



December 2022

WOMEN IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Improvements to
Policy, Data, and
Assessments Needed
to Better Understand
and Address Career
Barriers

WOMEN IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Improvements to Policy, Data, and Assessments Needed to Better Understand and Address Career Barriers

Why GAO Did This Study

Women have historically held critical roles in the military. However, women make up less than 10 percent of SOCOM service members, compared with about 19 percent DOD-wide. SOCOM leaders have acknowledged existing issues of gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, and career impediments, and the need to do more.

GAO was asked to review the incidence of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and DOD's efforts to assess potential barriers to women in SOF. This report examines, among other issues, the extent to which (1) DOD has developed policies to prevent and respond to such incidents involving SOCOM service members, (2) SOCOM has access to data on these incidents, and (3) DOD and SOCOM have identified and addressed barriers that may impact the careers of women in SOF. GAO reviewed policies; interviewed DOD, SOCOM, and service officials; interviewed officials at five SOF headquarters installations; and interviewed 51 women currently or formerly serving in SOF.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making eight recommendations, including that the military services revise their policies for incidents in joint environments to align with DOD policy, DOD establish a collaborative process for SOCOM to access data, DOD clarify oversight and use of the annual assessments, and DOD complete a comprehensive analysis of barriers to women in SOF. DOD concurred with all eight. DOD also commented on aspects of the scope, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-23-105168](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) policies to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault are applicable department-wide. But some of the implementing service policies related to the environments in which U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) operates are inconsistent with DOD policy. The military services, not SOCOM, are responsible for administering service-specific policies on these types of incidents; however, SOCOM service members conduct missions in a joint (i.e., multi-service) environment. Some of the services' policies related to incidents of gender discrimination and sexual harassment occurring in joint environments are not aligned with DOD policies. DOD policies state that, in joint environments, discrimination and harassment complaints are to be processed through the complainant's service. In contrast, Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force policies all assign this responsibility to the alleged offender's service. Without the military services revising their policies for joint environments to help ensure alignment with DOD policies, such cases may be processed inconsistently across DOD.

SOCOM has limited access to timely, accurate, and complete data on its personnel, including incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. While SOCOM has taken some steps to address its data access limitations, the department has not established a collaborative process to ensure SOCOM has access to data maintained in various Office of the Secretary of Defense and military service databases. Without such a process to facilitate SOCOM's access to needed data, SOCOM leadership will not be positioned to identify trends or address urgent concerns.

SOCOM has taken some steps to identify and address barriers, such as gender discrimination and pregnancy-related policies, that may affect women's careers in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF).

SOCOM-Identified Barriers to Women Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) information. | GAO-23-105168

However, DOD has yet to complete a comprehensive evaluation of barriers to women or developed a plan of action for addressing identified barriers. In addition, per a 2016 DOD requirement, SOCOM and the military departments are to conduct annual assessments on the full integration of women into previously closed positions. DOD has not, however, communicated which office has oversight responsibility for the assessments and their intended use is unclear. Without taking action to address these issues, DOD and Congress may be limited in their efforts to understand and address barriers to women in SOF.

Contents

Letter		1
	Background	5
	DOD Policies Apply to Incidents Involving SOCOM Service Members, but Service Policies Related to Joint Environments Are Inconsistent with DOD Policy	12
	SOCOM Has Limited Access to Data on Incidents Involving Women in SOCOM	21
	Several Factors Limit Efforts to Identify and Address Barriers That May Impact Careers of Women in SOF	27
	Conclusions	42
	Recommendations for Executive Action	43
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	44
Appendix I	Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces	48
Appendix II	Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces	85
Appendix III	Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	123
Appendix IV	Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command Assessments of Barriers to Women	133
Appendix V	GAO Interview Responses from Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces	135
Appendix VI	GAO Interview Responses from Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces	145

Appendix VII	Comments from the Department of Defense	153
Appendix VIII	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	157
Related GAO Products		158

Tables

Table 1: DOD and Non-DOD Organizations Contacted by GAO	131
Table 2: DOD and SOCOM Assessments of Barriers to Women in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)	133
Table 3: Responses by Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces to Questions about Barriers or Career Impediments to Get into U.S. Special Operations Forces (Questions 80 and 80a)	135
Table 4: Responses by Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces to Questions about Barriers or Career Impediments While Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (Questions 81 and 81a)	136
Table 5: Within the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women are given the same types of opportunities; this would include similar training and job assignments? (Question 69)	136
Table 6: Within the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women are treated with the same level of professionalism? (Question 70)	137
Table 7: Number of Women Who Experienced Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, or Retaliation While in SOF (Questions 10, 13, 21, 24, 33, 36, and 49)	137
Table 8: Did the experience of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military? (Questions 12, 23, 35, and 57)	138
Table 9: Number of Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Complaint, by Type, after	

Experiencing Gender Discrimination or Sexual Harassment on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 13, 15, 24, and 26)	139
Table 10: Number of Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Report, by Type, after Experiencing Sexual Assault on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 36 and 38)	139
Table 11: Number of Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Retaliation Report after Experiencing Retaliation after January 1, 2016 (Questions 49 and 52)	139
Table 12: How satisfied were you with the resolution of your complaint or report? (Questions 17, 28, and 41)	140
Table 13: Did the experience of filing a complaint or report cause you to consider leaving or separating from U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) or the military? (Questions 20, 32, 44, and 59)	140
Table 14: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Gender Discrimination Complaint (Question 18)	141
Table 15: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Sexual Harassment Complaint (Question 29)	141
Table 16: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Reporting Sexual Assault (Question 42)	142
Table 17: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing a Report of Retaliation (Question 55)	143
Table 18: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not play an active role in preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault? (Questions 71 and 75):	143
Table 19: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not adequately respond to allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault? (Questions 72 and 76):	144
Table 20: Within the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women were given the same	

types of opportunities; this would include similar training and job assignments? (Question 72)	145
Table 21: Within the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women were treated with the same level of professionalism? (Question 73)	145
Table 22: Number of Women Who Experienced Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, or Retaliation While Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (Questions 15, 18, 27, 30, 40, 43, and 57)	146
Table 23: Did the experience of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) or the military? (Questions 17, 29, 42, and 65)	147
Table 24: Number of Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Complaint, by Type, after Experiencing Gender Discrimination or Sexual Harassment on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 18, 20, 30, and 32)	147
Table 25: Number of Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Report, by Type, after Experiencing Sexual Assault on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 43 and 45)	148
Table 26: Number of Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Retaliation Report after Experiencing Retaliation after January 1, 2016 (Questions 57 and 60)	148
Table 27: How satisfied were you with the resolution of your complaint or report? (Questions 22, 34, and 48)	148
Table 28: Did the experience of filing a complaint or report cause you to consider leaving or separating from U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) or the military? (Questions 26, 39, and 52)	149
Table 29: Most Frequently Cited Reasons Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Gender Discrimination Complaint (Question 23)	149
Table 30: Most Frequently Cited Reasons Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Sexual Harassment Complaint (Question 35)	149

Table 31: Most Frequently Cited Reasons Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing a Report of Retaliation (Question 63)	150
Table 32: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not play an active role in preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault? (Questions 74 and 77)	150
Table 33: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not adequately respond to allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault that they were made aware of? (Questions 75 and 78)	151
Table 34: Did you need any resources related to transitioning from the military due to being in U.S. Special Operations Forces, for example due to a U.S. Special Operations Forces-related injury or experience? (Question 84)	151
Table 35: Did you have any difficulty accessing resources related to transitioning from the military? (Question 84a)	151
Table 36: Did you have any difficulty accessing any other transition-related resources that you tried to use when separating from the military? (Question 85)	152

Figures

Figure 1: Organizational Chart for the Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command	6
Figure 2: Examples of SOCOM-Identified Barriers to Women Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces	28
Figure 3: Demographic Information about Interview Participants for GAO Interviews, Women Currently or Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces	126

Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
DODIG	Department of Defense Inspector General
ODEI	Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
SOF	U.S. Special Operations Forces
SO/LIC	Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. The published product may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.



December 15, 2022

Congressional Requesters

Women have served in the U.S. military since the earliest days of our nation's history as nurses, water bearers, cooks, laundresses, and spies, and disguised as male soldiers to circumvent regulations that permitted only men to enlist.¹ The remaining restrictions on women's service and certain occupational roles were lifted within the past decade.² Specifically, in 2013, the Department of Defense (DOD) eliminated restrictions on women serving in ground-combat roles, including those in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), and required women's integration into such positions no later than January 1, 2016.³ Since 2001, the number of SOF personnel has grown from 45,000 to over 78,000 who carry out a broad range of activities that include counterterrorism, crisis response, and contingency force operations.

Notwithstanding the expansion of SOF personnel and activities, as well as the opening of previously closed positions to women, women continue to make up a smaller proportion of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) military personnel than of the department's overall military force.⁴ Specifically, the percentage of women service members in SOCOM increased from 7.9 percent in fiscal year 2016 to 9.8 percent in fiscal year 2021, according to SOCOM. In comparison, as of fiscal year

¹The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, *A Historical Review of the Influence of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service (DACOWITS), 1951 to Present: A 70-Year Review*, (Alexandria, VA: December 2020).

²A Secretary of Defense memorandum entitled *Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule* (Jan. 13, 1994) prohibited the assignment of women to positions in units below the brigade level whose primary mission was to engage in direct combat on the ground. "Direct ground combat" was defined as engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew-served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel.

³DOD, Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum, *Elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule* (Jan. 24, 2013).

⁴SOCOM is a functional combatant command that employs active and reserve forces of the military services that are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations.

2020, women represented approximately 18.7 percent of the total military force, according to DOD.⁵

DOD has stated that it is committed to promoting an environment free from barriers that may prevent underrepresented groups, including women, from rising to the highest levels of responsibility within the department.⁶ However, according to SOF leadership, forms of bias continue to exist within SOCOM, which create barriers to accessing a broad range of talent, skills, and perspectives.⁷ SOCOM leadership has stated that the command has made incremental progress in removing barriers to women's participation and advancement within SOF. However, SOCOM leadership has acknowledged existing issues of sexual harassment,⁸ sexual assault,⁹ and barriers to women's participation within

⁵DOD, *2020 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community*.

⁶Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report, Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military* (Dec. 18, 2020).

⁷Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and U.S. Special Operations Command Memorandum, *Diversity and Inclusion in SOF—Why It Matters and What We Must Do* (Sept. 10, 2020).

⁸DOD defines "sexual harassment" as conduct that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and deliberate or repeated offensive comments or gestures of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person's job, pay, or career; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career or employment decisions affecting that person; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Such conduct constitutes "sexual harassment" when it is so severe or pervasive that a reasonable person would perceive, and the victim does perceive, the environment as hostile or offensive. DOD Instruction 1020.03, *Harassment Prevention and Response in the Armed Forces* (Feb. 8, 2018) (incorporating change 1, Dec. 29, 2020).

⁹DOD defines "sexual assault" as intentional sexual contact characterized by the use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent. This includes a broad category of sexual offenses, including rape, sexual assault, aggravated sexual contact, abusive sexual contact, forcible sodomy (forced oral or anal sex), or attempts to commit these offenses. DOD Directive 6495.01, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program* (Jan. 23, 2012) (incorporating change 5, Nov. 10, 2021).

the command, and has stated that more needs to be done to address remaining challenges.¹⁰

You asked us to conduct a review of the incidence of women in SOCOM units who have experienced gender discrimination,¹¹ sexual harassment, sexual assault, and of DOD's efforts to assess any other potential barriers to serving in SOF. This report assesses the extent to which:

1. DOD has developed policies to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving SOCOM service members;
2. SOCOM can access and use timely, accurate, and complete data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving women in SOCOM, and DOD maintains data on reported retaliatory behavior against these women;¹² and
3. the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and SOCOM have identified and addressed barriers that may impact the careers of women serving in SOF.

For all of our objectives, we conducted virtual site visits to SOCOM headquarters and the headquarters for each service component command. We also interviewed various OSD, SOCOM, and military

¹⁰To Receive Testimony on the Posture of United States Special Operations Command and United States Cyber Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2023 and the Future Years Defense Program: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, 117th Cong. (Statement of General Richard D. Clarke, Commander, United States Special Operations Command) (Apr. 5, 2022).

¹¹For the purposes of this review, we use the term gender discrimination to refer to matters of prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex (including pregnancy) against women, including discriminatory harassment and disparate treatment. While DOD defines prohibited discrimination as discrimination, including disparate treatment, of an individual or group on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), gender identity, or sexual orientation that is not otherwise authorized by law or regulation and detracts from military readiness, the department does not specifically define gender discrimination. DOD Instruction 1350.02, *DOD Military Equal Opportunity Program* (Sept. 4, 2020).

¹²DOD defines "retaliation" as illegal, impermissible, or hostile actions taken by a service member's chain of command, peers, or coworkers as a result of making or being suspected of making a protected communication in accordance with DOD Directive 7050.06. DOD Instruction 1020.03. Protected communications include reports of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault when made to certain individuals or organizations. DOD Directive 7050.06, *Military Whistleblower Protection* (Apr. 17, 2015) (incorporating Change 1, Oct. 12, 2021).

service officials.¹³ To obtain the perspectives of women who had personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation while serving in SOF, we interviewed 51 women who either were currently serving in SOF at the time of our interviews (see app. I) or had formerly served in SOF (see app. II) and who volunteered to speak with us about these experiences occurring since 2016, and any related impediments to career progression.

For our first objective, we reviewed relevant DOD, SOCOM, and military service policies on gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. We compared the military services' policies related to such incidents occurring in joint environments with related DOD policies and assessed the extent to which they were aligned.

For our second objective we requested and obtained some data on reported incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault from SOCOM, and retaliation (for reporting incidents of sexual assault) involving SOCOM service members from the Department of Defense Inspector General (DODIG). However, after reviewing the data and interviewing relevant officials, we determined the gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault data were not sufficiently reliable to report, as discussed later in the report.

For our third objective, we analyzed OSD, SOCOM, and service component command efforts to identify and address potential barriers to women serving in SOF. Specifically, we compared data collection and assessment efforts with internal control standards for communicating the necessary quality information to achieve an agency's objectives and developing information needed for corrective action, among other things.¹⁴ For a detailed description of our scope and methodology, see appendix III.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2021 to December 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our

¹³For the purposes of this report, the term "military services" refers to the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force. We did not include the Space Force, given its status as a new organization that was established in December 2019.

¹⁴GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

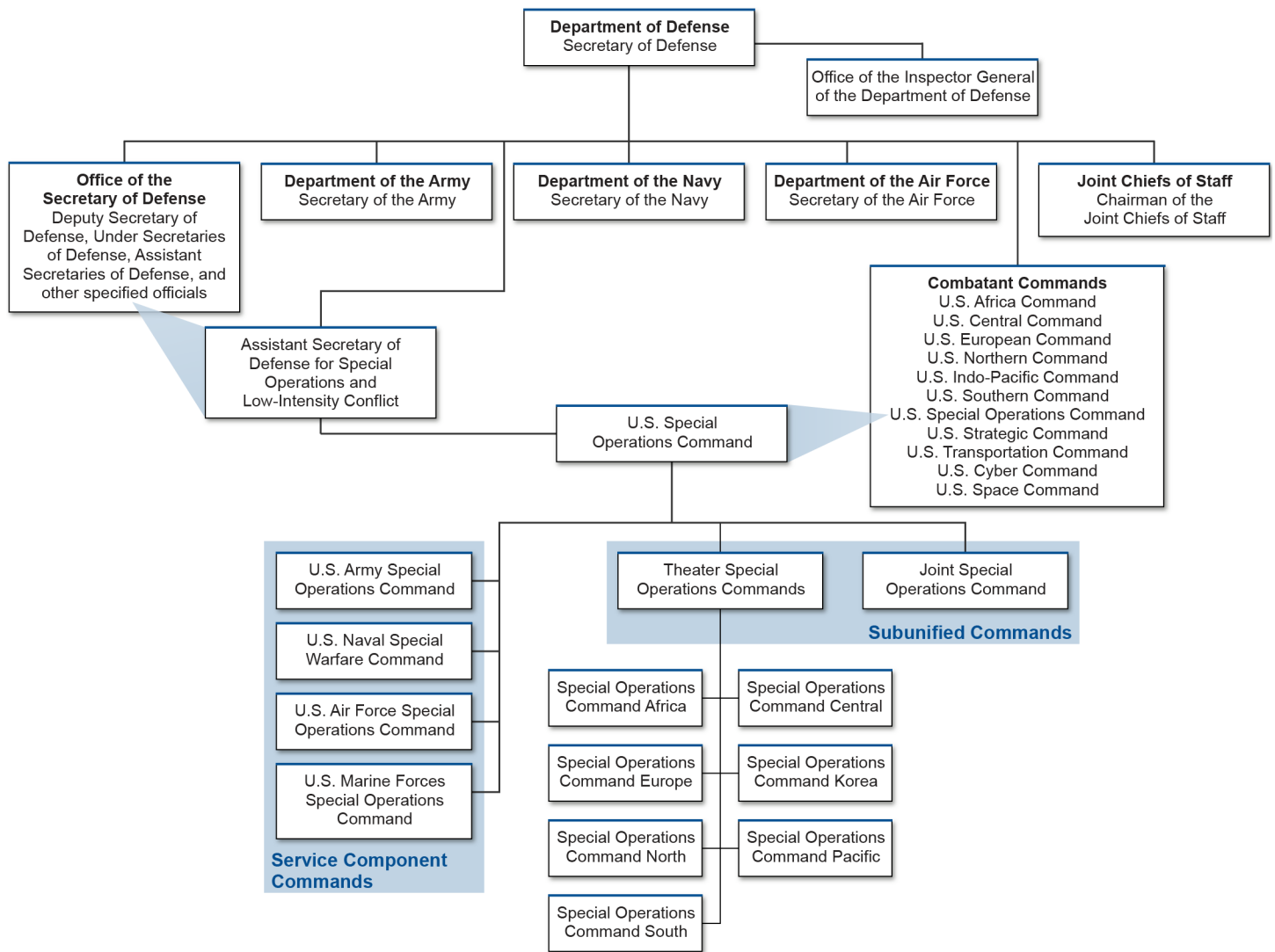
findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

DOD Entities with Roles and Responsibilities Related to SOF

Various officials and organizations within DOD have roles and responsibilities related to SOF, as described in figure 1.

Figure 1: Organizational Chart for the Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command



Source: GAO presentation of DOD information. | GAO-23-105168

- The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC)** is the principal civilian advisor to the Secretary of Defense for special operations, low-intensity conflict, and special operations peculiar administrative matters. In this role, the Assistant Secretary exercises authority, direction, and control of all special operations peculiar administrative matters relating to the organization, training, and equipping of special operations forces,

including resources and equipment, and civilian personnel.¹⁵ The Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) has similar authority, direction, and control as a military department Secretary over such administrative matters.

- **SOCOM** is the combatant command responsible for organizing, training, equipping, and providing fully capable SOF to defend the United States and its interests. Combatant commands with specified functional responsibilities operate worldwide across geographic boundaries. These commands provide unique capabilities to the combatant commands that have geographic responsibilities.¹⁶ Service members assigned to SOCOM remain under the administrative control of the military service to which they are assigned for matters such as pay, promotion, and professional development.

SOCOM is responsible for developing special operations strategy, doctrine, and tactics; employing forces of the command to carry out assigned missions; validating requirements; acquiring special operations peculiar equipment; and formulating and submitting requirements for intelligence support. Subject to the authority, direction, and control of the Secretary of Defense, the commander of SOCOM is responsible for and has the authority to conduct all affairs of the command for special operations activities.¹⁷

- SOCOM has established seven subordinate **Theater Special Operations Commands** that perform broad, continuous missions uniquely suited to SOF capabilities. This is the primary theater SOF organization for planning and controlling special operations and other SOF activities. The **Joint Special Operations Command** is a subunified command that is charged with studying special operations requirements and techniques, ensuring interoperability and equipment

¹⁵DOD Directive 5111.10, *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict* (May 5, 2021).

