

STARS AND STRIPES

USFK Conducts Online Sexual Assault Survey

By Jeremy Kirk, *Stars and Stripes*

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[YONGSAN GARRISON, South Korea] — With the Pentagon under scrutiny for its handling of sexual assault cases and victim support, U.S. Forces Korea is conducting an online survey to assess its sexual assault and harassment programs.

Gen. Leon LaPorte, USFK commander, established a Sexual Assault Working Group in March “to look at all aspects of sexual assault as it may occur both on and off base throughout the peninsula,” USFK spokesman Barry Bashaw wrote in response to questions from *Stars and Stripes*.

The Sexual Misconduct Survey, which will be online through Wednesday, is part of that program, officials said. The survey seeks servicemembers’ knowledge of victim support programs, how many unreported sexual assaults may be occurring, what other types of misconduct respondents believe is going on and whether people are satisfied with services for victims and assailants, Bashaw wrote.

It also requests suggestions for programs that could be started to prevent sexual assault, he wrote.

The Inspector General survey is open to all USFK personnel and takes about 20 minutes to complete. It’s available on the 8th Army intranet at <https://www-eusa-1.korea.army.mil>.

USFK officials declined to provide a copy to *Stars and Stripes*.

Officials hope at least 2,000 servicemembers take the voluntary survey. Survey information gathered will remain anonymous and only group statistics will be reported, according to USFK.

On Feb. 5, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld ordered a task force to look at the department’s sexual assault policy and victim treatment after the *Denver Post* reported Jan. 25 that 37 female servicemembers sought civilian agency sexual assault counseling after returning from combat zones.

The article stated the women reported poor medical treatment, lack of counseling and incomplete criminal investigations by the military, in addition to the threat of punishment after reporting an assault, according to the *Post*.

Rumsfeld's eight-member Pentagon task force contacted more than 1,300 individuals at 21 bases within the United States, Pacific Command and Central Command to evaluate current policy.

According to congressional testimony in May, task force members talked face-to-face with victims or called them to find out if the system was deficient.

The Defense Department's sexual assault rate per 100,000 uniformed servicemembers was 69.1 in 2002 and 70 in 2003. The task force's report found that "due to substantial differences in the definition of sexual assault, these rates are not directly comparable to rates reported by the Department of Justice."

According to the Defense Department, 701 rape cases were reported in 2002 throughout the military. The Army reported 196 cases; the Air Force, 234 cases; the Navy and Marines, 271 cases.

USFK reported the following figures for sexual assault over the last four years: 81 assaults in 2001, 65 in 2002, 86 in 2003 and 37 through May of this year. Again, however, before this year there was no standardization among the services or even among bases in the same service on exactly what constituted a sexual assault, Bashaw wrote.

Under the older definition, a sexual assault could have ranged from an inappropriate touch to rape. This year, the Defense Department has standardized the definition to be consistent with the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and USFK is using the new definition, Bashaw wrote.

In its 99-page report released in April, the task force made nine broad recommendations. The task force found the military doesn't have a standard way of handling sexual assault cases, making it hard to collect data and track how victims were treated.

Action was taken against assailants, but commanders didn't go through proper investigative channels. About 20 percent of commanders didn't fill out the proper paperwork because they were too busy, the task force found.

Under a revised Army personnel policy still to be released, company commanders no longer will have the authority to sign the disciplinary papers of soldiers accused of sexual offenses if the case doesn't go to court. The battalion commander's signature will be required, according to Darlene Sullivan, a task force member, quoted in an Army news release. The forms will also list the soldier's punishment.

Other changes include a re-emphasis on notifying the Army Criminal Investigation Command, referred to as CID, about all instances of sexual assault. According to Army statistics, CID investigated 92 allegations of sexual misconduct in the CENTCOM area between March 2003 and March 2004.

The changes also require commanders to assign a unit victim advocate to provide emotional support. New chapters will be added to Army Regulation 600-20 within 60 to 90 days, Lt. Col. John McPhaul of Army personnel stated in an Army news release.

Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick, D-Mich., introduced a plan last week to fund an office to fine-tune sexual assault policies, add more victim advocates and give Congress better oversight on Pentagon changes. Her amendment would add \$3 million to the 2005 Defense appropriations bill.

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