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Sexual Harassment in the Military is Declining

According to a recent survey commissioned by the Defense Department, sexual harassment in the military service is declining. The survey questions asked of military personnel were identical to those posed in 1988 so a direct comparison of results could be achieved. The DOD report was released in July. Some key data results, leading to the positive conclusion that the rate is declining, include:

-The percentage of women who reported unwelcome sexual attention at work declined from 64% to 55% (from 1988 to 1995). The percentage of men reporting same decreased to 14% from 17%.

-As to the frequency of sexually offensive behavior, those with 6 to 10 years of service were asked to compare 1988 with 1995. 60% of female respondents and 76% of males reported less frequency. 10% of females and 5% of males reported an increase in frequency.

-Training is extensive: 80% of respondents reported being trained and 60% measured the training as moderately or very effective.

-Knowledge and Awareness: When asked whether they knew what actions and words constituted sexual harassment, 82% of female respondents and 84% of males said to a large extent.

-Knowledge of Complaint Process: 87% of females and 89% of males stated that they knew the process for reporting allegations of sexual harassment.

-Reporting of Complaints: Personnel are increasingly reporting their experiences. In 1995, 40% of women and 17% of men chose to report an incident, compared to 8% and 10% respectively in 1988.

Other interesting data from the DOD survey that senior leadership should know includes:

-Who reported incidents? Junior enlisted personnel in the ranks of E1-E4 reported at somewhat higher rates (49%) than officers (39%) or senior enlisted personnel (40%).

-Who were the harassers? The most frequent cited source of harassment is co-workers (44% of women and 52% of men), and other military personnel of higher rank (43% of women and 21% of men).

-Military supervisors were named by 10% of women and 15% of men as the source of harassment.

-Where did the harassment occur? The sexual harassment occurred most often on military installations, at work, and during duty hours: 88% of women and 76% of men.

-Why were incidents NOT reported? The most common reason women did not report an incident was that they took care of it themselves (54%). 20% of women did not feel anything would be done. 17% of the women felt they would be labeled troublemakers. The most frequent reason men did not report the incident was the feeling it was not important enough (51%), while 13% felt that reporting would make their work circumstances unpleasant.

In a preamble to the report, Secretary of Defense William Perry stated that regardless of improvement, any incidence of sexual harassment is unacceptable, emphasizing that all employees of this Department have the right to carry out their jobs without discrimination or harassment.

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