¹⁶DOD has eleven unified combatant commands, including four combatant commands with specified functional responsibilities and seven combatant commands with a designated geographic area of responsibility.

¹⁷The commander of SOCOM is responsible for the following special operations activities: (1) direct action, (2) special reconnaissance, (3) unconventional warfare, (4) foreign internal defense, (5) civil affairs, (6) military information support operations, (7) counterterrorism, (8) foreign humanitarian assistance, (9) hostage rescue and recovery, (10) counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and (11) other activities specified by the President or Secretary of Defense. See section 167 of title 10, United States Code and DOD Directive 5100.01, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components* (Dec. 21, 2010) (incorporating change 1, Sept. 17, 2020).

standardization, planning and conducting special operations exercises and training, and developing joint special operations tactics.

- The **SOF service component commands train**, equip, and provide SOF from their respective military services. They include U.S. Army Special Operations Command, U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, U.S. Marine Forces Special Operations Command, and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command.

DOD Entities with Roles and Responsibilities Related to Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Retaliation

Various officials and organizations within DOD have roles and responsibilities related to preventing and responding to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation in the military.

- **Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.** This Under Secretary is responsible for establishing and overseeing the department's policies and programs to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.¹⁸ The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy—which reports directly to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs—supports the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness as the proponent for all military personnel policies and programs regarding recruiting, retention, compensation, travel and related human resources support. In addition, the Office of the Executive Director for Force Resiliency oversees both the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.
- **Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI).** The Director, ODEI is responsible for developing DOD Military Equal Opportunity policy, which includes policy on prohibited discrimination—to include gender discrimination—and sexual harassment. The Director of ODEI also oversees the military services' policies and programs for Military Equal Opportunity and harassment prevention and response.
- **Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.** This office serves as the department's single point of authority, accountability, and oversight for DOD's sexual assault prevention and response program. Among other things, the office is responsible for implementing and monitoring compliance with DOD sexual assault policy and providing the DOD components, including the military

¹⁸DOD Instruction 1350.02, DOD Instruction 1020.03, and DOD Directive 6495.01.

departments, with technical assistance in addressing matters concerning sexual assault prevention and response.¹⁹

- **Service Military Equal Opportunity programs.** DOD's Military Equal Opportunity program promotes equal opportunity as being critical to mission accomplishment, unit cohesiveness, and military readiness. In addition, the program emphasizes that the chain of command is the primary and preferred channel for processing and resolving complaints of prohibited discrimination or harassment (including gender discrimination and sexual harassment).²⁰ Each military service has established a Military Equal Opportunity program to receive and respond to such complaints.²¹ DOD policy states that the Secretaries of the military departments are to implement and ensure compliance with DOD's related policy, provide a central program to receive prohibited discrimination complaints, conduct annual assessments of Military Equal Opportunity programs to improve policy and enhance prevention and response initiatives, and respond to ODEI data requests.²²
- **Service Sexual Assault Prevention and Response programs.** The Secretaries of the military departments are responsible for establishing policies for preventing and responding to sexual assault within their respective department, and for ensuring compliance with DOD policy.²³ Each military service has established its own policy and program to prevent and respond to sexual assault. Military service policies include, among other things, responsibilities of commanders,

¹⁹DOD Instruction 6495.02, vol. 1.

²⁰DOD Directive 1020.02E, *Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity in the DOD* (June 8, 2015) (incorporating change 2, June 1, 2018).

²¹The Army's Military Equal Opportunity program does not address sexual harassment complaints; sexual harassment complaints are addressed through the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention program.

²²DOD Instruction 1350.02.

²³We refer to the military services' Sexual Assault Prevention and Response programs in this report, which includes the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention program. This program combines into a single program the Army's efforts to prevent and respond to incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault. In May 2022, we reported on the Army's administration of this program, including the policies and programs, oversight mechanisms, and identification of reporting barriers. We made nine recommendations to improve the Army's administration of the program, and the Army concurred with those recommendations. See GAO, *Sexual Harassment and Assault: The Army Should Take Steps to Enhance Program Oversight, Evaluate Effectiveness, and Identify Reporting Barriers*, [GAO-22-104673](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 27, 2022).

sexual assault response coordinators, and victim advocates, as well as training requirements for service members.

- The **Department of Defense Inspector General (DODIG) and the DOD Component Inspectors General** share responsibility for investigating complaints of reprisal—a form of retaliation.²⁴ Responsibilities for investigating reprisal complaints differ according to DOD personnel type and the basis for the reprisal. For complaints alleging reprisal against a service member, DODIG has the authority to either investigate the complaint or refer it to a DOD component IG for action.²⁵ Most reprisal cases involving service members are investigated by the DOD component Inspectors General, with DODIG oversight. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 directed DOD to establish a panel to review the department's systems used to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate crimes involving sexual assault.²⁶ The panel noted that fear of retaliation can undermine victims' willingness to report sexual assault, allowing the cycle of sexual assault to continue. It recommended, due to concerns regarding extensive delays and inadequate oversight, that DODIG take over all reprisal cases related to sexual assault and that these cases be given priority. In July 2016, DODIG assumed responsibility for all sexual assault reprisal investigations.

DOD Reporting Options for Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault

Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Service members who experience gender discrimination or sexual harassment have three Military Equal Opportunity complaint options: informal, formal, and anonymous.

- **Informal complaints** are written or oral allegations of gender discrimination or sexual harassment that are submitted to any entity authorized to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints, but the

²⁴DOD defines "reprisal" as taking or threatening to take an unfavorable personnel action, or withholding or threatening to withhold a favorable personnel action, for making, preparing to make, or being perceived as making or preparing to make a protected communication.

²⁵DOD Directive 7050.06.

²⁶Pub. L. No. 112-239, § 576 (2013).

complaints are not submitted as formal complaints. Service members who initially elect to resolve their complaints informally may submit a formal complaint if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal process.

- **Formal complaints** are written allegations of gender discrimination or sexual harassment submitted to the staff designated to receive such complaints. Commanders are also able to elevate informal complaints they are handling to formal complaints if they determine an investigation is warranted. Sexual harassment command investigations must be conducted in accordance with 10 U.S.C § 1561. Specifically, commanding officers are to commence an investigation (or cause the investigation to be commenced), to the extent practicable, within 72 hours of receipt of the initial complaint and complete the investigation within 14 days of the date it was commenced. Further, commanders are to take appropriate disciplinary or administrative action when a complaint is substantiated.²⁷
- **Anonymous complaints** are allegations of gender discrimination or sexual harassment that are submitted by an unknown or unidentified source. Actions taken in response to an anonymous complaint depend on the extent of the information provided. If the complaint contains sufficient information, such as the name of the alleged offender and the date of the incident, the commanding officer or supervisor must initiate an investigation and follow the same processes as for a formal complaint investigation for an anonymous gender discrimination complaint, or the processes found in 10 U.S.C. § 1561 for an anonymous sexual harassment complaint.

Sexual Assault

Service members who are sexually assaulted have two DOD reporting options: restricted and unrestricted reporting.

- **Restricted reporting** allows victims to confidentially disclose a sexual assault to specified individuals (e.g., sexual assault response coordinator, victim advocate, or military health care provider) and

²⁷DOD Instruction 1020.03.

receive support services such as health care, counseling, and other support without triggering an investigation.²⁸

- **Unrestricted reporting** allows a victim to access support services and triggers an investigation by law enforcement and command notification of the allegation. Victims who make an unrestricted report of sexual assault are also eligible for consideration for protection orders and expedited transfers, which are not available to victims filing restricted reports. A restricted report can be converted to an unrestricted report at a later date if the victim chooses, but an unrestricted report cannot be converted to a restricted report.²⁹

DOD Policies Apply to Incidents Involving SOCOM Service Members, but Service Policies Related to Joint Environments Are Inconsistent with DOD Policy

DOD's policies to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault are applicable department-wide, but some of the implementing military service policies related to environments in which SOCOM operates are inconsistent with DOD policy. Specifically, some of the military services' policies related to incidents of gender discrimination and sexual harassment occurring in joint environments—environments in which two or more military departments are operating, such as at joint commands and bases—are not aligned with DOD policies.³⁰

²⁸DOD guidance states that victims are eligible to make a restricted report of sexual assault, as long as the victim has not personally reported the incident to law enforcement or previously filed an unrestricted report for the same incident. The victim's election to make a restricted report does not preclude the command or military law enforcement from conducting an investigation of the incident, but information provided by the victim in a restricted report will not be disclosed to military law enforcement or the command. If a victim elects to make a restricted report and seeks care from a civilian health care facility, confidentiality afforded the restricted report is not guaranteed due to circumstances surrounding the independent investigation and requirements of individual state laws for civilian health care facilities. DOD Instruction 6495.02, vol. 1, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response: Program Procedures* (Mar. 28, 2013) (incorporating change 6, Nov. 10, 2021).

²⁹DOD Instruction 6495.02, vol. 1.

³⁰For the purposes of this report, "military services" refers to the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force. We did not include the Space Force, given its status as a new organization that was established in December 2019.

DOD and Services Have Policies to Prevent and Respond to Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault

DOD policies to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault provide the overarching guidance to the military services' prevention and response policies and programs. The military services have established service-specific policies related to such incidents as required by DOD policies and are responsible for administering such policies and programs on gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

Gender discrimination and sexual harassment. DOD and military service policies on gender discrimination and sexual harassment outline roles and responsibilities, reporting procedures, and the way complaints will be processed, as well as discuss training and prevention. DOD's Military Equal Opportunity policy, which covers prohibited discrimination, outlines specific responsibilities of joint military environment leaders to include combatant commanders.³¹ Specifically, combatant commanders are to ensure complaint disposition procedures are addressed in applicable regulations and DOD component servicing agreements, and that prohibited discrimination complaints are referred for disposition within established time frames.

The military services are responsible for administering policies and programs on gender discrimination and sexual harassment; however, a SOCOM official described efforts to develop supplemental SOCOM-specific policy. Specifically, in November 2021, SOCOM's Equal Opportunity Strategic Advisor stated that the command was developing a supplemental SOCOM enterprise-wide Military Equal Opportunity policy that would address discrimination and sexual harassment, among other things. This official stated that the policy would reflect DOD policies and discuss accountability, zero tolerance, the complaint process, training requirements, and command climate assessment processes. However, as of June 2022, the official was no longer with the command and the Equal Opportunity Strategic Advisor position was vacant, according to SOCOM officials. These officials stated that the development of the policy would most likely remain on hold until the position was filled.³²

³¹DOD Instruction 1350.02.

³²As of June 2022, SOCOM officials stated that they were drafting the job description to advertise the position; however, they did not have a timeframe for completion or for filling the position.

Sexual assault. DOD sexual assault policies discuss reporting options; responsibilities of commanders, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program personnel, and health care providers; case management procedures; data collection and maintenance; training requirements; and primary prevention.³³ DOD policy also outlines combatant commander responsibilities, such as establishing policies and procedures to implement the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program, and overseeing compliance with DOD policies within the combatant commanders' areas of responsibility and during military operations.³⁴ The military services have service-specific policies to implement these DOD policies.

SOCOM has established a sexual assault prevention and response regulation specific to SOCOM headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base.³⁵ The regulation outlines responsibilities of headquarters personnel and sexual assault response procedures. SOCOM headquarters has an agreement with the 6th Air Refueling Wing at MacDill Air Force Base for shared host installation support to provide investigation, legal, medical, and counseling services in response to incidents of sexual assault. In June 2022, SOCOM officials stated that they anticipate developing additional sexual assault prevention and response policy that will cover the entire SOCOM enterprise, not just headquarters personnel, but they did not provide an estimated issuance date or describe what the policy would include. In September 2022, SOCOM officials stated that they were also in the process of hiring a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Manager to support the SOCOM enterprise. According to Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office officials, since SOCOM is a combatant command it is the military departments, and not SOCOM, who are responsible for implementing these programs. Specifically, these officials stated that an individual in a SOCOM unit would report to a sexual assault response coordinator from the military service responsible for the area in which the report was made.

³³DOD Directive 6495.01; DOD Instruction 6495.02, vol. 1; and DOD Instruction 6400.09, *DOD Policy on Integrated Primary Prevention of Self-Directed Harm and Prohibited Abuse or Harm* (Sept. 11, 2020).

³⁴DOD Directive 6495.01.

³⁵U.S. Special Operations Command Regulation 600-8, *U.S. Special Operations Command Sexual Assault Prevention and Response* (May 18, 2021).

Some Service Policies Are Not Aligned with DOD Policies for Addressing Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in Joint Environments

While the military services are responsible for administering service-specific policies on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, SOCOM service members conduct global special operations and activities in joint environments. DOD policies include provisions related to these incidents occurring in joint environments (including joint commands and bases).³⁶ However, we identified a number of areas in which some of the military services' policies related to gender discrimination and sexual harassment in joint environments are not aligned with DOD policies, which could result in inconsistencies in how they are applied across the department.³⁷ The military services' policies on sexual assault generally align with DOD policies related to such incidents in joint environments.

Gender discrimination and sexual harassment. We identified areas in which Army, Air Force,³⁸ and Marine Corps policies related to incidents occurring in joint environments are not aligned with DOD policies,

³⁶In August 2008, we found that DOD's sexual assault policies did not adequately address important issues, such as how to implement the sexual assault program when operating in a deployed or joint environment. We recommended that DOD review and evaluate the department's sexual assault policies to ensure that adequate guidance is provided to effectively implement the program in deployed and joint environments. DOD concurred with the recommendation and issued such guidance in April 2009. See GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD's and the Coast Guard's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Programs Face Implementation and Oversight Challenges*, [GAO-08-924](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 29, 2008). Moreover, in September 2011, we reported that DOD did not have adequate guidance on how incidents of sexual harassment should be handled in environments wherein two or more of the military services are operating together and recommended that the department develop such guidance. DOD concurred with the recommendation. In 2017, we closed this recommendation as not implemented after DOD updated its sexual harassment guidance in 2015, but did not issue specific guidance on handling incidents in joint environments. However, DOD later took actions to implement this recommendation. Specifically, in February 2018, DOD issued a harassment policy that includes provisions specific to processing complaints in joint environments. DOD's Military Equal Opportunity policy on prohibited discrimination, issued in September 2020, also has provisions specific to processing complaints in joint environments. See GAO, *Preventing Sexual Harassment: DOD Needs Greater Leadership Commitment and an Oversight Framework*, [GAO-11-809](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 21, 2011).

³⁷For the purposes of this report, for each policy provision, we identified the policies as not fully aligned where the military service policies conflicted with the DOD policies. For additional details on our methodology for this analysis, see appendix III.

³⁸We reviewed Department of the Air Force policies, which are applicable department-wide and cover both the Air Force and the Space Force. However, as previously noted, we did not include the Space Force in this review, given its status as a new organization that was established in December 2019. As such, we refer to Department of the Air Force policies as Air Force policies and Department of the Air Force officials as Air Force officials in this report.

specifically, provisions related to command responsibility for processing (1) prohibited discrimination complaints and (2) harassment complaints. First, DOD policy states that, in joint environments, prohibited discrimination complaints are to be processed through the organization that has administrative control over the complainant.³⁹ Navy policy aligns with this DOD policy provision, whereas Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps policies assign this responsibility to the offender's command or military service.⁴⁰ DOD policy also states that the complainant's commander or supervisor is responsible for providing notice and sending updates to the alleged offender's commander or supervisor, upon receipt and final resolution of a complaint. However, Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps policies do not assign this responsibility to the complainant's commander or supervisor. As a result, commanders may be unclear about their responsibilities for addressing prohibited discrimination complaints in joint environments and there may be inefficiencies in processing such complaints.

Second, DOD policy states that, in joint environments, harassment complaints are processed through the command or military service that has administrative control, disciplinary authority, or a combination thereof, over the complainant.⁴¹ Navy policy aligns with this DOD policy provision, whereas, similar to prohibited discrimination complaints, Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps policies assign this responsibility to the offender's

³⁹DOD Instruction 1350.02. "Administrative control" is defined as the direction or exercise of authority over subordinate or other organizations with respect to administration and support. This includes organization of military service forces, control of resources and equipment, personnel management, unit logistics, individual and unit training, readiness, mobilization, demobilization, discipline, and other matters not included in the operational missions of the subordinate or other organizations.

⁴⁰Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5354.1H, *Navy Harassment Prevention and Military Equal Opportunity Program Manual* (Nov. 3, 2021); Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy* (July 24, 2020); Marine Corps Order 5354.1F, *Marine Corps Prohibited Activities and Conduct (PAC) Prevention and Response Policy* (Apr. 20, 2021); and Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2710, *Equal Opportunity Program* (June 18, 2020) (incorporating Department of the Air Force Guidance Memorandum 2022-01, Apr. 6, 2022).

⁴¹DOD Instruction 1020.03.

command or military service.⁴² DOD policy further states that the complainant's commander or supervisor is to provide updates, as appropriate, to the alleged offender's commander or supervisor, upon receipt of complaint through final disposition. However, Army and Air Force policies do not assign this responsibility to the complainant's commander or supervisor. As a result, there may be confusion as to which service is responsible for processing harassment complaints and they may be processed inconsistently depending on the joint environment and military services involved.

Officials from ODEI—the office responsible for the DOD policies we analyzed—said that they were unaware of any differences between DOD and military service policies for the joint environment. Conversely, Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps officials acknowledged that their services' policies do not align with these DOD policy provisions.

Army officials stated that the DOD policies that contain these provisions were issued after the most recent issuance of Army Regulation 600-20 in July 2020. Specifically, DOD's harassment policy issued in February 2018 assigned responsibility for complaint processing to the alleged offender's command or service.⁴³ DOD issued an update to the policy in December 2020 that instead assigned responsibility to the complainant's command or military service. DOD's Military Equal Opportunity policy, issued in September 2020, similarly assigns responsibility for complaint processing to the complainant's organization.⁴⁴ Army officials stated that the Army is currently updating Army Regulation 600-20 and that the updated policy will assign responsibility for processing prohibited discrimination and harassment complaints in joint environments to the complainant's command or service. However, these officials did not provide an estimated issuance date for the updated policy.

⁴²Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5354.1H; Marine Corps Order 5354.1F; and Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2710. Army Regulation 600-20 states that sexual harassment complaints in a joint service environment will follow instructions contained in DOD Instruction 1020.03; however, the regulation states more generally that harassment complaints in joint environments are to be processed through the command or military service that has administrative control, disciplinary authority, or a combination thereof, over the alleged offender.

⁴³DOD Instruction 1020.03.

⁴⁴DOD Instruction 1350.02.

The Air Force and the Marine Corps have updated their policies since the issuance of the DOD policies, but they remain counter to these DOD policy provisions. Specifically:

- Air Force officials stated that due to leadership and staff transitions over the last several years, they could not provide a definitive reason for why the Air Force maintained responsibility for complaint processing with the alleged offender's command or why DOD shifted responsibility to the complainant's command. These officials further noted that the Air Force's intent was likely to ensure involvement and accountability of the alleged offender's command to stop the behavior and administer appropriate corrective or disciplinary action, which the complainant's command does not have the authority to do. These officials also stated that it ensures that the alleged offender has more timely appeal rights and that are readily available with their command.
- Marine Corps officials stated that Marine Corps policy assigns responsibility to the alleged offender's commander in order to allow the commander to evaluate and address the behavior based on service norms and values.

In May 2022, we similarly reported that there were key Army policy provisions that did not align with DOD sexual harassment and sexual assault policy, such as provisions related to commander response to a report of sexual assault and sexual assault response coordinator access to commanders.⁴⁵ We recommended that the Secretary of the Army ensure that the Director of the Army Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program conducts a review of the program's upcoming regulation prior to issuance to ensure that it aligns with DOD policies for sexual harassment and sexual assault prevention and response. The Army concurred with the recommendation and we will monitor the Army's efforts to help ensure that all policy provisions align with DOD policy—to include those applicable to the joint environment.

