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To cite this article: Christine A. Gidycz, Joel Wyatt, Nathan W. Galbreath, Stephen H. Axelrad & Dave R. McCone (2018) Sexual assault prevention in the military: Key issues and recommendations, *Military Psychology*, 30:3, 240-251, DOI: [10.1080/08995605.2018.1489663](https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2018.1489663)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2018.1489663>



Published online: 18 Jul 2018.



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## Sexual assault prevention in the military: Key issues and recommendations

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### ABSTRACT

Data suggests that sexual assault and harassment continue to be significant concerns within the U.S. military. Given such findings, the Department of Defense and the component military services have recently developed several initiatives aimed at preventing sexual violence within their ranks. A number of these programming efforts are modeled after prevention initiatives in other communities such as college campuses. In this article, the authors discuss major issues that are important for the military as they move forward to augment their sexual assault prevention efforts. Previous prevention work both within and outside of the military will be discussed in the context of the reviewed issues. The article concludes with a list of recommendations.

### KEYWORDS

Sexual assault; harassment; prevention

**What is the public significance of this article?**—This review of sexual assault prevention programs both inside and outside of the military offers suggestions for best practices to reduce sexual assault and harassment within the military.

### Overview

Several Department of Defense (DoD) reports to Congress and the White House have acknowledged that sexual assault in the U.S. military is a serious problem that degrades the health, well-being, and readiness of service members (e.g., DoD, 2014a). Based on publicly available survey results, an estimated 14,881 U.S. service members experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2016, including 0.6% of men and 4.3% of women (Office of People Analytics, 2017). Many studies and reviews of sexual assault research conducted in military and veteran populations have suggested that sexual assault rates are higher in the military than in civilian populations (Turchik & Wilson, 2010). However, direct comparisons of sexual assault rates across these populations are scarce, and such comparisons do not always support the claim that military rates are higher (Black & Merrick, 2013). Whereas the question of whether sexual assault is more common in the military than among civilians remains to be conclusively resolved, it is clear that sexual assault is a significant problem in both populations.

Although the DoD has been devoting considerable and increasing attention to the issue of sexual assault, rigorously evaluated military sexual assault prevention (SAP) efforts, informed by public health research and best practice, are in their infancy. Prevention efforts in other communities, particularly within colleges and universities, have a much longer history. Moreover, whereas many civilian SAP programs have been subjected to rigorous evaluation and published in peer-reviewed journals, DoD prevention efforts often have been widely implemented without assessing their effectiveness. In addition, any evidence bearing on the effectiveness of DoD prevention efforts typically has not been disseminated to the general research community. If results are publicly available at all, the public typically must seek them out on DoD websites.

The purpose of this article is to distill the lessons learned from previous research on sexual assault prevention—work primarily conducted in college and university settings, but also in community and military samples—to propose best practices for future efforts to prevent sexual assault within the military. We organize our discussion around past prevention work in civilian populations followed by a review of military-specific interventions. Following this, important military-specific contextual factors that are important for military interventions are discussed. The article concludes with a list of recommendations for military SAP efforts.

## Civilian research on sexual assault prevention

### Characteristics

Although considerable gains have been made in efforts to prevent sexual assault over the past 20 years, the proliferation of programs has continued and recent reviews (e.g., DeGue et al., 2014) have concluded that evidence for their effectiveness is mixed at best. This is perhaps not surprising given high levels of diversity across these programs. First, interventions differ in terms of the focal target population: Some interventions focus on reducing the risk of perpetration, whereas others attempt to reduce victim vulnerability, and still others promote SAP across broad swaths of the general population. Second, prevention interventions have used a variety of modalities, with the most common approaches involving interactive presentations with discussion, didactic lectures, film or other media presentations, role plays, and skills practice exercises (DeGue et al., 2014). Finally, different interventions have targeted different specific risk and protective factors to reduce the risk of sexual assault. Historically, most prevention efforts have focused on changing individual factors, and studies of this type comprise the vast majority of the published literature on sexual assault prevention. For example, many interventions have focused on increasing knowledge about sexual assault, changing attitudes supportive of sexual assault (e.g., rape myths), and/or increasing empathy for victims of sexual assault. Others have attempted to reduce behaviors that are associated with increased sexual assault risk for both victims and perpetrators (e.g., heavy episodic drinking) or to teach behavioral skills that may prevent sexual assault (e.g., obtaining consent, bystander intervention, self-defense).

