

Military Sexual Assault Victims Less Likely to Stay in Military

RAND estimated that about 21,000 service members were sexually assaulted in 2014

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During an independent review of military sexual assault in 2014, RAND Corporation reported that troops who said they had been sexually assaulted during their service were twice as likely as those who hadn't to transition into civilian life prematurely.

The report published in February is titled Effects of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment on Separation from the U.S. Military, which can be accessed at [rand.org](https://www.rand.org). RAND estimated that about 21,000 service members were sexually assaulted in 2014. Of those, about 5,600 troops left the military within a 28-month period.

The report said troops who separate after reporting sexual assault are “disproportionally voluntary” compared to average military members. And while this pertained to men and women, men were more likely to voluntarily leave the military than women after experiencing sexual assault. However, sexual assault in the military affects more women than men.

RAND also reported that troops who leave the military after reporting sexual assault are likely to forgo “hundreds of thousands of dollars” in a lifetime of earnings since those service members are turning down compensation, such as re-enlistment bonuses, in favor of leaving the military.

RAND recommended that the military should prioritize prevention and response, as well as:

- Ensuring that training and prevention materials highlight that men and women are victims of sexual assault.
- Continue to investigate how sexual assault reporting affects troop separations from the services.

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RAND concluded the report by stating that estimates in the report are “likely underestimates.” Since the survey was carried out in 2014 and only assessed separations in a 28-month period that followed, the estimates in the report “represent only a fraction” of troops who’ve experienced sexual assault during their military career.

In February, the Department of Defense announced it started a commission that will “examine the problem of sexual assault in the military,” according to a DoD report. The commission had 90 days to compile and release a report. As of press time, the Pentagon had not done so.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in February at a Pentagon press briefing that he takes the issue of sexual assault “very, very seriously.” He added that the DoD wants to review what has worked in the past and what additional actions are needed to ensure a safe environment for troops.

“I think any other approach is, in my view, irresponsible,” Austin said. “We’ve been working at this for a long time in earnest, but we haven’t gotten it right.”

This article was originally featured in the June/July 2021 issue of [VFW magazine](#). It was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.