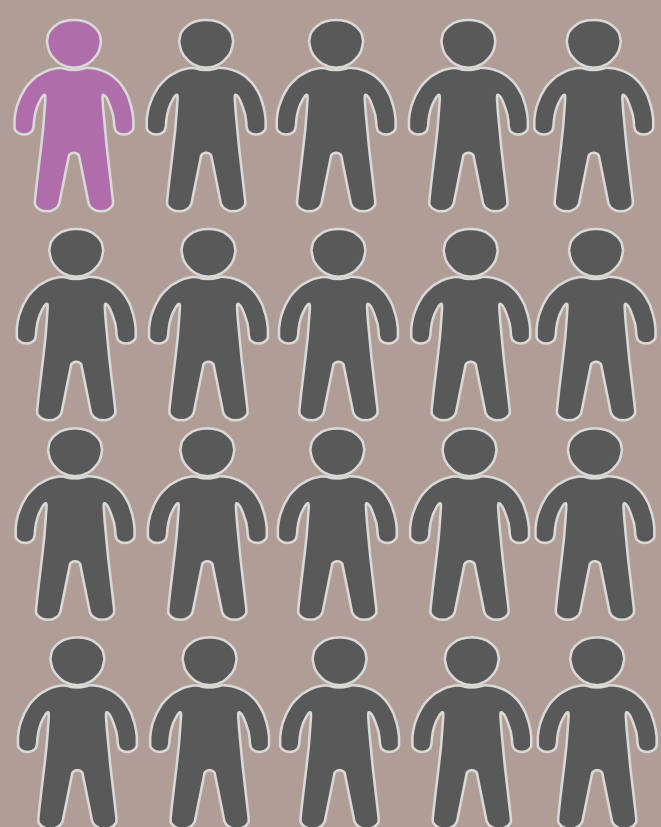


Sexual Assault in the Military

By Chiara Evans

The prevalence of sexual misconduct in the military deserves the attention of policymakers in order to adequately protect those serving the United States.

Prevalence



An estimated 1 in 20 servicewomen and 1 in 100 servicemen experienced sexual assault in 2013 (Morral et al).

Legislative History

- ★ Women largely lacked policies to protect them from sexual harassment until the 80's. During this period women ignored harassment, allowing mistreatment to prevail (Lee Arnold, Chelsea S).
- ★ As the issue gained saliency in the media, Secretary Weinberger recognized current policies were inadequate. Incidents such as the Tailhook Conference, Aberdeen Proving Ground Scandal, and US Air Force Academy scandal placed more pressure on policymakers to take action (Lee Arnold, Chelsea S).
- ★ In 2005 the Department of Defense created the Sexual Assault Prevention Response Office (SAPRO). The military actively claims to maintain a “zero tolerance” policy. Despite SAPRO's establishment the military's handling of sexual assault appeared to have undergone minimal change (Lee Arnold, Chelsea S).
- ★ In 2013, President Barack Obama became the first president to publicly address the issue. Recent legislation regarding sexual misconduct in the military includes the National Defense Authorization Act which requires that military members who are convicted are dismissed. This action was significant since US military commanders could previously waive convictions (Lee Arnold, Chelsea S).

Longterm Effects of Assault

Female veterans who have experienced sexual assault are

9 times more likely

to suffer from PTSD compared to female veterans who were not assaulted (Turchik).