Recently, investigations have begun to focus on changing group norms, particularly among men, to reduce sexual violence. Sexually aggressive men typically overestimate both the frequency of sexual aggression among their peers and their peers' comfort with sexual assault and sexual harassment, and they underestimate their peers' willingness to intervene to prevent sexual aggression (Berkowitz, 2010). In addition, men's perception of other men's willingness to intervene to prevent sexual assault has been found to be an important predictor of their own willingness to intervene (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003). This suggests that challenging men's perceived norms related to both sexual aggression and bystander intervention may be potent approaches to reduce sexually aggressive behavior.

The Men's Program (Foubert & Masin, 2012), a SAP program for men that focuses on bystander intervention, has been shown to increase men's bystander efficacy and willingness to intervene (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Foubert,

Brasfield, Hill, & Shelly-Tremblay, 2011). In addition, evidence shows that the Men's Program lowers men's rape myth acceptance, increases their empathy for female rape victims, and reduces their intent to commit sexual assault (Foubert, 2000; Foubert & Newberry, 2006). However, evidence for effects on the likelihood of sexual assault perpetration is mixed (Foubert, 2000; Foubert, Newberry, & Tatum, 2007).

Other programs have attempted to change norms regarding bystander intervention across broader populations comprised of both men and women. This type of approach is appealing because it allows open discussions about sexual assault without implying that men are perpetrators and women are victims. In addition, the bystander approach shifts responsibility to everyone, creating an environment where all individuals contribute to prevention efforts.

The two most widely researched bystander interventions are Bringing in the Bystander and the Green Dot Programs, both of which have been researched in college and high school samples. Bringing in the Bystander is co-led by a male and female group leader in single-sex groups. Program content includes information on prevalence, consequences, and causes of sexual violence and well as discussion about how community members can play an important role as bystanders who identify situations in which the risk of sexual violence is high and can intervene either before, during, or after (i.e., when a victim makes a disclosure) an assault or attempted assault. Role-play activities allow participants to practice prosocial bystander behavior. An emphasis is placed on safety for all participants and information about campus resources (e.g., police) is provided. Finally, participants are asked to develop a "bystander plan" and sign a pledge indicating that they will be active bystanders in their communities (Potter & Moynihan, 2011). There are two versions of the program, a single-session 90-min version and a 4.5-hr version consisting of three 90-min sessions. The program is noteworthy for its rigorous approach to evaluation (DeGue et al., 2014) and the fact that it has shown significant effects on a variety of important outcomes including bystander efficacy, intentions to intervene, and actual intervention behavior (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007; Cares et al., 2015); however, it has not yet been evaluated with respect to its effects on sexually aggressive behavior or on rates of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Given this, DeGue et al. (2014) concluded that Bringing in the Bystander stands out as a program with "substantial potential for impacting sexually violent behavior if subjected to rigorous evaluation on these outcomes" (p. 359).

Another mixed-gender bystander program, Green Dot, focuses on empowering potential bystanders to engage their peers around these issues. The intervention consists of two key components with the first being a motivational speech (50 min) delivered to students in introductory courses throughout the year. This speech introduces the concept of active bystander behavior, presents bystander behavior as something that is feasible and simple, and tries to motivate students to get involved in prevention. Following introduction of bystander concepts to a broad sample of students, intensive bystander training is delivered to a select group of student leaders. Although the intensive training is open to everyone, students are nominated to participate in this part of the program using a peer opinion leaders strategy. With this strategy, faculty, staff, and others nominate students who are believed to be respected and influential to participate in bystander training. The premise is that if leaders model positive sexual assault intervention behavior, the rest of the community is likely to do so as well (Coker et al., 2016). The Green Dot program has been associated with lower rape myth acceptance and more reported witnessing and engagement in bystander intervention behaviors (Coker et al., 2011). In addition, in a comparison of violence rates at a campus that received the Green Dot program and two “control” campuses, the Green Dot campus had lower rates of violence victimization and perpetration, although differences in rates of sexual violence were not significant (Coker et al., 2015). A 4-year longitudinal follow-up showed sustained decreases in violence rates and sexual victimization on the Green Dot campuses as compared to the controls, but self-reported perpetration rates did not decrease and were not significantly different between campuses (Coker et al., 2016). However, in a recent longitudinal analysis of the Green Dot program with high schools students, the program was found to decrease sexual perpetration as well as other forms of interpersonal violence perpetration and victimization (Coker et al., 2017).

