



Military academies report a 64 percent increase in sexual assault reports

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There were 41 reports of sexual assault at the military service academies this academic year, a 64 percent increase from reported assaults in the 2008-2009 academic year, according to a new [report](#) released by the Defense Department on Wednesday.

"Sexual harassment and assault are incompatible with our core values, degrade mission readiness and reflect poorly on military culture," Clifford L. Stanley, undersecretary of Defense for personnel and readiness, said in a statement. "The department is committed to establishing a culture free of sexual harassment and assault at the academies, and for the force in general."

Defense officials estimate fewer than 10 percent of incidents are actually reported at the academies. Cadets and midshipmen participated in the voluntary survey at higher rates than in previous years. Most -- 89 percent -- said they understood key training concepts on how to report sexual harassment or sexual assault.

It's not clear the increase in reports means there is an increase in sexual assaults at the academies. It could be the result of better training and education and increased confidence on the part of victims that service officials will respond effectively, the report said.

Anuradha Bhagwati, a former Marine Corps captain and executive director of the Service Women's Action Network, an organization founded and led by women veterans, said, "The reality today is that military academies are insular environments where sexual predators face little risk of prosecution and survivors have little hope for institutional protections."

SWAN called on the Pentagon to review and update policy measures to combat "a pervasive culture of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment."

"The academies integrated in 1976, and it took 30 years before a West Point cadet was convicted on a rape charge," Bhagwati said.

Yesterday, SWAN and the ACLU filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in New Haven, Conn., against the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to obtain records on the prevalence of military sexual trauma within the military and the services' responses to those incidents.

The Defense report was mandated in the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act, which directed the department to evaluate the effectiveness of training and policies related to sexual harassment and violence, as well as conduct the "Gender Relations Survey" every two years.

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