

An Analysis of Sexual Assault in the U.S. Military, 2004-2009

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Abstract

From 2004 to 2009, U.S. military reports of sexual assault increased by 90%. Whether this reflects a real increase in sexual assaults, or just an increase in reporting, the Department of Defense has committed to reducing the prevalence of these brutal crimes. In order to better understand the problem of sexual assault and how it can be addressed, it is important to put this criminal behavior in its proper context. Previous research has identified several key reasons why military personnel are more likely to commit sexual assault during periods of war than they are in peacetime, including heightened (1) desires for power, (2) desires for sexual fulfillment, and (3) beliefs that there will be no consequences. This paper reviews this literature and presents initial evidence that these same factors may be contributing to the U.S. military's current problem with sexual assault. Preliminary findings suggest that in the post 9/11 world, service members have increasingly struggled with compensatory desires for power, sexual frustrations abroad, and overly permissive environments where swift and serious punishments for bad behavior are far too rare.