Finally, researchers in the field are increasingly highlighting the need to integrate women’s programs that provide risk reduction information and teach empowerment-based self-defense skills into universities’ comprehensive prevention plans. Hollander (*in press*) specifically outlines keys components of empowerment self-defense programs, which include the fact that they are evidence-based, provide a comprehensive toolbox for responding to the full continuum of assault, explicitly hold perpetrators accountable, transform understanding of women’s bodies, place violence in a social context, and have goals regarding social change and empowerment of women. Recent reviews of women’s programming (see Senn, Hollander, & Gidycz, *in press*), suggest that such efforts have led to reductions in sexual

victimization among program participants as well as other positive outcomes, including increases in self-efficacy.

### **Critique**

Evaluation of programs in college samples generally has shown some promising results. However, most of these positive effects have emerged on relatively “soft” measures (e.g., knowledge and attitude change; see Labhardt, Holdsworth, Brown, & Howat, 2017, for a review). Whereas important and necessary, changes on these measures are insufficient for fully reducing rates of sexual assault. The dearth of studies with behavioral outcome measures is largely due to the complexities inherent in measurement (see McMahon, Palmer, Banyard, Murphy, & Gidycz, 2017, for a review). For example, it is difficult to measure bystander intervention without knowing whether respondents actually had the opportunity to intervene. Such difficulties notwithstanding, behavioral measures (e.g., self-reported behavior or sexual violence rates) clearly provide stronger evidence of program effectiveness than do softer measures. Unfortunately, they have not always been included in evaluation efforts, and when they have, they have most often not shown significant effects of the intervention (DeGue et al., 2014). Further, follow-up data are seldom collected to determine whether any observed changes persist, and when it is collected, it often is disappointing (e.g., Gidycz, Orchowski, & Berkowitz, 2011).

Too often, SAP programs (including bystander intervention) have focused on changing individual-level factors, such as knowledge, attitudes, or behavioral skills. Many researchers, scholars, and government agencies have called for increased focus on broader factors included in the peer, community, and institutional contexts (McMahon, 2015). This broader focus is consistent with the social-ecological model (SEM; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which highlights the need to consider risk and protective factors at multiple levels in order to understand complex behaviors such as sexual assault. More specifically, attention must be paid to broad factors such as coalition building, community mobilization, problems with the legal handling of sexual assault cases, improvement in victim services, and policy reform (Banyard, 2014; Cox, Lang, Townsend, & Campbell, 2010; DeGue et al., 2012).

### **Military SAP studies**

Since 2005, only a handful of published studies have assessed some form of SAP programming in the military. Some of the programs examined were developed specifically for military personnel. These include the Navy’s Sexual Assault Intervention Training Program (SAIT; Rau



et al., 2010, 2011), the Sexual Assault Victim Intervention (SAVI; Kelley, Schwerin, Farrar, & Lane, 2005), and the Know Your Power social marketing campaign (Potter & Stapleton, 2012). Each of these programs has been shown to be effective for changing some outcomes. For example, evaluations of separate SAIT programs for men and women showed that they increased knowledge and empathy for rape victims in both groups, and decreased rape myths, although only among males (Rau et al., 2010, 2011). In addition, exposure to the Know Your Power campaign, a social marketing strategy to promote bystander intervention, was associated with greater self-reported intervention in risky sexual assault situations (Potter & Stapleton, 2012). Other studies have evaluated the effectiveness of bystander-based interventions developed for civilian populations in military contexts. For example, in a sample of male soldiers, the Men's Program increased bystander efficacy and intentions to intervene to prevent sexual assault, and reduced self-reported likelihood of committing sexual assault. It also increased men's knowledge and reduced their rape myth acceptance (Foubert & Masin, 2012). In another study, military personnel who participated in the Bringing in the Bystander (Potter & Moynihan, 2011) intervention, compared to those who did not, reported significantly more bystander behaviors 4.5 months after program completion, even after controlling for any previous SAP program participation.

