

Sexual Assaults Rise Nearly 50 Percent at Service Academies

31 Jan 2019

Military.com | By [Patricia Kime](#)



Basic cadets run on the U.S. Air Force Academy's terrazzo in Colorado Springs, Colo., July 12, 2017. (U.S. Air Force photo/Darcie Ibidapo)

Incidents of sexual assault are up nearly 50 percent at the nation's military academies, and reporting rates remain stagnant -- troubling trends that Defense Department officials say the schools are addressing but must work harder to change.

According to a congressionally mandated survey conducted every two years at the schools, 747 students reported experiencing unwanted sexual contact during the 2017-2018 academic year, compared with 507 in the 2015-16 school year.

That included 273 cadets at the [U.S. Military Academy at West Point](#), N.Y.; 254 midshipmen at the [U. S. Naval Academy](#) in Annapolis, Md.; and 221 cadets at the [U.S. Air Force Academy](#) in Colorado Springs, Colorado. DoD officials said the numbers total 748 due to rounding.

The 2017-18 survey also noted that of the 747 reported incidents, 117 were reported through official channels, although a third of those reports were filed by students who didn't wish to have the incidents investigated, according to the Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Service Academies.

"Unwanted sexual contact" is the term used by surveyors to encompass various offenses prohibited by the Uniform Code of Military Justice, ranging from unwanted touching and groping to rape.

According to the survey, of the 117 incidents reported as sexual assaults, West Point saw an increase of 12 percent in the 2017-2018 school year to 56, up from 50, and the Naval Academy's incidents rose by 10 percent, from 29 to 32. The Air Force Academy saw its number of reported sexual assaults decline, from 33 to 29.

Overwhelmingly, female students continue to be the target of unwanted sexual contact, according to report estimates, but men also are seeing a rise in offenses. According to the survey, 15.8 percent of women said they'd experienced unwanted sexual contact, up from 12.2 percent in 2016, and 2.4 percent of men reported unwanted sexual contact, up from 1.7 percent in 2016.

The report noted that unwanted sexual contact increased for both genders at West Point and for women at the Air Force Academy, but there were no statistical increases for men and women at the Naval Academy or for men at the Air Force Academy.

In June 2017, then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis ordered the academies to institute changes to curb sexual assault and harassment. The schools developed plans that were introduced before the 2018-19 academic year began, including efforts to increase prevention, promote a culture of respect, raise awareness of the negative impacts of alcohol and encourage reporting.

DoD officials said Thursday that the survey captured in the report was conducted early in 2018, before these measures were implemented

"Our commitment is absolute," said Dr. Elizabeth Van Winkle, executive director of the DoD Office of Force Resiliency. "While we are disheartened that the strategies we have employed have not achieved the results we had intended, we are not deterred."

The survey noted that, in the majority of cases of unwanted sexual contact, alcohol was involved. At the Naval Academy, for example, alcohol was a factor in 72 percent of cases.

The survey also revealed that a culture of sexual harassment continues to plague the academies. According to the results, an estimated 50 percent of females and 16 percent of male students experienced sexual harassment during the survey period:

- At West Point, sexual harassment incidence rates remained relatively unchanged for women, 48 percent in 2017-18 vs. 46 percent in 2015-2016, but increased for men to 17 percent, up from 13 percent.
- At the Naval Academy, rates of sexual harassment increased for both men and women, 56 percent in 2017-2018 for women, up from 51 percent; and for men, 17 percent, up from 12 percent.
- The Air Force Academy saw no statistically significant change, remaining at around 47 percent for women and 13 percent for men.

Defense Department officials said the schools are making a concerted effort to address problems and promote a culture of respect on the campuses.

"It is imperative that we fortify our efforts to promote and sustain safe and respectful climates," said Rear Adm. Ann Burkhardt, director of the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, in a statement.



On Thursday, Protect Our Defenders, a non-profit organization that supports service members' rights in sexual assault and harassment cases, called on Congress to hold hearings on the report and the issue.

"The academies are grooming the next generation of military leaders. They are supposed to be held to a higher standard. What message does this send to the troops they will be leading? ... It is time for the president and Congress to replace military leadership who have failed to stem the tide of sexual assault and harassment," said retired Air Force Col. Don Christensen, president of Protect our Defenders and former chief prosecutor of the Air Force.

-- Patricia Kime can be reached at Patricia.Kime@Military.com. Follow her on Twitter [@patriciakime](https://twitter.com/patriciakime).

Related Topics

[Military Headlines](#), [Women in the Military](#), [Sexual Assault](#), [Crime](#), [Military Academies](#), [United States Air Force Academy](#), [United States Military Academy](#), [West Point](#), [US Naval Academy](#)

© Copyright 2019 Military.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.