DOD policies related to prohibited discrimination and harassment state that the military departments are responsible for establishing supplemental guidance for receiving, responding to, investigating, and resolving such complaints consistent with DOD policies.⁴⁶ ODEI officials stated that the military services are actively involved in processes to update DOD policies and are notified when updates occur. However,

⁴⁵[GAO-22-104673](#).

⁴⁶DOD Instruction 1350.02 and DOD Instruction 1020.03.

ODEI officials stated they were unsure whether the military services coordinated all changes to service policies with ODEI.

Officials from the military services also reported having procedures in place to ensure alignment with DOD policies and to revise their policies as updates are made. For example, Army officials stated that they have shared drafts of Army guidance with ODEI. Marine Corps officials stated that they use a DOD Military Equal Opportunity Working Group to stay informed of potential policy changes and review Marine Corps guidance to determine how best to implement new guidance. Further, Air Force officials stated that the Air Force conducts periodic required reviews (at least every 4 years) of its policies, including its Equal Opportunity policy. These officials further stated that wing-level IGs are required to conduct annual inspections of Equal Opportunity offices to ensure compliance with DOD and Air Force Equal Opportunity policies. However, even with these stated procedures, we found that DOD and some military service policies on the joint environment are not fully aligned.

Without the military services revising their prohibited discrimination and harassment policies—specifically, provisions related to incidents occurring in joint environments—to ensure alignment with DOD policy, such cases may be processed inconsistently across the department. Without action to better align the policies, there could be confusion regarding who is responsible for complaint processing, inefficient complaint processing, and varied outcomes for complainants and victims.

Sexual assault. The military services' policies related to incidents of sexual assault occurring in joint environments are generally aligned with DOD policy. DOD policy provisions related to the joint environment primarily focus on how the Case Management Group—an installation-level multidisciplinary group that meets monthly to review unrestricted reports of sexual assault—will operate. For example, DOD policy states that on a joint base or an installation with tenant commands, the commander of the tenant organization and the designated lead sexual assault response coordinator are to be invited to the Case Management Group meetings when service members in their unit or area of responsibility are victims of sexual assault. The commander of the tenant organization shall provide appropriate information to the host commander,

to enable the host commander to provide the necessary supporting services.⁴⁷ All of the military services' policies align with this provision.⁴⁸

Additionally, DOD policy states that the Case Management Group membership is to explore the feasibility of the joint use of existing sexual assault prevention and response resources on joint bases or installations with tenant commands.⁴⁹ All of the military services' policies discuss exploring resource sharing in joint environments.

DOD sexual assault policy states that the military departments are responsible for establishing policies and procedures to implement programs consistent with DOD policy.⁵⁰ Officials from the military services reported having procedures in place to ensure alignment with DOD policies and to revise their policies as updates are made. For example, an Air Force official stated that the department shares its draft sexual assault policies with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office so that it can identify any alignment issues requiring corrective action and Department of the Navy officials stated that they review policies every 2 years for consistency with DOD policy. Marine Corps officials stated that given the number of changes to the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program over the past decade, and the lengthy process to update Marine Corps policy, they implement changes to DOD policy by circulating DOD memorandums announcing the policy changes to commanders and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program personnel.

⁴⁷DOD Instruction 6495.02, vol. 1.

⁴⁸The Army refers to its Case Management Group as the Sexual Assault Review Board. Army Regulation 600-20; Secretary of the Navy Instruction 1752.4C, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Procedures* (Aug. 10, 2018); Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 1752.1C, *Navy Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program* (Aug. 13, 2015); Marine Corps Order 1752.5C, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program* (June 3, 2019); and Air Force Instruction 90-6001, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program* (July 15, 2020) (incorporating change 1, effective Mar. 26, 2021).

⁴⁹DOD Instruction 6495.02, vol. 1.

⁵⁰DOD Directive 6495.01.

SOCOM Has Limited Access to Data on Incidents Involving Women in SOCOM

SOCOM has limited access to timely, accurate, and complete data on SOCOM-assigned personnel, including data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving those personnel. While SOCOM has taken steps to improve its ability to identify its personnel and incidents involving those personnel, these efforts are ongoing and challenges related to SOCOM's ability to access timely, accurate, and complete data remain. Additionally, DODIG's investigations case management system maintains some information on retaliatory behavior that may be used to identify incidents reported by SOCOM personnel.

SOCOM Has Limited Access to Timely, Accurate, and Complete Data on Incidents Involving Personnel

SOCOM officials stated that the command has limited access to timely, accurate, and complete data on its personnel, including data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving women assigned to the command. According to SOCOM officials, as a functional combatant command, SOCOM has historically had limited access to data maintained by OSD and the military services in their respective databases that would, among other things, facilitate workforce management and track trends in data on incidents involving the command's assigned personnel. More specifically, officials from both SOCOM and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) described limitations associated with (1) database access, (2) a unique identifier for SOCOM personnel, and (3) the reliability of SOCOM-collected data.

Database access. According to officials, data on personnel assigned to SOCOM are captured in databases maintained by OSD and the personnel's assigned military service. Other data, such as those related to sexual assault incidents, are captured in databases maintained by the department, including the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office's Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database. As a result, officials told us that SOCOM historically has had to undertake the time-consuming process of requesting and aggregating personnel data from each of the command's subordinate commands every time it wanted to compile an overall picture of its collective force.

According to Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) and SOCOM officials, SOCOM's inability to access OSD and the military services' authoritative databases has hindered the command's ability to accurately identify the command population and attain other data that could better inform leadership's decisionmaking about such incidents. Those officials further stated that SOCOM is not the owner of the data on these incidents; rather, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and

Readiness and the military services are the owners and some do not share their data openly or regularly.

SOCOM leadership more recently issued two memorandums in March and June 2022 pertaining to the command's access to data.⁵¹ Specifically, the June 2022 memorandum requested the military services' support in SOCOM's data collection efforts by making military service data available in a single DOD-wide data management and analytics platform. According to a SOCOM official, the command has been actively coordinating with the DOD Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) to facilitate such access. However, an official from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) told us that SOCOM will not have access to timely, complete, and accurate data until all data owners are involved in developing a process or other means to help ensure SOCOM has access to such data.

Unique identifier. SOCOM officials stated that data on personnel assigned to the command—including data on women—have not been easily identifiable in OSD and military service data systems because the department has not established one common data field or unique identifier that clearly indicates that a service member is assigned to SOCOM. For example, officials from the Defense Manpower Data Center told us they could not isolate data on SOCOM personnel in their databases because they did not have a means of searching their databases specifically for personnel assigned to the command.⁵²

In the absence of a departmental code or identifier specific to SOCOM, officials said that they undertook an approximately 2-year effort to identify and compile a comprehensive list of SOCOM-specific unit identification codes. According to officials, these codes are the best data field to use to identify SOCOM personnel within DOD and military service personnel

⁵¹U.S. Special Operations Command, Vice Commander Memorandum, *Presentation of U.S. Special Operations Command Data in Advancing Analytics System* (Mar. 16, 2022); and U.S. Operations Command, Vice Commander Memorandum, *Services Support for U.S. Special Operations Command Comprehensive Review Data* (June 15, 2022).

⁵²The Defense Manpower Data Center supports the information requirements of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and other members of the DOD manpower, personnel, and training communities. The center provides this support through the collection and maintenance of an archive of automated manpower, personnel, training and other databases for DOD.

databases, since the department does not have an existing unique identifier for SOCOM personnel.

Officials stated that SOCOM did not previously maintain a complete list of these codes. However, they said that completion of this list provides SOCOM with a means of identifying almost all SOCOM-assigned personnel within OSD and military service databases that include unit identification code as a data field. For example, SOCOM officials stated that the list will allow SOCOM to identify unrestricted reports of sexual assault involving SOCOM personnel by searching the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database for any codes associated with SOCOM's list.⁵³ Officials further stated that its recently completed unit identification code list should be used to facilitate all related data queries because the list is explainable and defensible, as well as standardized.

Reliability of collected data. According to officials, SOCOM has implemented a process for collecting some data directly from its subordinate commands on a recurring basis to address the aforementioned limits on data access. For example, to help improve the command's access to more readily-available data, SOCOM officials stated that the command took steps to develop two dashboards that capture (1) personnel demographic data,⁵⁴ and (2) data on a range of issues associated with the health of the command.⁵⁵

However, according to an official from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC), the data collected on the health of the

⁵³The Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database is DOD's centralized case-level database for the collection and maintenance of information regarding sexual assaults involving persons covered by DOD policy, including service members, their adult dependents, and certain DOD federal civilian employees.

⁵⁴According to SOCOM officials, the SOCOM Personnel Dashboard was built within the department's Advancing Analytics system and uses DOD and military service authoritative data sources to facilitate search capabilities on assigned and authorized personnel counts, as well as component, grade, race, marital status, education status, and sex, among other things.

⁵⁵SOCOM officials stated that they request data on a range of issues related to the health of SOCOM from each of the subordinate commands on a quarterly basis. These data, including data on reported incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault involving SOCOM-assigned service members, are compiled into quarterly and annual reports for the command and department. Further, these data have been incorporated in a separate dashboard, called the SOCOM Demographics and Readiness Dashboard. According to a SOCOM official, the data aggregated in the SOCOM Demographics and Readiness Database are manually drawn from 29 different databases, including from the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database.

command as part of the Health of SOF dashboard effort are not yet accurate and should not be used to brief leadership on these issues. Officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) and SOCOM stated that incidents are reported to various entities within the department and each uses a different means of tracking. For example, the officials stated that some databases include unit identification codes, while other databases do not have a means of identifying SOCOM personnel.

The official from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) further stated that, for example, because Air Force Special Operations Command owns two installations that include other Air Force units, the sexual assault incident data from those installations may include inflated numbers that do not reflect only those incidents associated with Air Force Special Operations Command personnel. The official stated that, as of July 2022, a method to address this issue and isolate data specific to Air Force Special Operations Command personnel had not yet been developed. The official added that, until such steps are taken, the data should not be disseminated within or outside of the department.

Despite the progress made to improve its ability to identify its assigned personnel across the command, SOCOM's access to timely, accurate, and complete data remains limited and SOCOM was unable to provide us with such data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. For example, in July 2022, officials from SOCOM's Health of SOF Cell provided us with data on incidents of sexual assault involving SOCOM personnel.⁵⁶ However, upon review, we determined that the data provided were incomplete, as sexual harassment data were not provided, and we identified inconsistencies in the data that raised concerns about reliability.

A May 2021 Deputy Secretary of Defense memorandum on *Creating Data Advantage* highlights that data are a strategic asset and that leaders must ensure that all DOD data are visible, accessible, understandable, linked, trustworthy, interoperable, and secure.⁵⁷ The memorandum identifies five DOD Data Decrees, the first of which is that the department will maximize data sharing and rights for data use, as all DOD data are an

⁵⁶SOCOM created the Health of SOF Cell to orchestrate efforts in organizational culture and climate, diversity and inclusion, and countering extremism in SOF.

⁵⁷Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Creating Data Advantage* (May 5, 2021).

enterprise resource. Further, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* states that management should use quality information—information that is current, complete, accurate, accessible, and provided on a timely basis—to achieve an entity’s objectives.⁵⁸ The standards further state that management should internally communicate necessary quality information, to include selecting the appropriate means of communication, such as a written document.

SOCOM’s *2019 Enterprise Data Strategy* highlights that the command’s vision for its data is such that data are available to those who need it, enabling timely and more informed decisions while also stimulating innovation.⁵⁹ The strategy further states that data required by the command are disparate, incomplete, and not readily accessible or discoverable in a usable and secure form. SOCOM officials described similar data challenges to us. However, as of September 2022, SOCOM, the military services, and other relevant OSD offices—such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness—have not established a collaborative process to help ensure SOCOM has access to timely, accurate, and complete data on SOCOM personnel. Without a means of ensuring that timely, accurate, and complete data are available to SOCOM leadership regarding such incidents, SOCOM leadership will remain limited in its ability to identify trends, inform its understanding of the extent to which such incidents occur, and take appropriate action to address any urgent concerns.

DODIG Maintains Some Information on Retaliatory Behaviors Reported by SOCOM Personnel

DODIG maintains some information in its investigations case management system—the Defense Case Activity Tracking System–Enterprise⁶⁰—which allows the DODIG to conduct keyword searches to identify the number of service members that, while assigned to SOCOM,

⁵⁸[GAO-14-704G](#).

⁵⁹U.S. Special Operations Command, *Enterprise Data Strategy* (Dec. 4, 2019).

⁶⁰The Defense Case Activity Tracking System–Enterprise is used for case management, case tracking, and information storage, and to respond to requests for information and fulfill mandatory reporting requirements. The system enables users to record complaints, allegations of wrongdoing, and requests for assistance; document inquiries; store investigative case records; compile statistical information; provide prompt, responsive and accurate information; provide a record of complaint disposition; and record actions taken and notifications of interested parties and agencies.

reported “reprisal”⁶¹—a form of retaliatory behavior prohibited by DOD. DODIG investigates or oversees DOD component Inspector General investigations into allegations from service members who allege they have been retaliated against for reporting or preparing to report or attempting to report gender discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual assault.

According to DODIG officials, the fields currently available in the Defense Case Activity Tracking System–Enterprise allow DODIG to produce the data needed to respond to the types of inquiries it typically receives from internal and external parties. In response to a data request we submitted in December 2021 for sexual assault-related reprisal investigations involving SOCOM personnel, a DODIG official stated that the DODIG does not collect unit identification codes or military occupational specialty information from complainants.

DODIG officials stated that, in the absence of a unit identification code data field, both the complaint and case forms capture information on military service, component, unit, and location, which allow for manual keyword searches to fulfill specific requests. Officials also stated that, within the tracking system, there are certain fields that allow users to identify a command within a military service, for example, Air Force Special Operations Command.

More specifically, DODIG officials stated that, to identify SOCOM-specific investigations within the Defense Case Activity Tracking System–Enterprise, they perform word searches using various SOCOM-related terms they had, for example, seen in SOCOM case files. DODIG officials stated that they could run similar keyword searches for investigations involving other combatant commands. These officials initially acknowledged that this approach may result in inaccurate data, due to returning results that are not associated with SOCOM. However, officials later assured us that the accuracy of their data and reports are not affected by their manual data entry of certain fields, and that they believe this approach is more reliable than, for example, using a more

⁶¹DOD Directive 7050.06 defines “reprisal” as taking or threatening to take an unfavorable personnel action, or withholding or threatening to withhold a favorable personnel action for making, preparing to make, or being perceived as making or preparing to make a protected communication.

standardized approach to collect and track unique identifiers, such as unit identification codes.

DODIG officials stated that they do not receive many allegations of reprisal involving SOCOM personnel. To provide us with the requested data, DODIG officials used the approach described above to search for investigations involving SOCOM personnel.⁶² Based on that search, the officials provided data on two cases of alleged reprisal reported from fiscal year 2016 through fiscal year 2021 involving personnel the officials determined were assigned to SOCOM. DODIG officials also noted that gender is not tracked in the Defense Case Activity Tracking System–Enterprise.⁶³ While the gender of the complainants was not identified, we have previously reported⁶⁴ that male service members are also victims of sexual assault.⁶⁵

Several Factors Limit Efforts to Identify and Address Barriers That May Impact Careers of Women in SOF

SOCOM has taken some steps to identify and address barriers that may impact women’s careers in SOF, including barriers similar to those identified by women we interviewed who either currently serve or formerly served in SOF. However, several factors have limited those efforts. Specifically, while SOCOM completes annually required assessments on the integration of women into previously closed positions, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness has not clearly communicated which office has oversight responsibility for the completed assessments and the intended use of the assessments after they are

⁶²Officials noted that the quality of the data captured in the Defense Case Activity Tracking System–Enterprise is only as good as the data provided to them through various means, such as the hotline complaint intake form.

⁶³Officials stated that they do not currently collect information on gender because they consider it personally identifiable information.

⁶⁴In March 2015, we reported that, while DOD had taken steps to address sexual assault of service members generally, it had not used all of its data, such as analyses that show that significantly fewer male service members report sexual assault than female service members. At that time, we found that, DOD data for 2014 show that 1,180 male service members and 4,104 female service members had reported an incident of sexual assault to DOD. GAO’s analysis of sexual assault prevalence estimates using the results of a study conducted for DOD by the RAND Corporation shows that at most 13 percent of male service members had reported assaults against them, whereas at least 40 percent of female service members had reported assaults against them. GAO, *Military Personnel: Actions Needed to Address Sexual Assaults of Male Servicemembers*, [GAO-15-284](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 19, 2015).

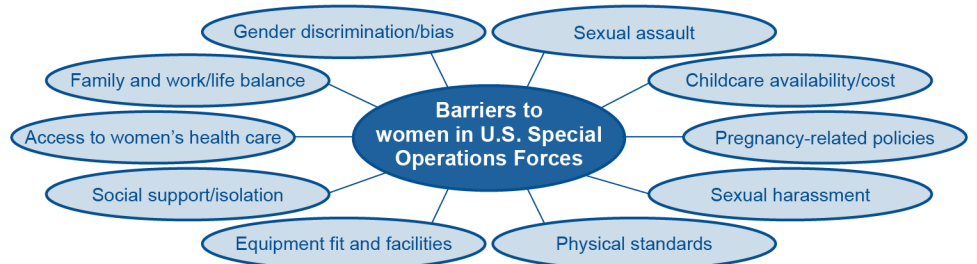
⁶⁵According to the *Department of Defense’s Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, an estimated 8.4 percent of active-duty women and 1.5 percent of active-duty men indicated experiencing an incident of unwanted sexual contact in the year prior to being surveyed.

submitted is unclear. Further, though SOCOM has identified some barriers, as of September 2022, officials had not identified plans to complete a comprehensive evaluation of barriers regarding women in SOF.

SOCOM Has Taken Some Steps to Identify and Address Career Barriers for Women in SOF

SOCOM has taken some steps to identify and address barriers impacting women’s careers in SOF. These steps include annual assessments on the integration of women into previously closed positions, climate surveys, and other individualized SOCOM service component command efforts. Figure 2 shows examples of barriers SOCOM identified from January 2021 through January 2022.

Figure 2: Examples of SOCOM-Identified Barriers to Women Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command information. | GAO-23-105168

First, SOCOM has conducted annual assessments required by a Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness memorandum—hereinafter referred to as “the memorandum”—regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions.⁶⁶ These annual assessments have identified the number of women in newly opened occupations, retention rates, and injury rates, as required by the memorandum. The memorandum also states that the assessments should include a detailed description of challenges and any corresponding mitigation strategies to address areas in which small numbers of women are identified in newly opened occupations. For example, the fiscal year 2021 assessment described a number of actions

⁶⁶The memorandum requires the Secretary of each military department and the Commander of SOCOM to provide the Secretary of Defense, through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, a written assessment regarding their implementation efforts toward the full integration of women in the armed forces. The requirement has no expiration date. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Annual Assessment Regarding the Full Integration of Women in the Armed Forces* (Mar. 18, 2016).

SOCOM took in the previous year to improve the integration of women into previously closed occupations and overcome barriers. According to the assessment, SOCOM

- revised current policies and instructions to ensure they reflected gender neutrality and proper representation of the composition of the force;
- reviewed occupational standards so that the link between selection standards and occupational demands is transparent; and
- reviewed the changes needed in equipment sizing, clothing fit, and facilities, and made necessary modifications.