Although these results are promising, these studies suffer from many of the same limitations as previous research with college students: Most have been implemented as brief, single-session trainings, are heterogeneous in content, and focus exclusively on changing individual-level factors. In addition, like most studies of college students, these studies have too often relied upon proxy measures (e.g., measures of change in knowledge, attitudes, or behavioral intentions) rather than measures of self-reported or actual behavior, and they have failed to include the longer-term follow-ups that would allow for determination of lasting effects.

Tharp et al. (2011) argued that evaluations of specific programs need to become more rigorous over time. Unfortunately, the research literature is filled with studies that lack empirical soundness. Whereas pre-post designs may be appropriate when initially evaluating a new program, it is difficult to draw solid conclusions without the use of a comparison group that does not receive the prevention program, and the long term impact of these programs cannot be established without collecting follow-up data. Unfortunately, there are existing well-known programs in both civilian and military contexts that have been implemented for a considerable amount of time, yet remain lacking in rigorous scientific evidence of their effectiveness (DeGue et al., 2014; Tharp et al., 2011).

## DoD SAP programs

The military has been expanding its prevention and response efforts despite the limited number of published studies on its prevention programs (see Rosenstein, De Angelis, McCone, & Carroll, this issue, for a review of program requirements). In the *Report to the President of the United States on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response*, the DoD encouraged active bystander intervention as a cornerstone of its prevention efforts (DoD, 2014b). An additional refinement of the DoD's prevention efforts is the adoption of the social-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a framework for efforts to prevent sexual assault in the military (DoD, 2014a). The DoD has refined the levels specified in the original model (individual, interpersonal, community, and society) to incorporate considerations unique to the military context. Specifically, the DoD added a level identifying "leaders at all levels," and specified multiple community-level influences ("DoD community," "service community," and "unit community;" DoD, 2014a). Leaders are considered a particularly important level of engagement within the military because "leaders are responsible for the climate of their unit and the welfare of their subordinates. The leader also assembles the resources for the requisite skills and expertise for a successful [SAPR] program" (DoD, 2014a, p. 10). Thus, leaders are ultimately responsible for making sure that their commands do not tolerate sexual harassment and assault, in part through ensuring that regular mandated SAPR education is provided and overseeing other elements of SAP programs (DoD, 2014b).

Some progress is being made regarding the evaluation of DoD efforts as the military has recently begun to require standardized assessment of bystander intervention behavior as part of command climate surveys. Since 2013, military unit commanders have been required to use a standardized annual survey to assess the overall health of the unit climate. Among other things, regular command climate surveys function to assess the commander's progress in promoting SAP reporting, and in creating a command free of sexual aggression. SAP and response questions accompany other items that measure individual attitudes about sexual harassment, equal opportunity, suicidal ideation, and other readiness-impacting behaviors. In addition to a measure that captures past-year prevalence of bystander intervention behaviors, the survey also includes a vignette that assesses how likely personnel are to intervene in a hypothetical situation. Although data from command climate surveys provide some evidence that its bystander intervention approaches have increased participants' stated willingness to intervene in risky situations, this is

offset by the low percentage of participants who actually report that they have recognized a high-risk situation. Moreover, although self-reported willingness to intervene could potentially be helpful in understanding the overall impact of bystander intervention programs on the attitudes of military personnel, they are not administered as part of pre-/post-test measurement in a randomized control trial or quasi-experimental design to evaluate a bystander intervention program. Similar to the college student studies cited above, these data, alone, are insufficient in determining the efficacy of SAP programs in the military on bystander intervention and other outcomes related to sexual assault. Moreover, neither the military unit climate surveys nor the regularly administered DoD victimization prevalence surveys include indicators for perpetration, making it difficult to know exactly how much of the adoption of bystander intervention principles are leading to reductions in sexually aggressive behavior.

### **Military-specific considerations: The importance of context**

The military is a large, complex institution with a unique mission, heritage and traditions. As such it has several unique characteristics that may be of importance in developing successful SAP programs. Turchik and Wilson (2010) reviewed many of the distinctive elements of the military, including its sociodemographic make-up, high rates of prior sexual victimization and perpetration among its members, and specific aspects of military culture and structure that may be associated with increased rates of sexual assault within the military, relative to civilian contexts. It is important to bear in mind, however, that there is also considerable variability in these characteristics within the military; both individual and cultural/environmental attributes differ across service branches, military occupations, and even individual units. Thus, it is important to conceptualize risk and protective factors for sexual aggression as varying across eras, units, and subcultures, rather than as uniformly characterizing the military as a whole.

