greater percentage of those at the Air Force Academy reported sexual assaults to authorities – 44 percent, compared with 41 percent at West Point and 40 percent at Annapolis.

Air Force Academy cadets also were less likely to experience sexual harassment in the form of sexist remarks or other crude or unwarranted speech or actions.

About 49 percent of the female cadets at the Air Force Academy said they were sexually harassed, compared with 59 percent at Annapolis and 62 percent at West Point.

Air Force Academy officials credited reforms implemented soon after the sexual assault scandal.

“We’ve been at this about a year and a half longer than the other academies” said academy spokesman Johnny Whitaker.

“The cadets start sexual assault training during basic cadet training and it continues for four years. It’s probably the single most talked-about, taught, trained subject that we’ve got here,” Whitaker said.

The intensified training began after dozens of female cadets went public with allegations that they were sexually assaulted at the school and that academy officials ignored their claims and sometimes punished women for reporting attacks.

The scandal led to a housecleaning of the academy’s command and sweeping policy reforms that expanded over the ensuing months to include the other service academies and the Department of Defense.

Among those was an annual cadet survey to determine the extent of the sexual assault problem. The results released Friday are the first of the annual surveys.

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