

## **Overview: Understanding and Responding to Victims of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence in the Military**

### **Recognizing the differences between civilian and military victims**

#### Active duty military rape/domestic violence survivors:

- May have limited access to rape crisis/DV services
- Restrictions on confidentiality in counseling
- Implications on personal and professional life
- Under the auspices of the UCMJ—military law
- Victim cannot ‘quit’ the military to get away from the offender or from abuse
- Victim encounters ‘bigger picture’: impact on unit, esprit de corps, divisiveness

### **Understanding the barriers and unique aspects of victimization in the military**

- Potential negative impact of reporting: for the unit, commander and the victim
- Career implications or repercussions for victims
- Housing/residential and job implications: Perpetrator is likely to be someone in their unit, chain of command, worksite or living quarters.
- Victims must often ‘prove’ themselves; being raped can impact other’s opinions of their abilities (viewed as weak or unfit for military service—worthy of discharge)
- Military ‘takes care of its’ own’: Chain of command (commander’s discretion and authority); reporting/seeking help often deferred to chain of command and victims feel they have no other options (Commander’s ‘need to know’ supersedes ALL.)

### **Additional concerns for military victims: Collateral Misconduct**

Collateral Misconduct: The victim engaged in conduct that was a violation of the UCMJ prior, during or after the sexual assault.

- The activity is violation of UCMJ
- Potential implications/disciplinary action for the misconduct
- Barrier to reporting rape to avoid disciplinary action \
- Potential for: victim-blaming by others and feelings of guilt by victim

#### Examples:

- Underage drinking
- Fraternalization
- Adultery
- Curfew violation
- Other activities that are non-compliant w/UCMJ

#### Victim’s concerns/fears:

- Disciplinary action
- Exposure, embarrassment, shame
- Loss of respect and credibility
- Military discharge, loss of career
- Psychiatric or drug treatment
- Other career implications (e.g., loss of security clearance)
- Potential loss of relationships (divorce, colleagues...)

Unit Commanders:

- Have authority re: disposition of case
- Can defer disciplinary actions
- Should consider encourage reporting
- Should avoid actions that further traumatize the victim

Source: *Collateral Misconduct in Sexual Assault Cases* (JTF-SAPR-001)

**Obstacles to seeking help for military service members or dependents**

Confidentiality	Commanders	Culture/climate
Live/work w/perpetrator	Social impact (in unit/on job)	Limited rape crisis or DV resources
Fear of poss. repercussions	Career impact	Psychological barriers

**Additional considerations for military domestic violence victims**

<b>Confidentiality</b>	<b>Commanders</b>	<b>Culture/climate</b>
<b>Limited DV resources</b>	<b>Isolation from family</b>	<b>Psychological barriers</b>
<b>Impact on abuser's career</b>	<b>Financial impact on family/housing</b>	<b>Fear of repercussions</b>

## Using this information to assist sexual trauma survivors

### **Intervention/treatment considerations with military population**

1. Use your skills and knowledge about sexual assault and domestic violence to work with military survivors.
2. Be aware of the unique needs and barriers of for military victims. Ask if there is anything that is of particular concern to them.
3. Acknowledge your limited understanding of the military system and be honest with the victim about this. Ask for clarification if the victim uses military terms or jargon that you don't know, especially as it relates to the command hierarchy.
4. Just as with any other victim with special needs/concerns, the focus is on their recovery and what is best for them. Listen to their concerns and respond accordingly.
5. Learn about the current military policies on sexual assault and domestic violence to better assist your clients. Keep resource information available or as a quick reference, if needed.
6. Ask for help or clarification from experts in the field or from military contacts regarding military policies, procedures or the Uniform Code of Military Justice if questions arise.

*FINAL NOTE: Treat all sexual assault victims the way you would want your loved one to be treated if it happened to them—with respect, compassion and dignity.*