A thorough review of differences between military and civilian contexts that may bear on the risk of sexual harassment and assault is beyond the scope of this article. However, below we draw upon our experience with both civilian and military SAP programs to highlight a few select contextual issues with particular relevance to military settings.

To begin, it is important to acknowledge the more permeable boundaries between work and leisure time in the military than in most civilian institutions, and the likely impact of this on sexual aggression. In the civilian world, *sexual harassment* is generally used to refer to actions

between co-workers in a workplace environment. In contrast, *sexual assault* can occur in any environment, although it generally occurs during off-duty hours in non-work settings. In the military, however, the demarcation between work and leisure time is less clear than it is in the civilian world. Service members inhabit a highly immersive environment in which they are in some sense on duty 24/7, and in which they often reside, work, and socialize with the same cohort, and largely in the same area. As the lines between on- and off-duty time blur, and with high levels of overlap between the people with whom one works and those with whom one socializes, the usual civilian differences in the locations in which sexual harassment and sexual assault occur (i.e., workplace versus anywhere) and in the relationships between perpetrators and victims (co-workers versus anyone) may no longer apply. This is likely to create in the military much more continuity between different forms of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual assault than is typical in most civilian environments.

Students, like service members, may be more likely than members of most other civilian institutions to experience both sexual harassment and sexual assault within the same environment. An important difference, however, is that colleges are not primarily workplaces, and that power differences among college students are negligible compared to power differences among service members. (There is, of course, a clear difference in power and authority between students and professors.) Within the military, rank conditions interactions in pervasive and institutionally mandated ways. It is visually prominent, and there are clear rules and norms prescribing obedience to those of higher rank and prohibiting fraternization with service members of higher or lower rank than oneself. Service members have considerable power over their subordinates, potentially increasing the likelihood of both sexual harassment and sexual assault in this environment relative to the college environment.

For these reasons, although both military and college/university environments share some features that identify them as “total institutions” (Goffman, 1961; Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006), the military is clearly more of a total institution than most universities. This implies that organizational climate—prevailing local norms and attitudes regarding sexism and sexual aggression—are likely to have a greater impact on individuals’ attitudes and behavior in college settings—and especially in military settings—than it would in other work or social environments. Thus, in the military in particular, leadership plays a critical role in setting norms and expectations that create a climate characterized by respect and professionalism or one in which sexism, sexual aggression, and other forms of misconduct are tolerated (Sadler, Mengeling, Booth,

O'Shea, & Torner, 2017; Sadler, Lindsay, Hunter, & Day, this issue). An unsupportive climate may manifest at several levels within an organization, from sexist environments at a small unit level (Harris, McDonald, & Sparks, 2018) to an overall sense of institutional betrayal when victims are unsupported following a sexual assault (Smith & Freyd, 2014). In contrast, an organization that promotes respect for its members enhances safety, trust, dignity, and morale (Holland, Rabelo, & Cortina, 2016). Under such circumstances, individuals may be more likely to come forward when they witness or experience inappropriate behavior and, as a result, sexual assault and harassment are likely to become less common.

The “continuum of harm” that has been adopted by the DoD and disseminated through SAPR trainings and awareness campaigns highlights the connections between sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. For example, the DoD's *Sexual Assault Prevention Strategy* (2014c) noted the imperative to “recognize the connection between preventing sexual assault in terms of the continuum of harm (e.g., sexist jokes, bullying, sexual harassment, hazing, drinking, stalking)” (p. 14). As argued above, the associations between less and more extreme forms of sexism and sexual aggression may be especially strong within the total institution of the military (Sadler et al., this issue).

Another key consideration for successful SAP is addressing alcohol use. Alcohol use is an important factor to consider because it is commonly involved in sexual assaults. First, both victims and perpetrators of sexual assault commonly report using alcohol at the time of the assault; this is true in both college contexts (see Abbey, Wegner, Woerner, Pegram, & Pierce, 2014, for a review) and military ones (Morral, Gore, & Schell, 2015). In addition, alcohol is often used by sexual assault perpetrators to incapacitate potential victims. For example, in a sample of enlisted male Navy personnel, 75% of those who endorsed behaviors consistent with rape or an attempted rape during their time in the military reported using drugs or alcohol for this purpose (McWhorter, Stander, Merrill, Thomsen, & Milner, 2009). Finally, if it is indeed the case, as we have argued above, that associations between sexual harassment and sexual assault are stronger in the military than in most civilian organizations, it may be that alcohol plays a role in both types of sexual aggression within the military. In civilian organizations, at least in the current era, alcohol misuse in the occupational setting is atypical, and thus it is unlikely to be a factor in sexual harassment. However, because service members are in some sense always on duty, they may be sexually harassed outside of the walls of the office, in settings in which alcohol use is common.

