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## **Sexual misconduct at Army, Navy academies persists, report finds**

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The Army and Navy's service academies have tolerated hostile attitudes toward women, hampering efforts to eradicate sexual assault and harassment at the institutions, according to a new report.

The attitudes of a certain number of midshipmen at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., and cadets at the Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., have created an environment where sexual assault is more likely to occur, the report states.

The 96-page report is the work of a congressionally mandated 12-member task force – made up equally of military and civilian members – assigned the task of assessing the cultures of the Navy and Army academies and recommending changes in their operations.

The Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies arose out of the sexual assault scandal at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. The Air Force Academy was exempt from the latest review, since a similar commission already had examined it.

The Army and Navy academies' response to sexual assault has been "sporadic and incomplete," the report concluded. Long-term efforts are needed, the panel concluded, because "sexual harassment and assault is not a 'fix and forget' problem."

A 2005 Pentagon inspector general report found that 111 individuals had reported incidents of sexual assault at West Point, 99 at the Naval Academy and 92 at the Air Force Academy. Members of the commission said they expect the number of reported incidents to increase as measures designed to encourage victims to come forward are implemented.

"The majority [of incidents] are jokes, sexual innuendoes, things that happen on a casual basis," said the task force's co-chair, Vice Adm. G.L. Hoewing, chief of naval personnel. "We believe that if those continue, the next step is that they become more egregious. That could result in touching and things like that could eventually lead to a sexual assault or worse."

The report was based on site visits by task force members, focus group meetings, survey information and interviews with school officials, experts, cadets, midshipmen and victims.

The commission recommended that the service academies increase the number and visibility of female officers and noncommissioned officers so they could serve as role models. The panel found that some members of the academies do not value women as highly as men because they are fewer in number, excluded from “highly regarded combat specialties” and held to different fitness standards.

Even though the Pentagon’s new limited confidentiality policy on reporting sexual assaults, implemented in June, applies to the service academies, the task force recommended that Congress enshrine the policy in law.

“If they’re sexually assaulted, we do know from experience that having immediate medical care and counseling support is going to create a healthier serviceperson,” said the task force’s other co-chair, Delilah Rumburg, executive director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. “We need to go the next step and create this by law, statutorily, and we think that’s the right thing to do.”

The report found that in the past two years, the system for holding alleged offenders accountable has improved, but current rape and sexual assault laws do not address some of the types of sexual misconduct occurring at the academies.

David S.C. Chu, undersecretary of Defense for personnel and readiness, said the Pentagon will evaluate the findings and recommendations of the task force and will report to the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, as required by law.

“The department is determined to continue our aggressive efforts to halt sexual misconduct of any sort by refining and improving our policies and procedures and applying them to the field force,” Chu said. “All members of the armed forces have the right to expect to be treated with professionalism, dignity and respect on duty and off duty.”

According to a Pentagon spokesman, the task force will examine the issue of sexual assault throughout the armed forces for the next 18 months, as mandated in the fiscal 2005 Defense Authorization Act.

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