Second, the Defense Organizational Climate Survey has been another mechanism that SOCOM officials stated provided them with information on barriers affecting women serving in SOF. The survey is part of the command climate assessment process that is a DOD-wide requirement for commanders of units greater than 50 personnel. Specifically, commanders are required to administer the survey within 120 days of assuming command and annually thereafter. SOCOM also has required commanders to create a Plan of Action and Milestones to address survey findings. We have previously reported on concerns associated with the reliability of DOD's climate survey data,⁶⁷ including compliance with

⁶⁷The Defense Organizational Climate Survey is a confidential, command-requested survey that, along with other tools, makes up a command climate assessment. The survey is focused on issues of organizational effectiveness, equal opportunity, and sexual assault response and prevention. Our prior work has identified concerns associated with the reliability of Defense Organizational Climate Survey data. Most recently, in our July 2022 report on the military service academies, we highlighted three important DOD-identified issues associated with the survey that affected the usability of the results, as well as associated corrective actions the department intended to take. However, as a result of the identified concerns, we did not report the data in July 2022. See GAO, *Military Service Academies: Actions Needed to Better Assess Organizational Climate*, [GAO-22-105130](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 29, 2022) and *Defense Nuclear Enterprise: DOD Can Improve Processes for Monitoring Long-Standing Issues*, [GAO-21-486](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 18, 2021).

certain statutory requirements related to conducting command climate assessments.⁶⁸

Third, SOCOM's service component commands have also undertaken individualized efforts to identify and address barriers such as ill-fitting equipment, gender bias, access to women's health care, pregnancy-related policies, childcare availability, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. For example:

- U.S. Army Special Operations Command completed a study in December 2021, which identified barriers and unique challenges women encounter in the command's units. A total of 5,010 participants completed a survey for the study, including 837 women service members (representing 42 percent of women service members assigned to U.S. Army Special Operations Command). The survey identified (1) equipment fitting challenges, (2) gender bias in the workplace, and (3) childcare, among other things, as the top challenges women in the command face. Other issues identified in the study included morale and quality of life, challenges related to pregnancy, and access to women's healthcare.⁶⁹ The study included 42 recommendations for addressing the identified barriers, including that U.S. Army Special Operations Command review sizing requirements for advanced combat helmets, conduct a needs

⁶⁸See GAO, *Military Personnel: Additional Steps Are Needed to Strengthen DOD's Oversight of Ethics and Professionalism Issues*, [GAO-15-711](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 3, 2015). We recommended that the Army and Air Force review and update guidance to require that commanders include in commanders' performance evaluations and assessments a statement about whether the commander conducted the required command climate assessments, as required by the statute. See National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, Pub. L. No. 112-239, § 572(a)(3) (2013); National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-66, §§ 587, 1721 (2013). We noted that without this updated guidance the Army and Air Force will continue to have limited visibility and oversight over this important commander responsibility aimed at ensuring the overall health of the organization. At the time of our recommendation, the Navy had developed guidance that addressed all of the requirements of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014. DOD partially concurred with this recommendation, stating that existing Army practice is consistent with the intent of departmental guidance for command climate survey use. DOD confirmed its position with regard to this recommendation on October 19, 2015. As of September 7, 2022, DOD had not provided information on any actions taken to implement this recommendation. We continue to believe that DOD should act on our previous recommendation.

⁶⁹Section 555 of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 directs the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretaries of the military departments, to develop a policy to ensure the careers of pregnant service members, or those who give birth or incur medical conditions arising from pregnancy or childbirth, are not thereby unduly affected. Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 555 (2021).

assessment for a child development center for the 7th Special Forces Group, and expand social support and mentorship programs.

- Air Force Special Operations Command conducted a roundtable discussion in June 2015 on issues facing women in the command, including barriers to entry, barriers to career progression, and sexual assault prevention and response, according to an official from the command. The roundtable led to the development of a Women's Initiative Team, according to an Air Force Special Operations Command official, whose mission is to identify barriers to readiness that are human- and family-centric and propose implementable solutions.

Further information on these and other efforts by SOCOM and the service component commands to identify and address barriers to women in SOF can be found in appendix IV.

We also conducted nongeneralizable interviews with 51 women who reported that they personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation while serving in SOF, and who volunteered to speak with us about those experiences and any related barriers to career progression.⁷⁰ In our interviews, women reported experiencing the same or similar barriers as those identified by SOCOM and the service component commands, including issues related to gender discrimination, pregnancy and family, ill-fitting equipment, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation. Some women expressed a desire to leave the SOF community or the military as a result of those experiences and barriers.

⁷⁰The 51 interviews included 41 interviews with women who were currently serving in SOF at the time of our interviews and 10 interviews with women who had formerly served in SOF. See appendix III for a complete description of our interview methodology.

Interview Comments on the Experience of Gender Discrimination and Its Career Impact

It was pretty detrimental...I wish I'd never come to [name of SOCOM service component command].

Basically the experience stopped me from further advancement in my career or from screening for an [Executive Officer] or [Commanding Officer] position.

I think [the experience of gender discrimination] probably put me behind my peers for promotion timelines.

I'm getting out of [career field] largely because I never got any recognition for my hard work.

It made me not want to be there. It felt like I would never be good enough because of my gender.

Source: GAO Interviews with women currently serving in SOF. | GAO 23 105168

Specifically, gender discrimination and the male-dominated culture were the first and second most frequently cited barriers, respectively, that the women we interviewed reported facing while serving in SOF. For example, one woman who was serving in SOF at the time of our interview said she thinks there is an unconscious bias in some service members who do not realize they are discriminating against women, and there is a culture in which women are not considered equal. Another woman said that there is a mindset in SOF that women are weaker and that they cannot have a family and be in SOF at the same time.

Interview comments on How Pregnancy and Parenting Impact Women's Careers

I feel like I am less valued in leadership's eyes because I am family-focused.

It's hard to have work/life balance, especially as a mom. There aren't enough services for single moms in SOF.

I would have to think twice about moving forward with my life and having children... [I]f I don't wait, it will impact my career.

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in SOF. | GAO-23-105168

Pregnancy-related policies and parental leave were the third and fourth most frequently cited barriers, respectively, that women we interviewed reported facing while serving in SOF. Multiple women we interviewed reported that having children puts women behind in terms of career advancement in SOF. Women also described difficulty balancing work and life as a parent while in SOF.

Interview Comments on the Experience of Sexual Assault and Its Career Impact

[The experience of sexual assault] made it hard to do my job....I didn't want to leave the office and go do things I needed to do, because I wanted to avoid people.

It impacted my overall health....It affected everything—how I parent, my morale at work.

The experience made me consider leaving all of it (referring to military career).

The post-traumatic stress of the assault has definitely impacted the rest of my career and any relationship I have been in.

Source: GAO interviews with women currently or formerly serving in SOF. | GAO-23-105168

Women we interviewed also discussed their experiences with sexual harassment and sexual assault. For example, 25 of the 41 women currently serving in SOF who volunteered to be interviewed reported they had experienced sexual harassment on or after January 1, 2016, while they were serving in SOF. Further, 13 of the 41 women said they had experienced sexual assault. Women we interviewed currently or formerly serving in SOF described the ways their experience of sexual assault impacted their mental health, their relationships with coworkers, and their career trajectories. One woman said it affected her whole person and her ability to be as present and effective as she would be otherwise. Women said that the experience of sexual assault made it feel unsafe to continue to go to work and be in the same places as the perpetrators.

In addition, 15 of the 41 women currently serving in SOF who volunteered to be interviewed stated that they experienced retaliation as a result of filing or preparing to file a complaint of gender discrimination or sexual harassment, or a report of sexual assault. Of those women, four stated that they had filed a retaliation report.⁷¹ Of the women who stated that they did not file a complaint or report about the incident they experienced, the top reason cited for not filing was that they were worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in their chain of command after filing.

⁷¹Our interviews included discussion of several forms of retaliation, as defined by DOD, and were not limited to incidents of reprisal related to filing a report of sexual assault. Forms of retaliation, other than reprisal, include ostracism and maltreatment. As noted previously, DOD defines “retaliation” in DOD Instruction 1020.03 as illegal, impermissible, or hostile actions taken by a service member’s chain of command, peers, or coworkers as a result of making or being suspected of making a protected communication in accordance with DOD Directive 7050.06.

Interview Comments on Positive Experiences and Recent Improvements

I think we're doing a decent job moving forward and promoting that everything is open to women in SOF. I've definitely seen an improvement over the years.

The policy that made the most difference is the women in combat exclusion being lifted. [It has had a] very positive effect.

I think there is a problem in SOF for some women, but I don't think it's the majority. But we're getting there in terms of changing policies, like pregnancy policies.

Even the [sexual assault prevention and response] trainings seemed like a joke at first and a lot of men felt it didn't affect them. But, I don't see that as much anymore. It is improving and all seems to be heading in the right direction.

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in SOF. | GAO-23-105168

By contrast, some of the 41 women we interviewed who are currently serving in SOF discussed positive aspects of their experiences while serving in SOF and recent improvements to policies and culture.⁷² For example, multiple women described how the policy change allowing women in combat positions has had a positive effect on women's careers more generally. Multiple women also stated that their own experience in SOF was positive overall and that entering the SOF community improved their career trajectories.

Women who volunteered to be interviewed also shared how changes to specific policies positively impacted their careers and demonstrated efforts made by leadership. For example, some women noted that there had been some recent improvements made to pregnancy-related policies and that their leadership was supportive of steps to continue their careers during their pregnancies. One woman noted that recent changes to the hair standards policy and equipment purchasing were positive efforts. Multiple women described how, although there is room for improvement, the command culture has improved since they first entered SOF.

See appendix V for our summary of some of the responses from women who were currently serving in SOF and volunteered to be interviewed, including responses to questions on barriers and perceptions of equal treatment; experiences with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation; experiences with filing a complaint or report; and perceptions of leadership's role in preventing and responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Additionally, appendix VI contains a summary of some of the responses to our interviews with women who had formerly served in SOF and volunteered to be interviewed.

⁷²We conducted these interviews to better inform our understanding of women's reported experiences with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation, as well as any perceived barriers stemming from these experiences. While many of our questions focused on these experiences, some women also provided positive examples about their experiences in SOF as part of their broader responses. See appendixes I and II for our complete questionnaires.

Oversight of Annual Assessments Has Not Been Communicated and Use Is Unclear

SOCOM annually completes required assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions.⁷³ However, we found that more than 6 years after the establishment of the requirement for the completion of the annual assessments, the office has not clearly documented and communicated which office has oversight responsibility for the assessments or how the assessments should be used once submitted.⁷⁴

Oversight and Completeness of Annual Assessments

First, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (Personnel and Readiness) has not clearly documented and communicated which office has responsibility for the annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions. For example, an official from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) who was involved in reviewing SOCOM's fiscal year 2021 assessment prior to submission stated that it was unclear to which office within Personnel and Readiness the submitting entities—the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) and SOCOM—should direct a request for an extension for submitting SOCOM's assessment. The official said the submitting entities ultimately contacted the Personnel and Readiness front office directly to obtain the extension, before receiving approval for the extension from an official in the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI).

Throughout our review, ODEI officials told us that the department was moving responsibility for the annual assessments from ODEI—the office with current responsibility for the assessments according to officials—to the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy (Military Personnel Policy), in response to a recommendation by the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the

⁷³The memorandum directs the Secretary of each military department and the Commander of SOCOM to provide the assessments, by December 31st of each calendar year, to the Secretary of Defense, through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

⁷⁴Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Annual Assessment Regarding the Full Integration of Women in the Armed Forces* (Mar. 18, 2016).

Services.⁷⁵ Upon subsequently contacting Military Personnel Policy in October 2021, officials confirmed that the department recently reassigned women's integration issues, under the "Women in Service" effort, back to Military Personnel Policy from ODEI. However, one official told us that the responsibility for the annual assessments remained under ODEI.

More recently, in August 2022, an ODEI official stated that ODEI and Military Personnel Policy agreed to transfer oversight responsibility for the assessments, including the fiscal year 2021 assessment, which ODEI was currently holding, to Military Personnel Policy once the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness approves the fiscal year 2020 assessment and submits it to the Secretary of Defense. ODEI officials told us that this agreement would transfer oversight for the fiscal year 2021 assessment and all future assessments to Military Personnel Policy, although no official documentation existed because communication occurred primarily by telephone or email.

Second, Personnel and Readiness has not ensured SOCOM has met all requirements for the annual assessments. We identified several missing elements required by the memorandum in SOCOM's most recent annual assessment (fiscal year 2021). For example, the memorandum requires the assessment to include a detailed description of challenges and any corresponding mitigation strategies to address areas in which small numbers of women are identified in newly opened occupations. However, the fiscal year 2021 assessment partially describes challenges, such as the number of women who failed to meet physical or performance-based standards. It indirectly notes other challenges through its description of actions SOCOM and component commands took and, therefore, does not include a detailed description of challenges or barriers, as required. In addition, the fiscal year 2021 assessment included data on injury rates for fiscal year 2021, but did not include a comparison to data on injury rates from the last 5 fiscal years, as required by the memorandum.

⁷⁵The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services recommended in its 2020 annual report that, "[t]he Secretary of Defense should designate a single office of primary responsibility to provide active attention and oversight to the implementation of the Military Services' gender integration plans in order to restore momentum and measure progress." The committee also stated in the report that, "[w]ith the transition of gender integration oversight to [ODEI], the Committee believes the singular focus on advancement of those gender integration efforts has diminished. The Committee recommends designating a separate and distinct office and staff solely dedicated to this critical objective without collateral duties." Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, *2020 Annual Report* (undated).

An official who reviews the reports prior to submission acknowledged that SOCOM may have omitted some elements from the assessment for a few reasons, including numbers that were too low to report, or a labor-intensive process to capture the data. The official further stated that it is not clear to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) and SOCOM whether the omission of the required elements is problematic, because Personnel and Readiness did not provide feedback on the assessments. The official stated that SOCOM has not taken steps to correct the omissions because the command did not discuss the requirements with Personnel and Readiness.

Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government states that management should document in its policies each unit's responsibility for an operational process's objectives, among other things.⁷⁶ The standards further state that management should internally communicate the necessary quality information to achieve the entity's objectives. In addition, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission recommended in its final report that DOD and the military services must resource and institute clear, consistent, and robust diversity management policies with emphasis on roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountability.⁷⁷

ODEI officials acknowledged that they only recently confirmed transfer of the assessments to Military Personnel Policy; however, Personnel and Readiness has not clearly documented and communicated which office will be responsible to the entities submitting the assessments. Without documenting and communicating which office has responsibility for the required annual assessments, oversight will remain unclear to the submitting entities, and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness will not have assurance that all requirements of the memorandum are met and necessary information is included in each assessment.

Use of Annual Assessments to Identify Next Steps

Personnel and Readiness has not established and documented a process or plan for use of the annual assessments. Officials from the Office of the

⁷⁶GAO-14-704G.

⁷⁷Military Leadership Diversity Commission, *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st Century Military, Final Report* (Mar. 15, 2011). The Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 mandated the creation of the Military Leadership Diversity Commission and directed it to conduct a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of policies that provide opportunities for the promotion and advancement of minority members of the armed forces, including minority members who are senior officers. Pub. L. No. 110-417, § 596 (2008).

Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) and SOCOM expressed concerns about the lack of a direction on how to use the assessments to identify next steps. These officials stated that in the 6 years Personnel and Readiness has required the assessments, SOCOM has not received any feedback or strategic guidance regarding next steps to address the findings identified in the assessments.

According to an official from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC), the office did not have plans for any further action based on the results of the fiscal year 2021 assessment.⁷⁸ The official stated that the office had not received a request to provide any follow-up information on the most recent assessments, including, for example, why certain career fields in SOF are not making progress in integrating women. The official further stated that the office did not have visibility into what happens to the assessment or into which office within Personnel and Readiness receives the assessment following submission to its front office, and the lack of follow-up was particularly frustrating given the significant resources involved in compiling the assessment.

The same Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) official stated that, although it is unclear how Personnel and Readiness uses the assessments, SOCOM uses data from its assessments for its own internal benchmarking. However, the data required by the memorandum are not optimal for SOCOM's internal use, according to that official. Specifically, the memorandum requirements focus on previously closed positions, so the assessments only produce data to meet that requirement, and not necessarily other positions that women could occupy prior to 2016, for example, the psychological operations occupational specialty.

Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government states that management should use the necessary quality information to achieve the entity's objectives.⁷⁹ In addition, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission recommended in its final report that DOD and the military services must resource and institute clear, consistent, and robust diversity

⁷⁸Officials from SOCOM did not identify how, if at all, SOCOM uses the information gathered as part of the annual assessments to subsequently address barriers to women serving in previously closed positions.

⁷⁹[GAO-14-704G](#).

management policies with emphasis on roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountability.⁸⁰

ODEI officials stated that a plan and guidance are needed to clarify the process for use after submission of the annual assessments. Those same officials stated that it would be beneficial to use the information in the assessments to improve the environment for women in SOF. However, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness has not established a consistent process for the use of the assessments or developed a plan of action to guide subsequent efforts to address any barriers to women's service in special operations forces identified in the assessments.

Without establishing a consistent process for use of the required annual assessments, the department may not be positioned to fully leverage the information captured in these reports. Moreover, without a clear process for use of these assessments, SOCOM may be expending valuable resources that could be used more effectively elsewhere. Further, the absence of a clear plan for the subsequent use of this information ultimately limits departmental leadership, as well as congressional, knowledge of barriers impacting women serving in SOF and any subsequent efforts to address them.

SOCOM Has Not Comprehensively Identified and Addressed Barriers to Women in SOF

SOCOM has identified some barriers to women in SOF through required annual assessments, climate surveys, and component command assessments. However, SOCOM has not completed a comprehensive evaluation of barriers or developed an action plan based on such an evaluation. As of September 2022, SOCOM officials have not identified plans to conduct a comprehensive evaluation.

For example, SOCOM's fiscal year 2021 assessment did not do the following:

- Address all required elements of the memorandum, such as including detailed descriptions of challenges in areas in which small numbers of women are identified in newly opened career fields.
- Provide information on women in career fields that were previously open to women, such as psychological operations. The memorandum requires only reporting on previously closed career fields; however, an

⁸⁰Military Leadership Diversity Commission, *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st Century Military, Final Report* (Mar. 15, 2011).

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) official stated that this additional information could be useful to SOCOM.

SOCOM's *Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Action Plan FY 2022–2023*, released in April 2022,⁸¹ calls for the identification of trends or disparities that would warrant a more detailed analysis to identify whether a barrier exists that would preclude a particular group from opportunities in SOCOM. The plan also calls for the development and recommendation of strategies to improve the participation rates of women in SOF career fields. However, the implementation plan does not contain specific details or results-oriented elements such as goals, objectives, metrics, and milestones to help ensure progress is made toward improving participation rates of women in SOF career fields.

In addition, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 required the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to commission a federally funded research and development center to conduct an evaluation of barriers to minorities in covered units, which include SOF units,⁸² and DOD plans to release a required report to Congress by the end of calendar year 2022.⁸³ The statute requires DOD to include actions, schedules, and specific milestones for completing recommendations in the report. Office of the Assistant Secretary of

⁸¹The implementation plan was released as a follow-up to SOCOM's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, issued in 2021. According to a SOCOM official, the implementation plan outlines tasks and outcomes for SOCOM headquarters and the component commands to achieve the desired end state outlined in SOCOM's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. See U.S. Special Operations Command, *Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Action Plan FY 2022–2023* (Mar. 29, 2022) and Headquarters United States Special Operations Command, *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2021* (undated).

⁸²Section 557 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 requires an evaluation of barriers to minority participation in certain units of the armed forces, which is to include an identification of barriers to minority participation in the recruitment, accession, assessment, and training processes as well as recommendations to increase minority participation in covered units. Covered units include the U.S. Special Operations Forces units such as Army Special Forces, Army Rangers, Navy SEALs, Air Force Combat Control Teams, Air Force Pararescue, Air Force Special Reconnaissance, Marine Raider Regiments, and Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance. Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 557 (2021).

⁸³ODEI was tasked with managing the evaluation, according to DOD officials. Though originally due January 1, 2022, the report, according to ODEI officials, is behind schedule due to difficulties with securing a contractor and to the COVID-19 pandemic. Officials further stated that ODEI is now targeting a December 31, 2022 release for the required report to Congress based on the evaluation. In addition, the statute requires the department to begin implementing recommendations from the report by March 1, 2023.

Defense (SO/LIC) and ODEI officials later clarified that, although gender was included in this evaluation, it will not focus specifically on barriers to women in SOF and will not have findings or recommendations related to barriers specific to such women.