Given the association between alcohol and sexual assault, it is concerning that military service is associated with significant alcohol use, particularly among men (e.g., Teachman, Anderson, & Tedrow, 2015). Turchik and Wilson (2010) articulated a number of factors within the military environment that may foster high-risk drinking behavior, including new independence for young recruits, accessibility of alcohol, new relationships, limitations on privacy, and living in close quarters within integrated units. In a recent review by Teachman and colleagues (2015), male veterans and active duty service members were found to be more likely to use alcohol than civilians (although female service members and veterans were actually less likely to drink than their civilian counterparts). Teachman et al. (2015) also reviewed evidence showing that military service appeared to encourage young men to drink alcohol, and that the longer men served the more likely they were to use alcohol.

The association between alcohol use and sexual assault has not gone unnoticed by the DoD, which has suggested a number of approaches available to command leadership to assist in reducing alcohol misuse and associated problems. In addition to recommendations to review alcohol policies (DoD, 2014c), additional examples include stopping the sale of alcohol at installation convenience stores located adjacent to barracks and dormitories; providing bar and hotel operators near military installations with a number to call if a service member is engaged in risky drinking or associated behavior; increasing military patrols to increase identification of personnel engaging in irresponsible alcohol use; or requiring that service members complete a responsible drinking class before being served alcohol on the installation (DoD, 2016).

## Recommendations

### *Leverage unique characteristics of the military*

The military has a number of unique attributes that can be an asset when designing and implementing SAP programming. We offer suggestions for leveraging these attributes.

### *Focus on the entire continuum of harm*

Data suggest that environments where sexual harassment is tolerated also are environments that have higher rates of rape. Although this appears to be negative on the face of it, it may actually suggest that early intervention at the first signs of sexism or harassment

may hold greater promise to reduce sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military than in institutions with less power over all aspects of the individual's life. That is, those same key elements of military life that may increase the associations between sexism and sexual aggression in this setting—consistent social groups across work and leisure time, strong hierarchical power and authority, and impermeable group boundaries—may just as readily operate to reduce the risk of sexism and sexual misconduct through early intervention and consistent response to infractions. The military's prevention strategy already acknowledges the relationship between sexual harassment and sexual assault (DoD, 2014c) and the military is poised to capitalize on this. These should be strongly leveraged in SAP efforts. Sexism and harassing behaviors are often more subtle and difficult to notice by others, and bystanders are more reluctant to intervene in these situations than with more overt types of sexual aggression (McMahon, Postmus, & Koenick, 2011). Therefore the military must clearly educate their members on the importance of recognizing cases of even subtle sexism or harassment and provide skills training on how to successfully intervene.

### ***Engage leaders at all levels***

The tone that leaders set, their own behavior, and their expectations of their subordinates are key to the success of any military SAP program. It is not sufficient for leaders to refrain from displaying sexism or other forms of bias; they must actively convey their high standards for behavior if they are to effectively prevent sexual aggression and other misconduct within their ranks. This requires engaging leadership at all levels of an organization (Sadler et al., 2017; Sadler et al., this issue) and should be a key consideration for any SAP effort. Indeed, Sadler et al. (2017) provide a comprehensive list of behaviors that could be utilized to both identify and target high risk units, and Sadler, Lindsay, Hunter, and Day (*in press*) provide specifics about how to incorporate training into the Professional Military Education System (PME) so that leaders are well-equipped to create environments where sexual assault is not tolerated.