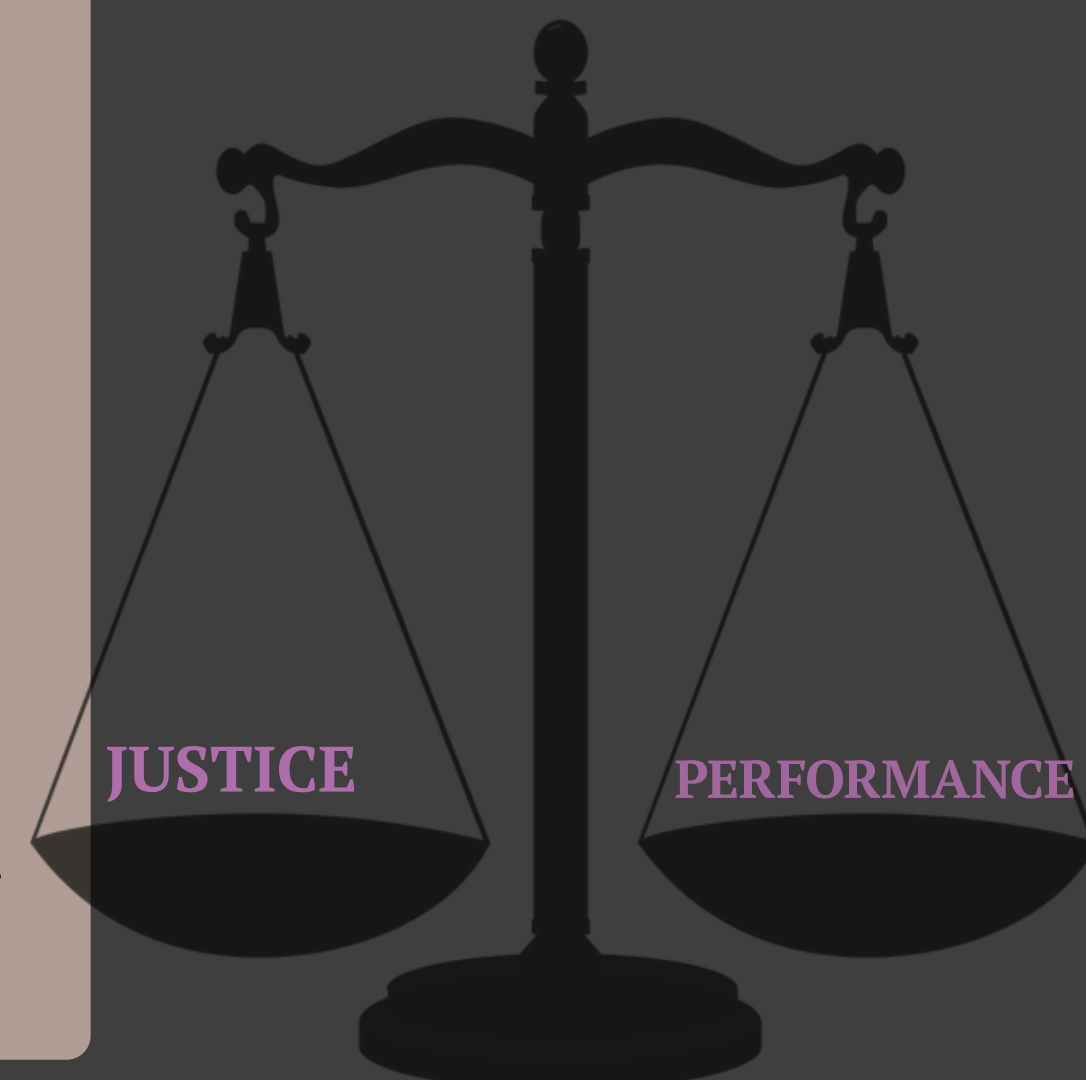
Additionally, female veterans who were assaulted report experiencing more difficulty adjusting to civilian life as well as higher rates of alcohol use and depression relative to those who were not assaulted (Turchik).

How is Sexual Assault Handled?

The United States military utilizes its own legal and penal system to maintain, “justice and the performance of military operations” according to former Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. (Warner and Armstrong). Sexual assault cases are currently handled within the chain of command, so victims must report their sexual assault to their commanding officer. (Warner and Armstrong). In order to hold a formal trial, the court martial cases must meet, “high standards of evidence”, inability to provide sufficient evidence or witnesses, as is frequently the case with sexual assault cases generally, prevents the court-martial from hearing the case. (Warner and Armstrong).

The military's handling of sexual assault has been deemed “chaotic”