Based on our interviews with officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) and ODEI, the evaluation is focused on minorities more broadly—not specifically on women—which, according to the one official, is consistent with the intent of the statutory requirements. For example, one of the statutory requirements is to report on the status and effectiveness of the response to the recommendations contained in the 1999 RAND Corporation report *Barriers to Minority Participation in Special Operations Forces*. The 1999 report was focused on race and ethnicity, not gender. The official from Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (SO/LIC) confirmed that the evaluation is largely a revisiting of the RAND study, and stated that focus groups conducted as part of the evaluation are based on race and ethnicity.

Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government states that management should develop information needed for corrective action, if necessary.⁸⁴ In addition, the standards state that management should define objectives clearly, including what is to be achieved [a goal], who is to achieve it, how it will be achieved—and in what time frames—in addition to helping ensure that terms are understood at all levels. Moreover, our prior work on effective strategic workforce planning states that agencies should periodically measure their progress toward meeting human capital goals and the extent to which human capital activities contribute to achieving programmatic goals, and provide information for effective oversight by identifying performance shortfalls and appropriate corrective actions.⁸⁵

Without completing a comprehensive analysis of barriers impacting the careers of women serving in SOF and developing a plan of action to address them, OSD and SOCOM lack reasonable assurance they have the necessary information to take action to address identified barriers. Further, OSD and SOCOM will not be in a position to know the extent to which barriers identified through other more narrowly focused efforts, such as Army Special Operations Command's 2021 study of barriers and

⁸⁴GAO-14-704G.

⁸⁵GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, GAO-04-39 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003).

our interviews with women in SOF, have broader implications for women across the command.

Conclusions

While women have historically held critical roles in the military, they represent less than 10 percent of SOCOM service members. SOCOM leaders have acknowledged barriers to women's participation within the command and the need to do more. DOD has policies to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault—identified barriers to women serving in SOF—but some of the military services' policies related to the environments in which SOCOM operates are inconsistent. That is, some of the military services' policies related to incidents of gender discrimination and sexual harassment occurring in joint environments do not align with DOD-level policies. This could result in the inconsistent processing of reported incidents across the department as well as confusion and varied outcomes for complainants and victims.

SOCOM has acknowledged past limitations associated with the availability of certain data on its assigned personnel, which have limited the command's ability to understand the full extent to which service members assigned to the command have reported incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. These limitations contribute to SOCOM's inability to access timely, accurate, and complete data on these types of incidents, even though it has taken some steps to improve its ability to collect such data. Relevant entities from across the department have not, however, established a collaborative process to help ensure that SOCOM has access to data on its assigned personnel, including on incidents involving its personnel, in a timely, accurate, and complete manner. Without such a process, SOCOM will remain limited in its ability to identify trends associated with these types of concerning incidents that may impact the careers of women in the command.

SOCOM has also taken some steps to identify and address barriers that may impact women's careers in SOF, such as gender discrimination and pregnancy policies, but several factors have limited the command's efforts to address them. Per a Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness requirement, SOCOM completes annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions. However, more than 6 years after the establishment of the requirement, Personnel and Readiness has not clearly documented and communicated which office is responsible for oversight of the assessments once submitted or established a process for use of the assessments. Until Personnel and Readiness documents and

communicates which entity has responsibility for the required annual assessments and establishes and documents a consistent process for the subsequent use of the assessments, the department may not be positioned to fully leverage the information contained in the assessments to, among other things, address barriers to women in SOF. Moreover, OSD and SOCOM have not completed a comprehensive evaluation of barriers that may affect women's careers in SOF. Without completing such an evaluation, OSD and SOCOM lack reasonable assurance they have the necessary information to take action to address identified barriers.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making a total of 8 recommendations, including 5 to the Secretary of Defense, 1 to the Secretary of the Army, 1 to the Secretary of the Navy, and 1 to the Secretary of the Air Force.

The Secretary of the Army should revise Army policy for prohibited discrimination—specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments—to ensure that the Army policy aligns with DOD policy. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of the Navy should ensure that the Commandant of the Marine Corps revises Marine Corps policy for prohibited discrimination and harassment—specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments—to ensure that the Marine Corps policy aligns with DOD policy. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of the Air Force should revise Department of the Air Force policy for prohibited discrimination and harassment—specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments—to ensure that the Department of the Air Force policy aligns with DOD policy. (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command; the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; and the Secretaries of the military departments, establishes a collaborative process for the timely sharing of accurate and complete data on SOCOM personnel, including data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. (Recommendation 4)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness clearly documents and

communicates which office has responsibility for the required annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions. (Recommendation 5)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness establishes a consistent process for the use of the required annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions. The process should include a plan of action to guide efforts to address any barriers to women's service in U.S. Special Operations Forces identified in the assessments. (Recommendation 6)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, completes a comprehensive analysis of barriers regarding women in U.S. Special Operations Forces. (Recommendation 7)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, upon completion of a comprehensive analysis of barriers regarding women in U.S. Special Operations Forces, develops a plan of action to address any barriers or career impediments to women's service in U.S. Special Operations Forces identified in the analysis, with goals, objectives, metrics, and milestones. (Recommendation 8)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In its written comments, DOD concurred with the recommendations, but commented on the title of our report and our scope, and an aspect of our methodology. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. DOD's written comments are summarized below and reprinted in their entirety in appendix VII.

In its written comments, DOD stated that the scope of the study is inconsistent with what the title of the report implies, i.e., a broad examination of barriers to women's advancement in the SOF community. DOD noted that it believed the scope of the report was limited because it focused on the incidence of women who experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault while serving in SOF, and because we only interviewed female service members with these

experiences. DOD stated that to break down barriers, it is necessary to assess the full range of women's experiences in SOF, including risk and protective factors. As an example of a broader look at these issues, it referenced a recent study by U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

We disagree that our report did not include a broad examination of barriers to women's advancement in the SOF community, and believe that the report title appropriately reflects the scope of our work. Our report not only assessed DOD's policies and data associated with women who experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual assault while serving in SOF, but also DOD's efforts to identify and address the range of career barriers experienced by women in SOF. Specifically, our third objective looked broadly at DOD's efforts to assess barriers to women serving in SOF, such as childcare availability and ill-fitting equipment, and subsequent efforts to take corrective action. As discussed in the report, we found that DOD has yet to complete a comprehensive evaluation of barriers to women or develop a plan of action for addressing identified barriers. For additional information on our scope and methodology for each objective in this report, see appendix III.

Interviewing female service members about their experiences with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault and other perceived barriers was one part of our methodology, which also included review of relevant policies, existing data, and ongoing assessment efforts. We conducted the interviews to obtain relevant context based on first-hand perspectives from women on their experiences with the incident reporting process, perceived impacts to their careers, and efforts to prevent and respond to these incidents. Our interviews also included broader questions about these women's experiences in SOF, such as culture and command climate, other barriers and impediments to their careers, and available transition assistance for those women who had separated from the military.

With regard to risk and protective factors, we agree that these are important considerations for the SOF community, but they were not the focus of this review. Our prior work has examined and recommended improvements to DOD's identification of risk and protective factors.⁸⁶ For

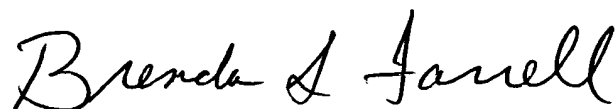
⁸⁶See GAO, *Sexual Assault: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Prevention Strategy and to Help Ensure It Is Effectively Implemented*, [GAO-16-61](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 4, 2015), and *Sexual Violence: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Efforts to Address the Continuum of Unwanted Sexual Behaviors*, [GAO-18-33](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2017).

example, in November 2015, we reported that DOD's sexual assault prevention strategy did not link prevention activities to desired outcomes or fully identify risk and protective factors, thus limiting its ability to take an evidence-based approach to the prevention of sexual assault. We recommended, and DOD concurred, that the department link activities to outcomes, and identify risk and protective factors in its sexual assault prevention strategy. DOD took actions to address this recommendation in August 2022.

Finally, we discuss the referenced U.S. Army Special Operations Command study in the report as an example of an individual service component command effort to identify and address barriers to women serving in SOF. However, as discussed in the report, DOD has not completed nor has it identified plans to conduct a comprehensive analysis of barriers to women in SOF. As such, we recommended, and DOD concurred, that the department complete a comprehensive analysis of barriers regarding women in SOF (recommendation 7). Until DOD conducts such an analysis, it will not be able to assess the full range of experiences of women in SOF or be well positioned to identify what is and what is not working to attract and retain this population.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, and the Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VIII.



Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

List of Requesters

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable James R. Langevin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Cyber, Innovative Technologies, and Information
Systems
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Jackie Speier
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Elaine G. Luria
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Julia Brownley
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Anthony G. Brown
House of Representatives

The Honorable Rick Larsen
House of Representatives

The Honorable Mikie Sherrill
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

To obtain the perspectives of women who reported they had personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation while serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), we interviewed 41 current service members currently serving in SOF who volunteered to speak with us about their experiences.¹ We advertised the interview opportunity on the Department of Defense's (DOD) Military OneSource website—a 24/7 connection for military families to information, answers and support—and on DOD social media platforms. We also disseminated the advertisement through officials at the installations included in our review. The advertisement included a telephone number and email address for volunteers to use to contact us. Our criteria for participation included women who, while serving in SOF, had personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, retaliation, or had perceived career impediments by a uniformed service member or a DOD civilian employee or contractor at any time after January 1, 2016. Further details about our methodology for conducting these interviews can be found in appendix III.

The questionnaire² we used to interview women currently serving in SOF follows:

I. Demographics

1. What military service are you in?

- Air Force
- Army
- Marines
- Navy

2. Component - Pick one based on Q1

- a. Army or Air Force: Are you active, reserve, or National Guard?
- b. Marines or Navy: Are you active or reserve?

¹We also interviewed 10 women who formerly served in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) who volunteered to speak with us and reported that they personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation while serving in SOF. The questionnaire for those interviews can be found in appendix II.

²The questionnaires used in the first five interviews had the same 84 questions as this questionnaire, with some minor differences in wording. The team made minor changes to some questions after conducting the first few interviews to improve the flow and clarity of the subsequent interviews.

**Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with
Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special
Operations Forces**

- Active
- Reserve
- National Guard
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

3. Rank - Pick one based on Q1

- a. Army, Navy, Marines: Are you enlisted, a warrant officer, or a commissioned officer?
- b. Air Force: Are you enlisted or an officer?
 - Enlisted
 - Warrant officer
 - (Commissioned) officer
 - Don't know/don't recall
 - Prefer not to answer

4. Which SOF component are you currently a member of? For example, USASOC, MARSOC, AFSOC...?

- USASOC (Army SOC)
- MARSOC (Marines SOC)
- AFSOC (Air Force SOC)
- NSWC (Navy SOC)
- JSOC
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer
- Other _____

a. Are you permanently or temporarily assigned to SOF?

- Permanently
- Temporarily
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

5. What is your occupational specialty code, for example, your MOS, AFSC, etc.?

a. Are you in an operator role?

Yes

No

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

6. Did you successfully complete a Special Operations Forces Qualifications Course for your service component command such as but not limited to the SEAL Qualification Training course or the Army Special Forces Qualification Course?

Yes

No

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

Operator

Enabler or Combat support

Support or Combat service support

a. How many SOF units have you supported or been attached to, including your current unit?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7 or more

7. How many years have you been in this current role?

0 – 4 years

- 5 – 9 years
- 10 – 14 years
- 15 or more years
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

8. How many years have you been in SOF in total?

- 0 – 4 years
- 5 – 9 years
- 10 – 14 years
- 15 or more years
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

9. And how many years have you been in the military overall?

- 0 – 4 years
- 5 – 9 years
- 10 – 14 years
- 15 or more year
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

II. Sex or Gender Discrimination

10. During your time as a service member in SOF, do you feel you have experienced discrimination based on your sex or gender?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

No/None open

Yes/Any open or Unclear → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

No → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

11. How, if at all, did the experience of discrimination impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

12. Did the experience of discrimination cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)
Yes (Military)
No, neither
Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

13. Did you experience discrimination based on your sex or gender as a service member in SOF on or after January 1, 2016?

Yes
No → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

You may have had more than one experience of sex or gender discrimination in SOF in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

14. We understand you may or may not have filed a complaint about that discrimination event. After reading through/hearing the definitions, did you file any kind of complaint about that discrimination event?

Yes
No → *SKIP to Q18*
Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

15. Do you remember if you filed an anonymous, informal, or formal complaint?

- Anonymous
- Informal
- Formal
- Don't remember
- Prefer not to answer

16. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the complaint with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't know for each one.

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the complaint with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the complaint with a Military Equal Opportunity professional, or with staff within your unit assigned to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints, or a Military Equal Opportunity office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the complaint with an Inspector General's office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. [If ARMY in Q1]: Did you file the complaint with an Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Did you share the complaint with military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Did you share the complaint with civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Did you share the complaint with a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. Were you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the resolution of the complaint?

- Satisfied → Continue to "a"

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with
Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special
Operations Forces

- Dissatisfied → SKIP to "b"
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied/About equal → SKIP to Q19
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q19
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q19

a. Would you say you were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied?

- Somewhat satisfied → Continue to "i"
Very satisfied → Continue to "i"
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q19
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q19

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q19

- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q19
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q19

b. Would you say you were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

- Somewhat dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
Very dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q19
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q19

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q19

- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q19
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q19

18. [If didn't file, "No" in Q14, otherwise skip] We understand there may be many reasons for not filing a discrimination complaint. What were your reasons for not filing one?

-
- Wanted to forget about it and move on
 - Did not want more people to know
 - Felt ashamed or embarrassed
 - Felt partially to blame
 - Thought it was not serious enough to report
 - Did not think anything would be done
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers
 - Did not think the complaint would be kept confidential
 - Did not want to hurt the offender's career
 - Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it
 - Did not trust the process would be fair
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command
 - Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career
 - Feared it would bring negative consequences onto other women in the unit
 - Some other reason → _____
 - Don't know/don't recall
 - Prefer not to answer

a. Did you speak with anyone else about the discrimination you experienced?

Yes → Continue to "i"

- No → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

i. [If "Yes"] Who did you speak with about the experience?

19. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q14, otherwise skip] How, if at all, did the experience of filing a complaint impact your military career?

- Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

20. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q14, otherwise skip] Did the experience of filing a complaint cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?

- Yes (SOF)
Yes (Military)
No, neither
Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

III. Sexual Harassment

21. During your time as a service member in SOF, have you experienced sexual harassment by a uniformed service member, or a DOD civilian employee or contractor?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

- No/None open
Yes/Any open or Unclear → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*
No → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*
Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

22. My next question is about the impact of this experience on your career, not about the experience itself. How, if at all, did the experience of sexual harassment impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

23. Did the experience of sexual harassment cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

No, neither

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

24. Did you experience sexual harassment on or after January 1, 2016?

Yes

No → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

You may have had more than one experience of sexual harassment in SOF in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

25. After reading through/hearing the definitions, did you file a complaint of any kind?

Yes

No → *SKIP to Q29*

Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

26. Do you remember if the complaint you filed was an anonymous, informal, or formal complaint?

- Anonymous
- Informal
- Formal
- Don't remember
- Prefer not to answer

27. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the complaint with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't know for each one.

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the complaint with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the complaint with a Military Equal Opportunity professional, or with staff within your unit assigned to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints, or a Military Equal Opportunity office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the complaint with an Inspector General's office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Did you file the complaint with a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Did you file the complaint with a Victim Advocate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. [If ARMY in Q1]: Did you file the complaint with any other Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Did you share the complaint with military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did you share the complaint with civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a civilian treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Did you share the complaint with a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

28. Were you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the resolution of the complaint(s)?

- Satisfied → Continue to "a"
Dissatisfied → SKIP to "b"
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied/About equal → SKIP to Q30
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q30
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q30

a. Would you say you were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied?

- Somewhat satisfied → Continue to "i"
Very satisfied → Continue to "i"
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q30
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q30

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q30

- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q30
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q30

b. Would you say you were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

- Somewhat dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
Very dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q30
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q30

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q30

- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q30
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q30

29. [If didn't file, "No" in Q25] We understand there may be many reasons for not filing a sexual harassment complaint. What were your reasons for not filing one?

-
- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Wanted to forget about it and move on | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want more people to know | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Felt ashamed or embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Felt partially to blame | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought it was not serious enough to report | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not think anything would be done | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not think the complaint would be kept confidential | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want to hurt the offender's career | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get labeled a troublemaker | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not trust the process would be fair | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want to hurt the offender's family | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Feared it would bring negative consequences onto other women in the unit | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some other reason | <input type="checkbox"/> → |
-
- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Don't know/don't recall | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prefer not to answer | <input type="checkbox"/> |

30. [If filed ANONYMOUS or INFORMAL complaint in Q26] We understand there may be many reasons for not filing a formal sexual harassment complaint. What were your reasons for not filing one?

-
- Wanted to forget about it and move on
 - Did not want more people to know
 - Felt ashamed or embarrassed
 - Felt partially to blame
 - Thought it was not serious enough to report
 - Did not think anything would be done
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers
 - Did not think the complaint would be kept confidential
 - Did not want to hurt the offender's career
 - Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak
 - Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get labeled a troublemaker
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it
 - Did not trust the process would be fair
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command
 - Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career
 - Did not want to hurt the offender's family
 - Feared it would bring negative consequences onto other women in the unit
 - Some other reason → _____
 - Don't know/don't recall
 - Prefer not to answer

a. Did you speak with anyone else about the harassment you experienced?

Yes → Continue to "i"

No → SKIP to Q31

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q31

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q31

i. [If "Yes"] Who did you speak with about the experience?

31. [If filed a complaint, "Yes" in Q25, otherwise skip] And how, if at all, did the experience of filing a complaint or making an informal complaint impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

32. [If filed a complaint, "Yes" in Q25, otherwise skip] Did the experience of filing a complaint or making an informal complaint cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

No, neither

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

IV. Sexual Assault

33. During your time as a service member in SOF, have you experienced sexual assault, including an attempted assault, by a uniformed service member, or by a DOD civilian employee or contractor?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

No/None open

Yes/Any open or Unclear → SKIP to Retaliation section

-
- No → *SKIP to Retaliation section*
Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Retaliation section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

34. My next question is about the impact of this experience on your career, not about the experience itself. How, if at all, did the experience of sexual assault impact your military career?

-
- Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

35. Did the experience of sexual assault cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?

- Yes (SOF)
Yes (Military)
No, neither
Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

36. Did you experience sexual assault on or after January 1, 2016?

- Yes
No → *SKIP to Retaliation section*
Don't remember → *SKIP to Retaliation section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

You may have had more than one experience of sexual assault in SOF in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

37. We understand you may or may not have filed a report. After reading through/listening to the definitions, did you file a report of any kind?

- Yes
No → *SKIP to Q42*
Don't remember → *SKIP to Q45*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Q45*

38. Do you remember if you initially filed a restricted or unrestricted report?

- Restricted → Continue to "a"
Unrestricted → SKIP to next question
Don't remember → SKIP to next question
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to next question

a. [If "Restricted"] Did you later convert this restricted report to an unrestricted report?

- Yes
No
Don't remember
Prefer not to answer

b. Did your chain of command learn that you'd filed a restricted report, without your consent?

- Yes → Continue to "i"
No → Skip to question 39
Don't remember → Skip to question 39
Prefer not to answer → Skip to question 39

i. Do you know how your chain of command found this out?

- Yes
No
Don't remember
Prefer not to answer

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

39. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the report with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't know for each one.