### ***Intentionally integrate programming efforts***

Despite various efforts to reduce sexual assault on college campuses, there still is limited data to suggest that such programming efforts have led to reductions in sexual assault. A significant issue is that these efforts are often inconsistent with best practices in

this area (Nation et al., 2003). As noted previously, prevention programs are often time-limited, brief, and address a limited number of risk factors at best. Given this, scholars are calling for a more integrated and systematic plan to address sexual assault across students' years in college (Banyard, 2014). As noted by Banyard (2014), whereas we know that longer or greater doses of prevention are more effective, "we know little about the impact of creating greater exposure by linking different prevention tools" (p. 345). The current call is to link different prevention tools across the time that students are in college, but with an emphasis on considering the developmental level of the audiences at each stage (Banyard, 2014). For example, some have questioned the developmental appropriateness of teaching first-year students bystander intervention skills given that they may not yet have an awareness of sexual assault and what it entails. Further, they may also have little understanding of what consent entails and are at a developmental stage where it may be hard to speak up and not follow the crowd (Banyard, 2013, 2014). Thus, some scholars reason that it may be more appropriate to teach basic information early in a student's career, and teach bystander intervention as students mature into more leadership roles on campus and are more comfortable stepping up in a risky situation (Banyard, 2014). Efforts at integrated programming of this sort are in their early stages. Scholars have yet to evaluate such a comprehensive approach, and there is still much to be learned about the integration of prevention across the college years (Orchowski, Edwards et al., *in press*). In addition, as discussed below, the same logic and adaptation of a developmentally-based integrated program may not apply to the military given its unique context and culture. If this approach is used in the military, then, it should be with these caveats in mind.

Despite the limited progress on college campuses regarding an integrated approach to prevention, the call to action along these lines is important for the military as well. The military has implemented a number of parallel programming efforts in their settings which include bystander focused and social marketing educational efforts, as well as policy changes. At the same time, efforts have also addressed the needs of survivors who come forward. Just as with efforts on college campuses, it is important for the military to design integrated interventions. Such a plan should strive to build up and coordinate messages across time. Prevention with new recruits likely needs to provide basic information about sexual assault and its risk factors (e.g., alcohol) and increase their awareness of it as a problem within the military. Consistent with what is being recommended for college students, it might



be most beneficial to offer risk reduction programming to women that includes an empowerment-based self-defense program early on given its effectiveness on rates of victimization (Orchowski, Edwards et al., *in press*). Social marketing campaigns could likely be used throughout time to reinforce messages that either raise awareness or teach specific skills. Bystander intervention approaches can perhaps be best implemented once individuals have an awareness of sexual assault and risky situations and feel comfortable in their environments.

At the same time, such individually based interventions need to be augmented by interventions that address more macro-systemic factors. That is, each military installation should consider the various factors, from an immediate (or micro) level to increasingly broad (macro) level, that may impact sexual assault perpetration at that location. For example, are there unique risk factors (such as living arrangements, unit mission requirements, subculture norms, or local policies) that affect rates of sexism, sexual harassment, and/or sexual assault at that installation? Do these or other factors influence the willingness of service members to intervene when necessary, or to report incidents when warranted? Addressing these and similar factors at all levels of the social ecology is likely important to the success of any SAP effort.

### ***Incorporate alcohol in prevention plans and assessments***

Alcohol and sexual assault programming are typically conducted separately on college campuses. Rarely is alcohol discussed as a major risk factor for sexual perpetration, or as a factor on one's ability to intervene as a bystander. There has been a call on college campuses to address the overlap between alcohol and sexual victimization (Davis et al., 2012; Testa & Livingston, 2009); it is important that the military integrate sexual assault and alcohol prevention efforts as well. In addition to reviewing alcohol policies, we recommend that military SAP efforts include education about the association between alcohol use and being at risk for sexual assault, explain the specific risks involved when consuming alcohol, demonstrate how perpetrators use alcohol as a weapon against potential victims, and discuss how alcohol may impair an individual's ability to give consent, resist an assault, or to intervene effectively as a bystander. Prevention efforts that incorporate alcohol information may be effective for both universal and primary prevention. With regard to the latter, results of a recently completed study of college men who were high risk drinkers (i.e., those who had obtained a university alcohol violation) suggest that an integrated alcohol/sexual

assault intervention had positive effects on several outcomes, including drinking intentions, negative alcohol-related consequences, sexually coercive behavior, and bystander intervention intentions (Orchowski, Barnett et al., *in press*). Similar interventions targeting high-risk groups could also augment more universal prevention efforts within the military. In fact, Orchowski and her colleagues are working to translate their program for college students to address sexual assault in the military among heavy drinkers (Orchowski et al., 2017).

