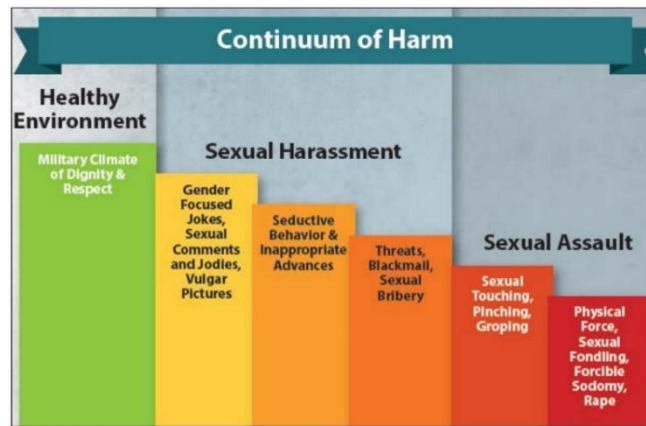


Sexual Harassment/Assault Continuum of Harm

The murder of Army SPC Vanessa Guillén, the associated Independent Review Committee findings, and subsequent legislation have led to change across the Department of Defense (DoD). Now with [new regulations](#) under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Commanders and other supervisors must lead the charge to bolster prevention, raise awareness of the sexual harassment/assault continuum of harm, increase reporting, and promote advocacy for a safer DoD community.

"We need concrete actions that fundamentally change the way we handle military sexual assault...we need to make it clear that these crimes will not be minimized or dismissed." – President Joe Biden

The sexual harassment/assault continuum of harm refers to a range of inappropriate actions. The most subtle forms of this behavior include unsolicited sexual innuendo and unwelcomed sexual advances; and the most extreme forms of this behavior include the use of physical force to commit unwanted sexual contact.



Invisible Wounds after Sexual Harassment/Assault

Sexual harassment/assault can happen to and be perpetrated by anyone – regardless of gender, sexual orientation, rank, duty position, etc. The trauma experienced after sexual violence can leave lasting invisible wounds that can differ from one individual to the next. These may include depression, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, panic attacks and other conditions. Research¹ also shows a strong association between sexual assault and self-harm, which include suicidal impulses and behaviors as well as non-suicidal self-injury.

A [report](#) released by the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military states that "leadership is paramount," and provides recommendations on accountability, prevention, climate and culture, and victim care and support, to include:

- Establishing and maintaining a command climate of dignity and respect for all;
- Using strategies to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault;
- Ensuring victims are afforded care and consideration including preventing retaliation.

For sexual harassment/assault victims and survivors, healing and positive coping strategies include reaching out to friends, family, a professional, or getting involved in raising awareness of resources to prevent sexual assault. The Invisible Wounds Initiative shares [stories](#) from Airmen and Guardians who have invisible wounds, which may be helpful to those living with invisible wounds, and to their leaders and caregivers.

¹ Kayleigh N. Watters, Matthew M. Yalch, Relative effects of sexual assault and other traumatic life events on self-harm, European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2022, 100244, ISSN 2468-7499, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejtd.2021.100244>.

Resources



The [DoD Safe Helpline](#) is the sole secure, confidential, and anonymous crisis support service specially designed for members of the Department of Defense community affected by sexual assault.



Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program

[The Department of the Air Force Resilience](#) provides information on sexual assault including reporting options.



Health.mil

According to the DoD, 6,888 service members reported sexual assault (fiscal year 2019).

Resources, healthy coping strategies, statistics, and more are available on the [Military Health System website](#)