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the report with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the report with a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the report with a Victim Advocate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. [If ARMY in Q1]: Did you file the report with any other Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Did you file the report with the DOD Safe Helpline?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Did you report the assault to military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Did you report the assault to civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a civilian treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Did you report the assault to a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Did you file the report with a Military Criminal Investigative Organization, for example, with the Army Criminal Investigation Division, NCIS, or the Air Force Office of Special Investigations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Did you file the report with another law enforcement agency or official?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

40. What was the report-filing process like for you?

- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

41. Were you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the resolution of the report?

- Satisfied → Continue to "a"

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with
Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special
Operations Forces

-
- Dissatisfied → SKIP to "b"
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied /About equal → SKIP to Q43
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q43
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q43
- a. Would you say you were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied?
- Somewhat satisfied → Continue to "i"
- Very satisfied → Continue to "i"
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q43
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q43
- i. What makes you say that?
- _____ Then SKIP to Q43
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q43
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q43
- b. Would you say you were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?
- Somewhat dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
- Very dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q43
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q43
- i. What makes you say that?
- _____ Then SKIP to Q43
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q43
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q43

42. [If didn't file, "No" in Q37] We understand there may be many reasons for not reporting a sexual assault. What were your reasons for not reporting?

-
- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Wanted to forget about it and move on | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want more people to know | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Felt ashamed or embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Felt partially to blame | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought it was not serious enough to report | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not think anything would be done | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not think the report would be kept confidential | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want to hurt the offender's career | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get labeled a troublemaker | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not trust the process would be fair | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want to hurt the offender's family | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Feared it would bring negative consequences onto other women in the unit | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some other reason | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <hr/> | |
| Don't know/don't recall | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prefer not to answer | <input type="checkbox"/> |

-
- a. Did you speak with anyone else about the assault?
- Yes → Continue to "i"
- No → SKIP to Q45
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q45
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q45

i. [If "Yes"] Who did you speak with about the assault?

43. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q37] And how, if at all, did the experience of filing a report impact your military career?
-

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

44. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q37] Did the experience of the filing a report of sexual assault cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

No, neither

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

45. I'm going to read a list of military resources that you may or may not have tried to access following the assault, and when I'm done I'm going to ask if you tried to access ANY of them. The resources are Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (or SARCs), Victims' Advocates, DOD Safe Helpline, Special Victims' Counsel, military medical care, military mental health counseling, Sexual Assault Forensic Examinations (SAFE), chaplain counseling, or any other military resources. Did you TRY to access ANY of those resources?

Yes → Continue to next question

No → SKIP to Q47

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q47

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Q47*

46. Did you experience any difficulty in accessing any military resources following the assault?

Yes → *Continue to "a"*

No → *SKIP to Q47*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Q47*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Q47*

a. What were those difficulties?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

47. Did you try to access any civilian resources following the assault?

Yes → *Continue to next question*

No → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

48. Why did you try to access civilian resources?

V. Retaliation

49. While serving in SOF, as a result of you filing or preparing to file a complaint or report of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual assault, did you experience retaliation after January 1, 2016?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

No/None open

Yes/Any open or Unclear → *SKIP to "SOCOM efforts" section*

No → *SKIP to "SOCOM efforts" section*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to "SOCOM efforts" section*

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to "SOCOM efforts" section

You may have had more than one experience of retaliation in SOF in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

50. What form did the retaliation take?

Reprisal:

- Promotion interference
- Unwarranted disciplinary or other corrective action
- Punitive transfer or reassignment
- Unfavorable performance evaluation not supported by performance
- Unfair decision on pay, benefits, awards, or training
- Non-indicated referral for mental health evaluation
- Other significant downgrades in duties or responsibilities inconsistent with the military member's grade

Ostracism:

- Improper exclusion from social acceptance, activities or interactions
- Denying privilege of friendship due to reporting or planning to report a crime
- Blaming
- Subjecting to insults or bullying

Cruelty, Oppression, or Maltreatment:

- Acts that occur without a valid military purpose, and may include physical or psychological force or threat or abusive or unjustified treatment that results in physical or mental harm
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

51. Who was responsible for the retaliation? For example, someone in leadership or a peer?

- Leadership
- Peer
- Don't remember
- Prefer not to answer

52. Did you report the retaliation you experienced?

- Yes
- No → SKIP to Q55
- Don't remember → SKIP to Q56
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q56

53. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the report with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't know for each one.

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the report with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the report with a Military Equal Opportunity professional, or with staff within your unit assigned to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints, or a Military Equal Opportunity office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the report with an Inspector General's office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Did you file the report with a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Did you file the report with a Victim Advocate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. [If ARMY in Q1]: Did you file the report with any other Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Did you file the report with the DOD Safe Helpline?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Did you report the retaliation to military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Prefer NTA
i. Did you report the retaliation to civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a civilian treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Did you report the retaliation to a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

54. What action, if any, did the military take as a result of your report of retaliation, as far as you are aware?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

55. [If didn't file, "No" in Q52] We understand there may be many reasons for not reporting retaliation. What were your reasons for not reporting?

Wanted to forget about it and move on

Did not want more people to know

Felt ashamed or embarrassed

Felt partially to blame

Thought it was not serious enough to report

Did not think anything would be done

Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers

Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak or a complainer

Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did I

Did not trust the process would be fair

Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command

Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career

-
- Feared it would bring negative consequences onto
other women in the unit
- Some other reason _____
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

56. How, if at all, did the retaliatory actions impact your military career?

-
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

57. Did the experience of retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from the military or SOF?

- Yes (SOF)
- Yes (Military)
- No, neither
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

58. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q52] How, if at all, did filing a report of retaliation impact your military career?

-
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

59. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q52] Did the experience of filing a report of retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from the military or SOF?

- Yes (SOF)
- Yes (Military)
- No, neither
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

**VI. SOCOM Efforts to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Trauma,
Discrimination, and Retaliation**

60. During your time in SOF, have you received Sexual Assault
Prevention and Response training?

Yes

No → *SKIP to INTERVIEWER decision point before Q64*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to INTERVIEWER decision point
before Q64*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to INTERVIEWER decision point
before Q64*

61. How often did you receive this training?

Only once, never repeated

Annually

Twice a year

3 to 4 times a year

Other _____

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

62. Do you recall if this was service-specific training or SOCOM-led
training, or some combination of both?

Service-specific

SOCOM-led

Don't remember

Prefer not to answer

63. Did the training you received differ depending on your location, for
example, between assignment locations or when deployed versus
when living at your assigned installation?

Yes

No

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

INTERVIEWER decision point:

Did NOT file a complaint for sexual harassment (Q25 = No) → *Ask the next question*

Did file a complaint for sexual harassment (Q25 = Yes) → *SKIP to next INTERVIEWER decision point after Q65*

64. Are you familiar with the three options for filing complaints of sexual harassment—formal, informal and anonymous—and the differences between the three?

Yes

No

Not sure

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next INTERVIEWER decision point after Q65*

65. If you wanted to file a complaint of sexual harassment, who would you file the complaint with?

Chain of command

Military Equal Opportunity professional/Military Equal Opportunity office

Inspector General office

To staff within her unit assigned to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response personnel

SARC

Victim Advocate

Army SHARP office/personnel

Healthcare personnel

Chaplain/religious personnel

Other → _____

- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

INTERVIEWER decision point:

Did NOT file a report for sexual assault (Q37 = No) → *Ask the next question*

Did file a report for sexual assault (Q37 = Yes) → *SKIP to Culture and Command Climate section*

66. Next I have a question about sexual assault reporting. Are you familiar with the two types of reporting for incidents of sexual assault—restricted and unrestricted reporting—and the differences between the two?

- Yes
- No → *SKIP to Culture and Command Climate section*
- Not sure → *SKIP to Culture and Command Climate section*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Culture and Command Climate section*

67. If you wanted to make a restricted report of sexual assault, who would you report to?

- Chain of command
- Sexual Assault Prevention and Response personnel
- SARC
- Victim Advocate
- Army SHARP office/personnel
- DOD Safe Helpline
- Healthcare personnel
- Chaplain/religious personnel
- Military Criminal Investigative Organization
- Other law enforcement agency or official
- Other → _____
- Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

68. If you wanted to make an unrestricted report of sexual assault, who would you report to?

Chain of command

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response personnel

SARC

Victim Advocate

Army SHARP office/personnel

DOD Safe Helpline

Healthcare personnel

Chaplain/religious personnel

Military Criminal Investigative Organization

Other law enforcement agency or official

Other → _____

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

VII. Culture and Command Climate

69. Within the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women are given the same types of opportunities; this would include similar training and job assignments.

Yes → Continue to "a"

No → Continue to "a"

Don't know, no basis to judge, or no opinion → SKIP to next question

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to next question

a. What makes you say that?

70. Within the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women are treated with the same level of professionalism?

- Yes → *Continue to "a"*
- No → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → *SKIP to next question*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next question*

a. What makes you say that?

71. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not play an active role in preventing sexual harassment?

- Does → *Continue to "a"*
- Does not → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to
judge, or no opinion → *Continue to "b"*
- Prefer not to answer → *Continue to "b"*

a. What makes you say that?

b. What more could be done by leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to to prevent sexual harassment, if anything?

72. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not adequately respond to allegations of sexual harassment that they are made aware of?

- Does → *Continue to "a"*
- Does not → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → *Continue to "b"*

Prefer not to answer → Continue to "b"

a. What makes you say that?

b. What more could be done by leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to to respond to allegations of sexual harassment, if anything?

73. How much, if at all, does the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to foster a climate that supports reporting incidents of sexual harassment, compared to your Service as a whole? Would you say not at all, slightly, somewhat, or very much?

Not at all → Continue to "a"

Slightly → Continue to "a"

Somewhat → Continue to "a"

Very much → Continue to "a"

Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → SKIP to next question

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to next question

a. Can you elaborate on how the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not support reporting?

74. How much, if at all, does the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to foster a climate that supports reporting incidents of sexual assault, compared to your Service as a whole? Would you say not at all, slightly, somewhat, or very much?

Not at all → Continue to "a"

Slightly → Continue to "a"

Somewhat → Continue to "a"

Very much → Continue to "a"

Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → SKIP to next question

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to next question

- a. Can you elaborate on how the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not support reporting?
-

75. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not play an active role in preventing sexual assault?

Does → Continue to "a"

Does not → Continue to "a"

Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → Continue to "b"

Prefer not to answer → Continue to "b"

- a. What makes you say that?
-

- b. What more could be done by leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to, to prevent sexual assault, if anything?
-

76. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not adequately respond to allegations of sexual assault that they are made aware of?

Does → Continue to "a"

Does not → Continue to "a"

Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → Continue to "b"

Prefer not to answer → Continue to "b"

- a. What makes you say that?
-

- b. What more could be done by leadership in the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to to respond to allegations of sexual assault, if anything?
-

77. Next, I have several questions about SOCOM headquarters leadership, not leadership of your service command or leadership in your unit or the SOF community in general. Overall, do you think SOCOM headquarters leadership is or is not committed to establishing a climate that does not tolerate or condone gender discrimination?

- Is committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Not committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Some are, some aren't → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → *SKIP to next question*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next question*

a. What makes you say that?

78. Overall, do you think SOCOM headquarters leadership is or is not committed to establishing a climate that does not tolerate or condone sexual harassment?

- Is committee → *Continue to "a"*
- Not committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Some are, some aren't → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → *SKIP to next question*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next question*

a. What makes you say that?

79. Overall, do you think SOCOM headquarters leadership is or is not committed to establishing a climate that does not tolerate or condone sexual assault?

- Is committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Not committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Some are, some aren't → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → *SKIP to next section*

Prefer not to answer

→ SKIP to next section

a. What makes you say that?

VIII. Career Impediments

80. Based on your personal experiences or the experiences of other women you've observed, do women face specific barriers or career impediments to get into special operations forces that may impact women more than men?

Yes

→ Continue to "a"

No

→ SKIP to next question

Don't know/don't recall

→ SKIP to next question

Prefer not to answer

→ SKIP to next question

a. What are those barriers or impediments?

Physical ability tests

Prior experience or training

Facility availability

Male-dominated culture

Gender discrimination

Concern about being victim of military sexual trauma

Other _____

81. And again, based on your personal experiences or the experiences of other women you've observed, do women face specific barriers or career impediments while serving in special operations forces that may impact women more than men?

Yes

→ Continue to "a"

No

→ SKIP to Wrap Up section

Don't know/don't recall

→ SKIP to Wrap Up section

Prefer not to answer

→ SKIP to Wrap Up section

a. What are those barriers or impediments?

- Lack of physical ability/strength
- Lower-quality training than me
- Lower quality equipment than men
- Male-dominated culture
- Gender discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual assault
- Concern about being victim of military sexual trauma
- Parental leave policies
- Pregnancy-related policies

82. During your time as a service member in SOF, since January 1, 2016, do you feel that your military career has been impacted at all, whether positively or negatively, by any of the following: one, by specific policies, two, by command culture or climate, or three, by any other issues that may impact women more than men?

- Yes → *Continue to "a"*
- No → *SKIP to Wrap Up section*
- Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Wrap Up section*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Wrap Up section*

a. Could you please describe the kinds of impacts you've experienced?

- Not getting promoted as quickly as male peers
- Not receiving choice assignments
- Missing or delaying deployment
- Lack of camaraderie/feeling part of the team
- Punitive transfer or reassignment

- Unfavorable performance evaluation not supported
by performance
- Unfair decision on pay, benefits, awards, or training
- Other significant downgrades in duties or responsibilities
inconsistent with the military member's grade
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

IX. Wrap up

83. I have one more general question for you. Do you have any suggestions for ways to improve the experiences of women in Special Operations Forces that we haven't already discussed?

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

To obtain the perspectives of women who reported they had personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation while serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), we interviewed 10 women who had formerly served in SOF who volunteered to speak with us about their experiences.¹ We advertised the interview opportunity on the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Military OneSource website—a 24/7 connection for military families to information, answers and support—and on DOD social media platforms. We also disseminated the advertisement through officials at the installations included in our review. The advertisement included a telephone number and email address for volunteers to use to contact us. Our criteria for participation included women who, while serving in SOF, had personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, retaliation, or had perceived career impediments by a uniformed service member or a DOD civilian employee or contractor at any time after January 1, 2016. Further details about our methodology for conducting these interviews can be found in appendix III.

The questionnaire we used to interview women formerly serving in SOF follows:

a. Demographics

1. Can you confirm that you were previously in SOF, but are no longer in SOF?

Yes → *Continue to Q2*

No → *Continue to “a”*

a. Are you currently in SOF?

Yes → *Switch to Questionnaire for Women Currently in SOF (Demographics Section)*

No → *End Interview*

2. Are you currently in the military, including the National Guard or active reserves?

¹We also interviewed 41 women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) who volunteered to speak with us and reported that they personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation while serving in SOF. The questionnaire for those interviews can be found in appendix I.

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Interviews with
Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special
Operations Forces

- Yes → SKIP to Q3
No → Continue to "a"
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q3

a. Did you retire or did you separate?

- Retire
Separate
Prefer not to answer

3. What military service are you in or were you in?

- Air Force
Army
Marines
Navy

4. Which SOF component were you a member of? For example, USASOC, MARSOC, AFSOC...?

- USASOC (Army SOC)
MARSOC (Marines SOC)
AFSOC (Air Force SOC)
NSWC (Navy SOC)
JSOC
Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer
Other → _____

5. Were you permanently or temporarily assigned to SOF?

- Permanently
Temporarily
Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

6. While in SOF, were you active, reserve, National Guard, or some combination?

Active

Reserve

Both

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

7. Rank - Pick one based on Q3:

- Army, Navy, or Marines: While in SOF, were you enlisted, a warrant officer, or a commissioned officer?

- Air Force: While in SOF, were you enlisted or an officer?

Enlisted

Warrant officer

(Commissioned) officer

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

8. What was your occupational specialty code in SOF, for example, your MOS, AFSC, etc.?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

9. Were you in an operator role?

Yes

No

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

10. Did you successfully complete a Special Operations Forces Qualifications Course for your service component command such as

but not limited to the SEAL Qualification Training course or the Army
Special Forces Qualification Course?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer
- Operator
- Enabler or Combat support
- Support or Combat service support

11. How many SOF units did you support or were you attached to, in
total?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 or more

12. How many years were you in SOF in total?

- 0 – 4 years
- 5 – 9 years
- 10 – 14 years
- 15 or more years
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

13. In what year were you last in SOF?

14. Pick one based on Q2

- Yes, still in military: And how many years have you been in the military overall?
 - No, not in military: And how many years were you in the military overall?
- 0 – 4 years
- 5 – 9 years
- 10 – 14 years
- 15 or more years
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

b. Sex or Gender Discrimination

15. During your time as a service member in SOF, do you feel that you experienced discrimination based on your sex or gender?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

No/None open

Yes/Any open or Unclear → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

No → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

16. How, if at all, did the experience of discrimination impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

17. Pick one based on Q2:

- Yes, still in military: Did the experience of discrimination cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- No, not in military: Did the experience of discrimination cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)
Yes (Military)
No, neither
Don't know/don't recall
Prefer not to answer

18. Did you experience discrimination based on your sex or gender as a service member in SOF on or after January 1, 2016?

Yes
No → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

You may have had more than one experience of sex or gender discrimination in SOF in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

19. We understand you may or may not have filed a complaint about that discrimination event. After reading through/listening to the definitions, did you file any kind of complaint about that discrimination event?

Yes
No → *SKIP to Q23*
Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*
Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual harassment section*

20. Do you remember if you filed an anonymous, informal, or formal complaint?

Anonymous
Informal

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

- Formal
- Don't remember
- Prefer not to answer

21. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the complaint with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't recall for each one. [IF NO LONGER IN MILITARY]: Please note that I'm not asking about any interaction you may have had with the VA.

	Yes	No	Don't Recall	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the complaint with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the complaint with a Military Equal Opportunity professional, or with staff within your unit assigned to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints, or a Military Equal Opportunity office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the complaint with an Inspector General's office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. [If Army in Q3]: Did you file the complaint with an Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Did you share the complaint with military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Pick one based on Q2: [Yes, in military] Did you share the complaint with civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility [No, not in military] Did you share the complaint with civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility while you were still in the military?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Did you share the complaint with a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. Were you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the resolution of the complaint?

Satisfied → Continue to "a"

Dissatisfied → SKIP to "b"

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied /About equal → SKIP to Q24

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q24

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q24

a. Would you say you were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied?

Somewhat satisfied → Continue to "i"

Very satisfied → Continue to "i"

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q24

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q24

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q24

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q24

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q24

b. Would you say you were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

Somewhat dissatisfied → Continue to "i"

Very dissatisfied → Continue to "i"

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q24

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q24

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q24

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q24

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q24

23. [If didn't file, "No" in Q19, read this, otherwise skip] We understand there may be many reasons for not filing a discrimination complaint. What were your reasons for not filing one?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Wanted to forget about it and move on | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want more people to know | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Felt ashamed or embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Felt partially to blame | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought it was not serious enough to report | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not think anything would be don | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not think the complaint would be kept confidential | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not want to hurt the offender's career | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did not trust the process would be fair | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Feared it would bring negative consequences onto other women in the unit | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some other reason <input type="checkbox"/> → _____ | |
| Don't know/don't recall | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prefer not to answer | <input type="checkbox"/> |

24. Pick one based on Q2:

- Yes, still in military: Did you speak with anyone else about the discrimination you experienced?
- No, not in military: Did you speak with anyone else about the discrimination you experienced while you were in the military?

-
- Yes → Continue to “a”
No → SKIP to Q25
Don’t know/don’t recall → SKIP to Q25
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q25

a. [If “Yes”] Who did you speak with about the experience?

25. [If filed a complaint, “Yes” in Q19, read this, otherwise skip] How, if at all, did the experience of filing a complaint impact your military career?