### ***Include rigorous evaluation***

It is imperative that the military create and sustain a rigorous evaluation of its prevention programming efforts. It is no longer sufficient for the military or college programs to rely on short-term "soft" measures of effectiveness to argue that their efforts are succeeding. It is inherently more complicated to evaluate a coordinated prevention plan compared to isolated programs, and neither the military nor college campuses have yet engaged in such efforts. Recently, colleges have been mandated to conduct regular campus climate surveys to monitor (among other forms of violent behavior), rates of sexual victimization and harassment (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2017). Similar surveys are already conducted in the military and could serve as one measure of whether a coordinated plan is influencing rates of sexual victimization. However, consistent with the focus on behaviors across the continuum of harm, other key indices of effectiveness should also be included; these include positive attitude change, increased engagement in prosocial bystander behavior, and a rise in victims' disclosures to authorities as a result of greater trust in the system. Other useful indices include rates of sexist and sexually harassing behaviors, willingness to intervene when these behaviors occur, and confidence in reporting witnessing such occurrences to leadership. To use these types of measures to determine the effects of a coordinated SAP intervention, the intervention would need to be introduced to some sites and not to others; rates of victimization as well as other key indices of positive change could be then be compared at sites that did versus did not receive the intervention.

### ***Consider military context when adapting civilian programs***

Although this review provides some suggestions about what has worked in college settings, the translation of programs from these settings to the military takes

considerable thought and effort. Nation et al. (2003) noted that it is imperative to include members of the target population in developing and implementing prevention strategies to ensure that the program is meeting the community's needs. In addition, there are barriers that may be unique to specific environments that also need to be addressed in the context of programming in order to maximize effectiveness. One strategy for making programs relevant for the particular context is to conduct focus groups with members of the target population prior to developing interventions. Of concern for the military when attempting to evaluate its efforts is that the vast majority of outcome measures were developed for use with college students; thus, the content of such scales may be less relevant for military populations.

### Consider victimization history and subgroup status

SAP efforts on college campuses and in the military have not adequately addressed how issues related to participants' lived experiences influence their responsiveness to prevention efforts (Worthen & Wallace, 2017). What we do know suggests that individuals may respond differently to SAP efforts as a function of their victimization history. Although studies in this area are limited and inconsistent, Rothman and Silverman (2007) found that their campus-wide SAP program only reduced rates of victimization for those without a history of prior victimization. This is particularly important given high rates of premilitary sexual victimization among military members (Turchik & Wilson, 2010); it is therefore essential that prevention programmers work to ensure that prevention efforts assist individuals both with and without a history of sexual victimization. Further, to date, both college and military SAP interventions have been designed around heteronormative relationships, thus potentially limiting their applicability to lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (Worthen & Wallace, 2017). In one of the first studies to assess how individuals with different identities responded to an on-line prevention program, lesbian, gay, and bisexual students expressed disappointment with the program's heteronormative biases (Worthen & Wallace, 2017). Further, compared to gay, lesbian, and heterosexual students, bisexual and "mostly heterosexual" students were more likely to report being angry about the program and view it as "valueless." These findings are particularly concerning given that sexual minorities evidence higher rates of sexual victimization than sexual majorities in both college student (Edwards et al., 2015) and military samples (DoD, 2016). Thus, it is important that the military incorporate

content geared toward the experiences of sexual minorities (as well as other minority groups). Doing so will likely increase the relevance, and by extension the effectiveness, of such efforts (Worthen & Wallace, 2017).

### Conclusions

Multilevel prevention consistent with an ecological approach is inherently comprehensive and must focus on community engagement, contextualized programming, and structural factors that contribute to sexual assault in the military (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009). We agree with Casey and Lindhorst that contextualized prevention cannot occur without engaging community members to identify their beliefs about the contributors to and likely solutions for sexual violence. DoD (2014c) stated, "Due to the complex nature of the problem, it is important to conduct a number of interventions (actions) that span multiple levels to achieve the greatest, lasting impact," (p. 8). However, this implementation is cumbersome and time-consuming, and empirical evidence of progress is still lacking and hard to obtain. It is our hope that the suggestions provided in this review will help to guide the military's efforts toward the important goal of creating and evaluating comprehensive interventions to eliminate sexual violence, and concurrently that the DoD will invest in a comprehensive evaluation strategy to ensure that their efforts are leading to safer communities for all service members.

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