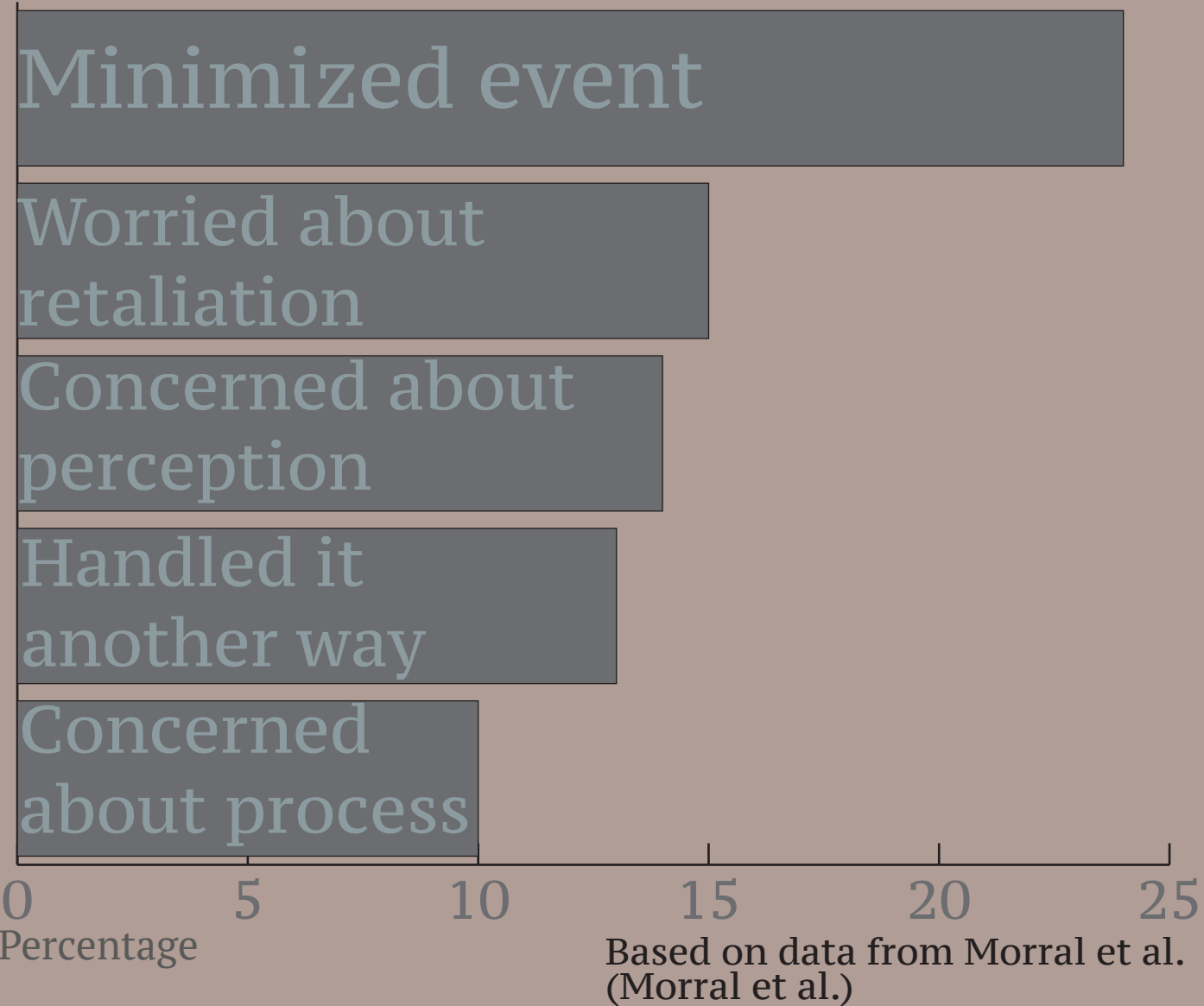
(Warner and Armstrong)



What is Wrong With the Current System?

During a hearing in front of the Senate Armed Forces Committee survivors of sexual assault described the current process as the, “most humiliating thing that I have ever experienced” (McVeigh).

Main Reasons for Not Reporting Sexual Assault from Active Service Members



Systemic Issues

Within the military systemic gender issues, the closed nature of the institution, as well as the approval of violence create an environment where sexual assault prevails. The military is a “highly gendered institution” (Warner and Armstrong). It is both a male-dominated environment and a space where hyper-masculinity prevails (Warner and Armstrong). This environment further exacerbates the power difference between men and women (Turchik). Within military units harmful attitudes about sexual misconduct are maintained through socialization (Turchik). The combination of a lack of societal and organizational power is shown to promote sexual victimization within organizations (Turchik). Additionally, the military places an emphasis on violence, and it is often seen as a mechanism to achieve goals (Turchik). A culture of violence may heighten the risk of sexual misconduct within the military (Turchik). In such an environment, reporting could result in social costs such as seeming weak to their peers (Warner and Armstrong).

The Solution: Professionalize

In order to limit a victim’s fear of retaliation and avoid systemic barriers Congress should enact an independent prosecutor within the Defense Department (“Gillibrand Leads”). Senator Kirsten Gillibrand outlined a plan to “professionalize” the way in which the military handles sexual assault in the Military Justice Improvement Act (“Gillibrand Leads”). By removing this process from the chain of command, victims would no longer need to report their assault to a commanding officer. To help maintain efficiency, the independent prosecutor should operate within the Defense Department (Koons). Military officials opposed to an independent prosecutor argue taking cases out of the chain of command may inhibit combat readiness(Koons). These individuals should consider how a woman’s inability to trust their peers and supervisors may also affect combat readiness(Koons). The women and men serving the United States deserve a system that allows them to safely report assault without consequences.

"Our nation's military leaders have spent decades promising 'zero tolerance' on sexual assault, but it's painfully clear that they've failed at that mission. The Pentagon, by its own admission, is out of time-and should now be out of excuses."- Senator Kirsten Gillibrand ("Gillibrand Leads").

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