- Don’t know/don’t recall
Prefer not to answer

26. [If filed a complaint, “Yes” in Q19, read this, otherwise skip]:

- [See Q2: if “Yes” (currently in military)] Did the experience of filing a complaint cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- [See Q2: if “No” (not in military)] Did the experience of filing a complaint cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

- Yes (SOF)
Yes (Military)
No, neither
Don’t know/don’t recall
Prefer not to answer

c. Sexual Harassment

27. During your time as a service member in SOF, did you experience sexual harassment by a uniformed service member, or a DOD civilian employee or contractor?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

No/None open

Yes/Any open or Unclear → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

No → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

28. My next question is about the impact of this experience on your career, not about the experience itself. How, if at all, did the experience of sexual harassment impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

29. Pick one based on Q2:

- Yes, still in military: Did the experience of sexual harassment cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- No, not in military: Did the experience of sexual harassment cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

No, neither

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

30. Did you experience sexual harassment on or after January 1, 2016?

Yes

No → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

You may have had more than one experience of sexual harassment in SOF in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

31. We understand you may or may not have filed a complaint. After reading through/listening to the definitions, did you file a complaint of any kind?

- Yes
- No → *SKIP to Q35*
- Don't remember → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Sexual assault section*

32. Do you remember if the sexual harassment complaint you filed was an anonymous, informal, or formal complaint?

- Anonymous
- Informal
- Formal
- Don't remember
- Prefer not to answer

33. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the complaint with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't recall for each one. [IF NOT IN MILITARY]: Please note that I'm not asking about any interaction you may have had with the VA.

	Yes	No	Don't Recall	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the complaint with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the complaint with a Military Equal Opportunity professional, or with staff within your unit assigned to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints, or office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the complaint with an Inspector General's office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Did you file the complaint with a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

	Yes	No	Don't Recall	Prefer NTA
e. Did you file the complaint with a Victim Advocate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. [If Army in Q3]: Did you file the complaint with any other Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Did you share the complaint with military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Pick one based on Q2: [Yes, in military] Did you share the complaint with civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility? [No, not in military] Did you share the complaint with civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility while you were still in the military?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Did you share the complaint with a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

34. Were you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the resolution of the complaint(s)?

- Satisfied → Continue to "a"
- Dissatisfied → SKIP to "b"
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied/About equal → SKIP to Q37
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q37
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q37

a. Would you say you were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied?

- Somewhat satisfied → Continue to "i"
- Very satisfied → Continue to "i"
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q37
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q37

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q37

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q37
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q37

b. Would you say you were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

Somewhat dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
Very dissatisfied → Continue to "i"
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q37
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q37

i. What makes you say that?

Then SKIP to Q37
Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q37
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q37

35. [If didn't file, "No" in Q31] We understand there may be many reasons for not filing a sexual harassment complaint. What were your reasons for not filing one?

Wanted to forget about it and move on
Did not want more people to know
Felt ashamed or embarrassed
Felt partially to blame
Thought it was not serious enough to report
Did not think anything would be done
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers
Did not think the complaint would be kept confidential
Did not want to hurt the offender's career
Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak

Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get
labeled a

Troublemaker

Worried about potential negative
consequences from the person(s) who did it

Did not trust the process would be fair

Worried about potential negative
consequences from a supervisor or
someone in interviewee's chain of command

Thought it might hurt her performance
evaluation/fitness report or her career

Did not want to hurt the offender's family

Feared it would bring negative
consequences onto other women
in the unit

Some other reason →

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

36. [If filed ANONYMOUS or INFORMAL complaint in Q32] We
understand there may be many reasons for not filing a formal sexual
harassment complaint. What were your reasons for not filing one?

Wanted to forget about it and move on

Did not want more people to know

Felt ashamed or embarrassed

Felt partially to blame

Thought it was not serious enough to report

Did not think anything would be done

Worried about potential negative
consequences from coworkers or peers

Did not think the complaint would be
kept confidential

**Appendix II: Questionnaire for Interviews with
Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special
Operations Forces**

-
- Did not want to hurt the offender’s career
 - Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak
 - Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get labeled a troublemaker
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it
 - Did not trust the process would be fair
 - Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee’s chain of command
 - Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career
 - Did not want to hurt the offender’s family
 - Feared it would bring negative consequences onto other women in the unit
 - Some other reason
-
- Don’t know/don’t recall
 - Prefer not to answer

37. Pick one based on Q2:

- Yes, still in military: Did you speak with anyone else about the harassment you experienced?
- No, not in military: Did you speak with anyone else about the harassment you experienced while you were in the military?

- Yes → Continue to “a”
- No → SKIP to Q38
- Don’t know/don’t recall → SKIP to Q38
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q38

a. [If “Yes”] Who did you speak with about the experience?

38. [If filed a complaint, "Yes" in Q31, otherwise skip] And how, if at all, did the experience of filing a complaint or making an informal complaint impact your military career?

- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

39. [If filed a complaint, "Yes" in Q31, otherwise skip]

- [See Q2: if "Yes" (currently in military)] Did the experience of filing a complaint or making an informal complaint cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- [See Q2: if "No" (not in military)] Did the experience of filing a complaint or making an informal complaint cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

- Yes (SOF)
- Yes (Military)
- No, neither
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

d. Sexual Assault

40. During your time as a service member in SOF, did you experience sexual assault, including an attempted assault, by a uniformed service member, or by a DOD civilian employee or contractor?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

- No/None open →
- Yes/Any open or Unclear → *SKIP to Retaliation section*
- No → *SKIP to Retaliation section*
- Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Retaliation section*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

41. My next question is about the impact of this experience on your career, not about the experience itself. How, if at all, did the experience of sexual assault impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

42. Pick one based on Q2:

- Yes, still in military: Did the experience of sexual assault cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- No, not in military: Did the experience of sexual assault cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

No, neither

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

43. Did you experience sexual assault on or after January 1, 2016?

Yes

No → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

Don't remember → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Retaliation section*

You may have had more than one experience of sexual assault in SOF in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

44. We understand you may or may not have filed a report. After listening to the definitions, did you file a report of any kind?

Yes

No → *SKIP to Q49*

Don't remember → *SKIP to Q50*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Q50*

45. Do you remember if you initially filed a restricted or unrestricted report?

- Restricted → Continue to "a"
Unrestricted → SKIP to Q46
Don't remember → SKIP to Q46
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q46

a. [If "Restricted"] Did you later convert this restricted report to an unrestricted report?

- Yes
No
Don't remember
Prefer not to answer

b. Did your chain of command learn that you'd filed a restricted report, without your consent?

- Yes → Continue to "i"
No → Skip to Q46
Don't remember → Skip to Q46
Prefer not to answer → Skip to Q46

i. Do you know how your chain of command found this out?

- Yes
No
Don't remember
Prefer not to answer

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

46. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the report with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't recall for each one. [IF NO LONGER IN MILITARY]: Please note that I'm not asking about any interaction you may have had with the VA.

	Yes	No	Don't Recall	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the report with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the report with a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the report with a Victim Advocate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. [If Army in Q3]: Did you file the report with any other Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Did you file the report with the DOD Safe Helpline?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Did you report the assault to military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Pick one based on Q2: [Yes, in military] Did you report the assault to civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility? [No, not in military] Did you report the assault to civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility while you were still in the military?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Did you report the assault to a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Did you file the report with a Military Criminal Investigative Organization, for example, with the Army Criminal Investigation Division, NCIS, or the Air Force Office of Special Investigations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Did you file the report with another law enforcement agency or official?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

47. What was the report-filing process like for you?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

48. Were you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the resolution of the report?

Satisfied → Continue to "a"

Dissatisfied → SKIP to "b"

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied/About equal → SKIP to Q50

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q50

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q50

a. Would you say you were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied?

Somewhat satisfied → Continue to "i"

Very satisfied → Continue to "i"

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q50

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q50

i. What makes you say that?

_____ Then SKIP to Q50

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q50

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q50

b. Would you say you were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

Somewhat dissatisfied → Continue to "i"

Very dissatisfied → Continue to "i"

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q50

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q50

ii. What makes you say that?

- _____ *Then SKIP to Q50*
- Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Q50*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Q50*

49. [If didn't file, "No" in Q44] We understand there may be many reasons for not reporting a sexual assault. What were your reasons for not reporting?

- _____
- Wanted to forget about it and move on
- Did not want more people to know
- Felt ashamed or embarrassed
- Felt partially to blame
- Thought it was not serious enough to report
- Did not think anything would be done
- Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers
- Did not think the report would be kept confidential
- Did not want to hurt the offender's career
- Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak
- Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get labeled a troublemaker
- Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it
- Did not trust the process would be fair
- Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command
- Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career

Did not want to hurt the offender's family

Feared it would bring negative consequences
onto other women in the unit

Some other reason _____

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

50. Pick one based on Q2:

- Yes, still in military: Did you speak with anyone else about the assault?
- No, not in military: Did you speak with anyone else about the assault while you were in the military?

Yes → Continue to "a"

No → SKIP to Q51

Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q51

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q51

a. [If "Yes"] Who did you speak with about the experience?

51. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q44] And how, if at all, did the experience of filing a report impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

52. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q44]

- [See Q2: if "Yes" (currently in military)] Did the experience of filing a report of sexual assault cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- [See Q2: if "No" (not in military)] Did the experience of filing a report of sexual assault cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

-
- No, neither
 - Don't know/don't recall
 - Prefer not to answer

53. I'm going to read a list of military resources that you may or may not have tried to access following the assault, and when I'm done I'm going to ask if you tried to access ANY of them. The resources are Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (or SARCs), Victims' Advocates, DOD Safe Helpline, Special Victims' Counsel, military medical care, military mental health counseling, Sexual Assault Forensic Examinations (SAFE), chaplain counseling, or any other military resources. Did you TRY to access ANY of those resources?

- Yes → Continue to next question
- No → SKIP to Q55
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q55
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q55

54. Did you experience any difficulty in accessing any military resources following the assault?

- Yes → Continue to "a"
- No → SKIP to Q55
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Q55
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q55

a. What were those difficulties?

-
- Don't know/don't recall
 - Prefer not to answer

55. Did you try to access any civilian resources following the assault?

- Yes → Continue to next question
- No → SKIP to Retaliation section
- Don't know/don't recall → SKIP to Retaliation section
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Retaliation section

56. Why did you try to access civilian resources?

e. Retaliation

57. As a result of you filing or preparing to file a complaint or report of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual assault while serving in SOF, did you experience retaliation after January 1, 2016?

Yes → We cannot speak about open or ongoing investigations or any ongoing legal matters. Is any related legal matter or investigation still open, including any appeals?

No/None open →,

Yes/Any open or Unclear → *SKIP to "SAPR Training" section*

No → *SKIP to "SAPR Training" section*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to "SAPR Training" section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to "SAPR Training" section*

You may have had more than one experience of retaliation in 2016 or later but my next set of questions is only about the one event that had the biggest effect on you.

58. What form did the retaliation take?

Reprisal:

Promotion interference

Unwarranted disciplinary or other corrective action

Punitive transfer or reassignment

Unfavorable performance evaluation not supported by performance

Unfair decision on pay, benefits, awards, or training

Non-indicated referral for mental health evaluation

Other significant downgrades in duties or responsibilities inconsistent with the military member's grade

Ostracism:

Improper exclusion from social acceptance,
activities or interactions

Denying privilege of friendship due to
reporting or planning to report a crime

Blaming

Subjecting to insults or bullying

Cruelty, Oppression, or Maltreatment:

Acts that occur without a valid military purpose,
and may include physical or psychological
force or threat or abusive or unjustified
treatment that results in physical or
mental harm

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

59. Who was responsible for the retaliation? For example, someone
in leadership or a peer?

Leadership

Peer

Don't remember

Prefer not to answer

60. Did you report the retaliation you experienced?

Yes

No → SKIP to Q63

Don't remember → SKIP to Q63

Prefer not to answer → SKIP to Q63

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Interviews with Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

61. I'm going to read a list of types of individuals and offices, and I'd like you to tell me if you filed the report with any of these. You can tell me Yes or No or that you don't recall for each one. [IF NO LONGER IN MILITARY]: Please note that I'm not asking about any interaction you may have had with the VA.

	Yes	No	Don't Recall	Prefer NTA
a. Did you file the report with your chain of command?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Did you file the report with a Military Equal Opportunity professional, or with staff within your unit assigned to receive Military Equal Opportunity complaints, or a Military Equal Opportunity office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Did you file the report with an Inspector General's office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Did you file the report with a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Did you file the report with a Victim Advocate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. [If Army in Q3]: Did you file the report with any other Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention office or personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Did you file the report with the DOD Safe Helpline?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Did you report the retaliation to military healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel at a military treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Pick one based on Q2: [Yes, in military] Did you report the retaliation to civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[No, not in military] Did you report the retaliation to civilian healthcare personnel, including mental health personnel, at a civilian treatment facility while you were still in the military?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Did you report the retaliation to a chaplain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

62. What action, if any, did the military take as a result of your report of retaliation, as far as you are aware?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

63. [If didn't file, "No" in Q60] We understand there may be many reasons for not reporting retaliation. What were your reasons for not reporting?

Wanted to forget about it and move on

Did not want more people to know

Felt ashamed or embarrassed

Felt partially to blame

Thought it was not serious enough to report

Did not think anything would be done

Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers

Interviewee did not want people to see her as weak or a complainer

Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it

Did not trust the process would be fair

Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command

Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation /fitness report or her career

Feared it would bring negative consequences onto other women in the unit

Some other reason

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

64. How, if at all, did the retaliatory actions impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

65. Pick one based on Q2:

- Yes, still in military: Did the experience of retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- No, not in military: Did the experience of retaliation cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

No, neither

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

66. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q60] How, if at all, did filing a report of retaliation impact your military career?

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

67. [If filed a report, "Yes" in Q60]:

- [See Q2: if "Yes" (currently in military)] Did the experience of filing a report of retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military?
- [See Q2: if "No" (not in military)] Did the experience of filing a report of retaliation cause you to leave or separate from SOF or the military?

Yes (SOF)

Yes (Military)

No, neither

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

f. Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Training

68. During your time in SOF, did you receive Sexual Assault Prevention and Response training?

Yes

No → *SKIP to Culture and Command Climate section*

Don't know/don't recall → *SKIP to Culture and Command Climate section*

Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to Culture and Command Climate section*

69. How often did you receive this training while in SOF?

Only once,
never repeated

Annually

Twice a year

3 to 4 times a year

Other

Don't know/don't recall

Prefer not to answer

70. Do you recall if this was service-specific training or SOCOM-led training, or some combination of both?

Service-specific

SOCOM-led

Don't remember

Prefer not to answer

71. Did the training you received differ depending on your location, for example, between assignment locations or when deployed versus when living at your assigned installation?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

g. Culture and Command Climate

72. Within the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women were given the same types of opportunities; this would include similar training and job assignments.

- Yes → *Continue to "a"*
- Some yes, some no → *Continue to "a"*
- No → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge, or no opinion → *SKIP to next question*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next question*

a. What makes you say that?

73. Within the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women were treated with the same level of professionalism?

- Yes → *Continue to "a"*
- Some yes, some no → *Continue to "a"*
- No → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge, or no opinion → *SKIP to next question*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next question*

a. What makes you say that?

74. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not play an active role in preventing sexual harassment?

- Did → *Continue to "a"*
Some did, some didn't → *Continue to "a"*
Did not → *Continue to "a"*
Don't know, no basis to judge, or no opinion → *Continue to "b"*
Prefer not to answer → *Continue to "b"*

a. What makes you say that?

b. What more could have been done by leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to, to prevent sexual harassment, if anything?

75. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not adequately respond to allegations of sexual harassment that they were made aware of?

- Did → *Continue to "a"*
Some did, some didn't → *Continue to "a"*
Did not → *Continue to "a"*
Don't know, no basis to judge, or no opinion → *Continue to "b"*
Prefer not to answer → *Continue to "b"*

a. What makes you say that?

b. What more could have been done by leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to, to respond to allegations of sexual harassment, if anything?

76. How much, if at all, did the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to foster a climate that supported reporting incidents of sexual harassment, compared to your Service as a whole? Would you say not at all, slightly, somewhat, or very much?

- Not at all → Continue to "a"
Slightly → Continue to "a"
Somewhat → Continue to "a"
Very much → Continue to "a"
Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → SKIP to next question
Prefer not to answer → SKIP to next question

a. Can you elaborate on how the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not support reporting?

77. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not play an active role in preventing sexual assault?

- Did → Continue to "a"
Some did, some didn't → Continue to "a"
Did not → Continue to "a"
Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → Continue to "b"
Prefer not to answer → Continue to "b"

a. What makes you say that?

b. What more could have been done by leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to, to prevent sexual assault, if anything?

78. Do you feel that leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not adequately respond to allegations of sexual assault that they were made aware of?

- Did → Continue to "a"
- Some did, some didn't → Continue to "a"
- Did not → Continue to "a"
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → Continue to "b"
- Prefer not to answer → Continue to "b"

a. What makes you say that?

b. What more could have been done by leadership in the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to, to respond to allegations of sexual assault, if anything?

79. How much, if at all, did the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to foster a climate that supported reporting incidents of sexual assault, compared to your Service as a whole? Would you say not at all, slightly, somewhat, or very much?

- Not at all → Continue to "a"
- Slightly → Continue to "a"
- Somewhat → Continue to "a"
- Very much → Continue to "a"
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → SKIP to next question
- Prefer not to answer → SKIP to next question

a. Can you elaborate on how the SOF unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not support reporting?

80. Next, I have several questions about SOCOM headquarters leadership, not leadership of your service command or leadership in your previous unit or units or the SOF community in general. Overall, during your time in SOF, do you think SOCOM headquarters leadership was or was not committed to establishing a climate that does not tolerate or condone gender discrimination?

- Was committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Was not committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Some were, some weren't → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → *SKIP to next question*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next question*

a. What makes you say that?

81. Overall, during your time in SOF, do you think SOCOM headquarters leadership was or was not committed to establishing a climate that does not tolerate or condone sexual harassment?

- Was committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Was not committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Some were, some weren't → *Continue to "a"*
- Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion → *SKIP to next question*
- Prefer not to answer → *SKIP to next question*

a. What makes you say that?

82. Overall, during your time in SOF, do you think SOCOM headquarters leadership was or was not committed to establishing a climate that does not tolerate or condone sexual assault?

- Was committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Was not committed → *Continue to "a"*
- Some were, some weren't → *Continue to "a"*

Don't know, no basis to judge,
or no opinion

→ *SKIP to next section*

Prefer not to answer

→ *SKIP to next section*

a. What makes you say that?

h. Career Impediments

83. During your time as a service member in SOF, since January 1, 2016, do you feel that your military career was impacted at all, whether positively or negatively, by any of the following: one, by specific policies, two, by command culture or climate, or three, by any other issues that may impact women more than men?

Yes

→ *Continue to "a"*

No

→ *SKIP to Transition Section*

Don't know/don't recall

→ *SKIP to Transition Section*

Prefer not to answer

→ *SKIP to Transition Section*

a. Could you please describe the kinds of impacts you've experienced?

Not getting promoted as quickly
as male peers

Not receiving choice
assignments

Missing or delaying deployment

Lack of camaraderie
/feeling part of the team

Punitive transfer
or reassignment

Unfavorable performance
evaluation not supported by
performance

Unfair decision on pay,
benefits, awards, or training

- Other significant downgrades in
duties or responsibilities
inconsistent with the military
member's grade
- Don't know/don't recall
- Prefer not to answer

i. Transition and Transition Resources

[See Q2:]

- If YES, still in military → SKIP to Wrap Up section
- If NO, not in military → My next set of questions is about when you left the military and your experience with military transition programs and resources. In these questions we are only asking about military resources and not VA resources.

84. Did you need any resources related to transitioning from the military due to being in SOF, for example due to a SOF-related injury or experience?

- Yes → Continue to "a"
- No → Continue to Q85
- Don't know/don't recall → Continue to Q85
- Prefer not to answer → Continue to Q85

a. [If "yes"] Did you have any difficulty accessing those resources?

- Yes → Continue to "i"
- No → Continue to Q85
- Don't know/don't recall → Continue to Q85
- Prefer not to answer → Continue to Q85

i. Which resource or resources did you experience difficulty accessing?

85. Did you have any difficulty accessing any other transition-related resources that you tried to use when separating from the military?

