

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-463T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2004, Congress has continually taken steps to address sexual assault in the military. For example, Congress has required the development of policy and the tracking and reporting of data regarding sexual assaults. However, reports of sexual assault continue to rise, according to DOD, and in a January 2021 memo, the Secretary of Defense noted that despite years of work in the area, the department must do more.

Drawing from ongoing and prior work, this statement (1) describes the statutory requirements concerning sexual assault prevention and response in the military that were contained in the NDAA's from fiscal years 2004 to 2019, and (2) discusses whether there are areas where DOD can provide focus to further address sexual assault. GAO reviewed the NDAA's to identify requirements related to sexual assault as well as their status and category. GAO also reviewed prior reports, obtained information on recommendation implementation, and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made more than 30 recommendations in prior work specifically related to DOD's efforts to prevent sexual assault and address the needs of certain populations in its sexual assault prevention and response efforts. DOD has made progress in addressing some of the recommendations, but sustained leadership attention is needed to ensure that the remainder of these recommendations are addressed.

View [GAO-21-463T](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

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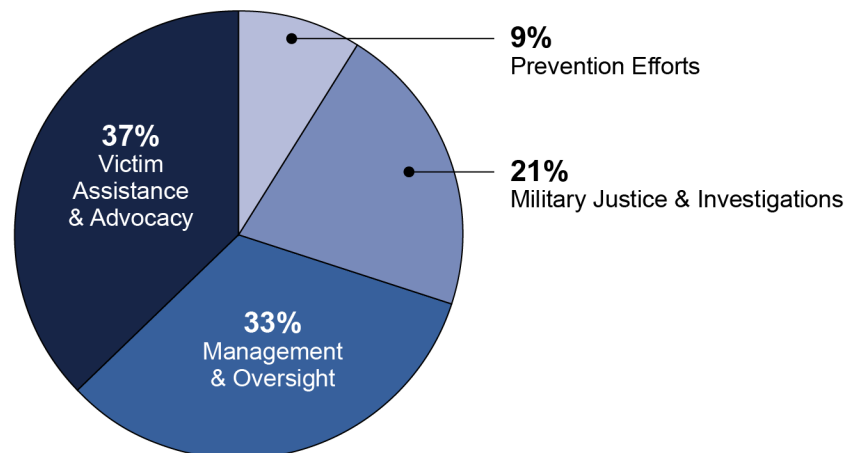
SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

Continued Congressional Oversight and Additional DOD Focus on Prevention Could Aid DOD's Efforts

What GAO Found

In the National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA) from fiscal years 2004 to 2019, based on GAO's preliminary analysis, Congress enacted 249 statutory requirements related to sexual assault prevention and response in the military to assist the Department of Defense (DOD) with its efforts in this area. These statutory requirements covered a number of different areas. For example, they required annual reports on sexual assaults at the military service academies and within the armed forces to aid oversight, and the establishment of training and certification programs for sexual assault response coordinators and victim advocates. Although the requirements cover a wide range of activities, GAO found that they generally related to two broad categories: (1) victim assistance and advocacy, and (2) management and oversight. A smaller percentage of requirements were related to prevention efforts (see figure).

Categories of 249 Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Statutory Requirements in the National Defense Authorization Acts, Fiscal Years 2004-2019



Source: GAO analysis of National Defense Authorization Acts. | GAO-21-463T

While DOD has taken a number of steps to address sexual assault, GAO's prior work has shown that there are areas in which DOD can focus to further address the issue. With the exception of some more recent initiatives, the department's efforts have been largely focused on responding to, rather than preventing, incidents of sexual assault. For example, GAO found that the department had not fully developed performance measures to assess the effectiveness of sexual assault prevention efforts and make changes when needed, and recommended that it do so. Recent DOD efforts in this area, in addition to continued congressional oversight and the implementation of prior GAO recommendations, could help DOD reduce the incidence of sexual assault. Further, additional actions are needed to strengthen DOD's efforts to address the needs of male servicemembers who have been sexually assaulted and the needs of DOD's workforce of nearly 900,000 civilian employees with regard to prevention and response. For example, GAO found that DOD was not tracking all reported work-related sexual assaults involving civilian employees and recommended that it issue guidance to help ensure more comprehensive tracking.