- Yes → *Continue to "a"*
No → *Continue to Q86*
Not applicable
(e.g., didn't try to access any) → *Continue to Q86*
Don't know/don't recall → *Continue to Q86*
Prefer not to answer → *Continue to Q86*

a. [If "yes"] Could you please describe the difficulty and the resource or resources involved?

86. From your perspective, during your time in SOF, did female enablers and operators receive the same access to transition-related resources when separating from the military while they were in SOF?

- Yes → *Continue to "a"*
No → *Continue to "a"*
Don't know/don't recall → *Continue to Q87*
Prefer not to answer → *Continue to Q87*
Not applicable/can't answer → *Continue to Q87*

a. [If "yes" or "no"] What makes you say that?

j. Wrap up

87. Thank you. I have one more general question for you. Do you have any suggestions for ways to improve the experiences of women in Special Operations Forces that we haven't already discussed?

Appendix III: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of this report were to assess the extent to which (1) the Department of Defense (DOD) has developed policies to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) service members; (2) SOCOM can access and use timely, accurate, and complete data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving women in SOCOM, and DOD maintains data on reported retaliatory behavior against these women; and (3) the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and SOCOM have identified and addressed barriers that may impact the careers of women serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). Our review focused on active-duty women permanently assigned to SOCOM and its component commands.¹

DOD defines “prohibited discrimination” as discrimination, including disparate treatment, of an individual or group on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), gender identity, or sexual orientation that is not otherwise authorized by law or regulation and detracts from military readiness.² While DOD does not specifically define “gender discrimination,” for the purposes of this review, we use the term to refer to matters of prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex (including pregnancy) against women, including discriminatory harassment and disparate treatment.

DOD defines “sexual harassment” as conduct that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and deliberate or repeated offensive comments or gestures of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person’s job, pay, or career; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career or employment decisions affecting that person; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Such conduct constitutes sexual harassment when it is so severe or pervasive

¹The U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) service component commands are U.S. Army Special Operations Command, U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, U.S. Marine Forces Special Operations Command, and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command.

²Department of Defense (DOD) Instruction 1350.02, *DOD Military Equal Opportunity Program* (Sept. 4, 2020).

that a reasonable person would perceive, and the victim does perceive, the environment as hostile or offensive.³

DOD defines “sexual assault” as intentional sexual contact, characterized by the use of force, threats, intimidation, abuse of authority, or when the victim does not or cannot consent. The term includes a broad category of sexual offenses consisting of the following specific Uniform Code of Military Justice offenses: rape, sexual assault, aggravated sexual contact, abusive sexual contact, forcible sodomy (forced oral or anal sex), or attempts to commit these acts.⁴

One-on-One Interviews with Women in SOF

To obtain the perspectives of women who reported experiencing gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation while serving in SOF, we interviewed 51 women who were currently serving in SOF at the time of our interviews or had formerly served in SOF. These women volunteered to speak with us by telephone about their experiences since January 2016. We also spoke with these women about whether while serving in SOF they felt that such incidents or other non-related experiences had resulted in impediments to their career progression.

To develop our interview protocols for (1) women currently serving in SOF and (2) women formerly serving in SOF, we reviewed DOD, SOCOM, and service policies and surveys; interviewed DOD, SOCOM, and non-governmental organization officials; and reviewed our prior work related to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic abuse in the military. We also consulted with a GAO mental health professional on the appropriateness of the instruments as well as with guidance on resources to offer participants if relevant. A survey specialist helped to design both interview protocols. Two other survey specialists reviewed the instrument for current SOF members for methodological issues, but because the instrument for the former SOF members was methodologically nearly identical they did not review that instrument. We further obtained and incorporated feedback from three analysts who had experience working on issues related to sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military

³DOD Instruction 1020.03, *Harassment Prevention and Response in the Armed Forces* (Feb. 8, 2018) (incorporating change 1, effective Dec. 29, 2020).

⁴DOD Directive 6495.01, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program* (Jan. 23, 2012) (incorporating change 5, Nov. 10, 2021).

to ensure that appropriate questions were included and written in a clear manner.

Prior to interviewing the participants, we pretested the interview protocols with eight individuals who were currently serving in or had formerly served in SOF.⁵ We used the pretests to determine whether: (1) the questions were clear, (2) the terms used were precise, (3) participants were able to provide information that we were seeking, and (4) the questions were unbiased and written in a manner to minimize the re-traumatization of the participants. We made changes to the content and format of the interview protocols based on the results of our pretesting. To ensure consistent implementation of the interview protocols across interviewers and participants, the two female analysts who conducted the interviews were trained before conducting them independently. The training included observing another team member conduct a mock interview and being observed while conducting a mock interview.

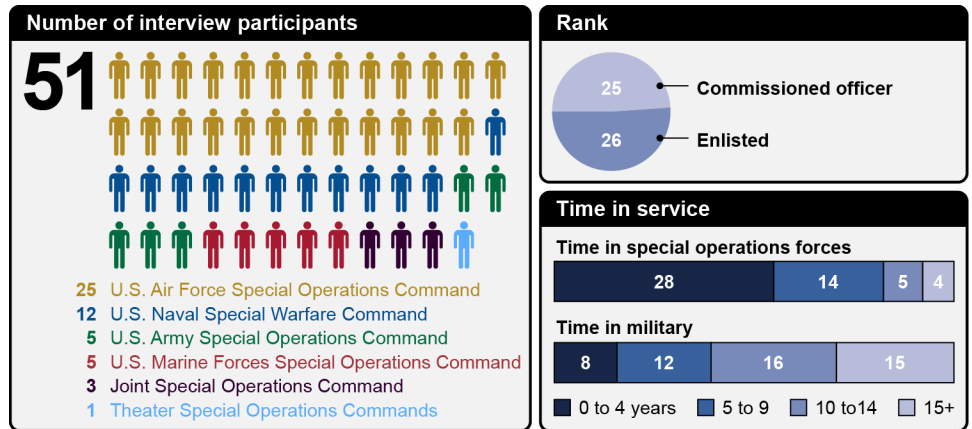
We advertised the interview opportunity to the public on DOD's Military OneSource website—a 24/7 connection for military families to information, answers and support—and on DOD social media platforms. We also disseminated the advertisement through officials at the installations included in our review. The advertisement included a telephone number and email address for volunteers to use to contact us.

From January 2022 through April 2022, we received a total of 99 responses to our advertisement. To help ensure we had a more complete understanding of the victim's experience with reporting incidents and perceived career impacts, our criteria for participation included women who, while serving in SOF, had personally experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, retaliation, or had perceived career impediments by a uniformed service member or a DOD civilian employee or contractor at any time after January 1, 2016. We did not interview women who identified having an open or ongoing law enforcement or other legal action related to a reported incident about such actions. Based on these criteria, we excluded 14 individuals who had contacted us during our interview period. After establishing contact with us to volunteer for an interview, 34 women chose not to participate and discontinued communication. We completed interviews with 51 service members—41 currently serving in SOF and 10 who formerly

⁵We conducted five pretests of the interview protocol for service members currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) and three pretests of the interview protocol for service members formerly serving in SOF.

served in SOF. Figure 3 provides additional demographic details about our interview participants.

Figure 3: Demographic Information about Interview Participants for GAO Interviews, Women Currently or Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces



Source: GAO analysis of interview participant data. | GAO-23-105168

We asked the participants closed- and open-ended questions on a range of topics regarding incident reporting processes, impacts on participants' careers, and SOCOM efforts to prevent and respond to such incidents. These topics included participants' awareness of available services, resources, and reporting options; motivations or barriers to reporting the incident(s); experiences when reporting the incident(s); and experiences transitioning out of SOF (for women who had formerly served in SOF). The questionnaire we used to conduct voluntary interviews with women currently serving in SOF is included in its entirety in appendix I, and the questionnaire for women formerly serving in SOF is included in its entirety in appendix II.

Due to the sensitivity of the information being discussed, we took several steps to help ensure a confidential and safe environment for participants during the telephone interviews. Specifically, names and contact information provided by volunteers for the purposes of scheduling the interviews were handled confidentially and maintained separately from responses. We did not audio record the interviews. We took notes electronically in Microsoft Word forms, and data were electronically extracted from the Word forms into a comma-delimited file that was then imported into Excel and the statistical program SAS for analysis.

To summarize the perspectives obtained through these interviews, we conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses of the interview data. To conduct the quantitative analysis, a data analyst used SAS to identify counts related to closed-ended responses and produced tables using these counts. To conduct the qualitative analysis, we reviewed open-ended questions for examples and anecdotes that were representative of the participants or notable and relevant for other reasons. Because we did not select participants using a statistically representative sampling method, the perspectives obtained are nongeneralizable and therefore cannot be projected across DOD, a military service or service component command, or installation. While the information obtained was not generalizable, it provided perspectives from women who were willing to discuss their experiences with the incident reporting process, impacts to their careers, efforts to prevent and respond to these incidents, and the culture and command climate of SOCOM and SOF units.

Methods Used to Assess DOD and SOCOM Policies for Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault

To assess the extent to which DOD and SOCOM have developed policies to prevent and respond to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving women in SOF, we reviewed relevant DOD, SOCOM, and military service policies.⁶ We also compared the military services' policies related to such incidents occurring in joint environments with related DOD policies and assessed the extent to which they were aligned. Specifically, one analyst (1) reviewed DOD policies for provisions related to incidents of prohibited discrimination, harassment, and sexual assault occurring in joint environments, and (2) reviewed relevant military service policies to identify the extent to which they aligned with the DOD policy provisions. Next, a second analyst reviewed the identified DOD policy provisions and aligned military service policy provisions to verify the findings, and the two analysts consulted to reach consensus on any differences in findings. We interviewed DOD and military service officials regarding some of the policy provisions that did not align and reasons for the non-alignment.

Further, we interviewed relevant DOD and SOCOM officials at the headquarters levels as well as a nongeneralizable sample of military service and other installation officials at the headquarters level for each

⁶For the purposes of this report, the term "military services" refers to the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force. We did not include the Space Force, given its status as a new organization that was established in December 2019.

SOCOM service component command.⁷ At the installations we interviewed Military Equal Opportunity personnel, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response personnel, senior enlisted leaders, and commanders about a number of topics such as how they prevent, track, respond to, and resolve incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Because we did not select locations using a statistically representative sampling method, the comments provided during our interviews with installation officials are nongeneralizable and therefore cannot be projected across DOD, a military service or component command, or any other installations. While the information obtained was not generalizable, it provided perspectives from installation officials that have assisted with the response to reported incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault as well as related prevention efforts.

We compared information from our analysis of policy, one-on-one interviews with service members, and interviews with DOD and military service officials with DOD policies to assess the extent to which the military services' policies on discrimination, harassment, and sexual assault in joint environments are aligned with DOD policies.⁸

Methods Used to Assess Data Access

To assess the extent to which SOCOM can access and use timely, accurate, and complete data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving women in SOCOM, we conducted interviews with DOD, SOCOM, and military service officials about how data on these incidents are collected and maintained. We requested and received data on reported incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving SOCOM service members from SOCOM and each service component command. However, after reviewing the data and interviewing relevant officials, we determined the data were not sufficiently reliable to report. We also requested and received data on reported incidents of sexual assault involving SOCOM service members from DOD's Sexual Assault

⁷We conducted virtual site visits to the headquarters installation for each SOCOM service component command: U.S. Army Special Operations Command (Fort Bragg, North Carolina); U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command (Naval Base Coronado, California); U.S. Marine Forces Special Operations Command (Camp Lejeune, North Carolina); and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command (Hurlburt Field, Florida). We also conducted a virtual site visit to SOCOM headquarters (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida).

⁸DOD Instruction 1350.02, DOD Instruction 1020.03, and DOD Directive 6495.01.

Prevention and Response Office, but did not report them due to concerns about completeness.

In addition, we interviewed Department of Defense Inspector General (DODIG) officials regarding the collection and maintenance of data in connection with sexual assault-related reprisal investigations. We requested data from the DODIG on sexual assault-related reprisal investigations involving SOCOM service members from fiscal years 2013 through 2020. In response to our request, DODIG officials provided data on sexual assault-related reprisal investigations for fiscal years 2016 through 2021.

Further, as part of our previously discussed virtual site visits to SOCOM headquarters and the headquarters of each service component command, we interviewed Military Equal Opportunity and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response personnel about how they collect and track data related to incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault involving SOCOM service members. We also interviewed these officials about how, if at all, they identify trends for such incidents involving this population. We compared information from our review of data and interviews with DOD, SOCOM, and military service officials with SOCOM's 2019 *Enterprise Data Strategy*.⁹ In addition, we determined that the information and communication component of internal control was relevant to this objective.¹⁰ Specifically, we identified the underlying principles that management should use quality information—that is current, complete, accurate, accessible, and provided on a timely basis—and internally communicate that information to achieve objectives as relevant to this objective. We assessed SOCOM's data collection processes to determine whether SOCOM met these principles.

Methods Used to Assess Identification of Barriers Impacting the Careers of Women in SOF

To assess the extent to which OSD and SOCOM have identified and addressed barriers that may impact the careers of women serving in SOF, we reviewed OSD, SOCOM, and service component command efforts to identify potential barriers to women serving in SOF. Specifically, we analyzed SOCOM's annual assessments on the integration of women into previously closed positions, as required by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and interviewed DOD and

⁹U.S. Special Operations Command, *Enterprise Data Strategy* (Dec. 4, 2019).

¹⁰GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

SOCOM officials regarding how they are prepared, submitted, and used.¹¹ We also reviewed documentation related to service component command efforts more broadly, such as roundtable discussions, focus groups, and studies, to capture the full range of efforts taken or underway. In addition, we interviewed DOD officials regarding an ongoing statutorily required evaluation of barriers to minority participation in covered units in SOF and reviewed related documentation.¹²

Additionally, we analyzed the responses from our one-on-one interviews with women currently or formerly serving in SOF units to identify reported career barriers. We compared the reported barriers with barriers identified by SOCOM and the component commands to determine any similarities or differences. Further, as part of our virtual site visits to SOCOM headquarters and the headquarters of each service component command, we interviewed commanders and senior enlisted leaders about efforts to address cultural and other impediments to women serving in SOF units and to better identify issues specific to women. Moreover, we reviewed related reports and relevant recommendations made by the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. We also interviewed committee officials about issues related to the integration of women in SOF as well as the committee's work in this area.

We determined that the information and communication component and the control activities component of internal control were relevant to this objective.¹³ Specifically, we identified the underlying principles that management should use quality information and internally communicate that information to achieve objectives as relevant to this objective. Further, management should document in its policies, each unit's responsibility for an operational process's objectives and develop information needed for corrective action, among other things. We assessed DOD, SOCOM, and service component command documentation and our interviews with officials from those organizations

¹¹Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Annual Assessment Regarding the Full Integration of Women in the Armed Forces* (Mar. 18, 2016).

¹²Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 557 (2021).

¹³[GAO-14-704G](#).

to determine whether the department had met these principles. We further compared this information with relevant DOD guidance and law.¹⁴

Table 1 presents the DOD and non-DOD organizations we contacted during our review to address our three objectives.

Table 1: DOD and Non-DOD Organizations Contacted by GAO

Organization	Office contacted
Department of Defense (DOD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services • Defense Manpower Data Center • Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office • DOD Office of Inspector General • Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion • Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict • Office of People Analytics • Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy • Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)
Department of the Army	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity and Inclusion Agency • Fort Bragg • U.S. Army Special Operations Command
Department of the Navy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camp Lejeune • Department of the Navy Office of Force Resiliency • Marine Corps, Opportunity, Diversity, and Inclusion Branch • Marine Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response • U.S. Marine Forces Special Operations Command • Naval Base Coronado • U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command
Department of the Air Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Force Equal Opportunity • U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command • Cannon Air Force Base • Hurlburt Field • Integrated Resilience • MacDill Air Force Base

¹⁴Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Annual Assessment Regarding the Full Integration of Women in the Armed Forces* (Mar. 18, 2016) and Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 557 (2021).

Appendix III: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Organization	Office contacted
U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health of Special Operations Forces Cell• Joint Special Operations Command• J1 Directorate of Personnel• J3 Directorate of Operations• SOCOM Office of the Inspector General
Nongovernmental organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service Women's Action Network

Source: GAO. | GAO-23-105168

We conducted this performance audit from April 2021 to December 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix IV: Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command Assessments of Barriers to Women

Department of Defense entities, including U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), provided information on various assessments, surveys, discussion groups, and analyses related to barriers to women in U.S. Special Operations Forces. Specifically, the efforts undertaken since fiscal year 2016 are listed below in table 2, along with the completion date or status, and the population addressed.

Table 2: DOD and SOCOM Assessments of Barriers to Women in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)

Title	Description	Completion date or current status	Population addressed by assessment
Barriers to Minority Participation in Elite Units in the Armed Forces	The study is in response to the requirement specified in Sec. 557 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 ^a to understand barriers to minority participation in covered units and develop recommendations to increase minority representation.	Pending. Final report expected by December 2022	Minority operators serving in covered SOF units, and enablers to the extent possible
SOCOM Annual Assessments Regarding the Full Integration of Women in the Armed Forces	These assessments, required by a 2016 Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, ^b include a description of efforts to recruit qualified female candidates into special operations; the number of female candidates selected to participate in initial special operations selection, assessment, and qualification programs since 2016; the number of female candidates progressing to subsequent phases of training; the number of females in operational units; and a description of the status of the command's four implementation lines of effort (accession, talent management, communication, and longitudinal assessment).	Annually since fiscal year 2017	Women SOF candidates and women in operational units
Defense Organizational Climate Survey 5.0 – Military Version	The climate survey is a confidential, command-requested organizational development survey that measures cross-cutting risk and protective factors to help DOD leadership and unit/organization leaders gain an understanding of problematic behaviors in their organization.	Recurring. February 2022 (latest)	DOD-wide
Breaking Barriers: Women in Army Special Operations (USASOC)	The study used surveys, focus groups, and interviews to identify barriers women soldiers encounter in Army SOF units and establish lessons learned and best practices in order to recruit, maximize comprehensive integration, and retain extraordinary soldiers.	December 2021	USASOC male and female service members
Integrated Resilience and Preservation of the Force and Family Division Meeting on Diversity Barriers (AFSOC)	The meeting was a division focus group on barriers to diversity in AFSOC. The goal was to provide feedback and discuss the issues of race, diversity, and inclusion to better inform AFSOC and Air Force leadership. The meeting included a discussion of barriers to women in AFSOC. Meeting attendees included various commissioned positions.	August 5, 2020	AFSOC male and female service members.
Women's Leadership Symposium (AFSOC)	The symposium, involving keynote speakers and panel discussions, created a professional development forum to highlight challenges and best practices associated with women in SOF, promoting awareness and skills to facilitate a more inclusive culture.	November 10, 2020	Women in AFSOC

**Appendix IV: Department of Defense and U.S.
Special Operations Command Assessments of
Barriers to Women**

Title	Description	Completion date or current status	Population addressed by assessment
Diversity and Inclusion Barrier Analysis (MARSOC)	The MARSOC Diversity and Inclusion Working Group conducted a barrier analysis to determine if there were any conscious or unconscious biases within the organization.	2021	MARSOC male and female service members and federal government employees (not contractors)
Equal Opportunity Focus Groups (MARSOC)	The focus groups conducted by equal opportunity staff were to confirm the Defense Organizational Climate Survey results that identified two challenges within the command: lack of sexual assault reporting knowledge and organizational processes.	July 2021	MARSOC male and female service members
Inspector General Focus Groups (MARSOC)	The MARSOC Inspector General conducted focus groups to assess the command climate as part of an Inspector General inspection.	April to May 2021	MARSOC male and female service members
Focus Groups based on Climate Survey (NSW)	The focus groups dive deeper into identifying command climate issues identified in the Defense Organizational Climate Survey.	Recurring	NSW male and female service members and civilians

Legend:

DOD	Department of Defense
SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
SOF	U.S. Special Operations Forces
USASOC	U.S. Army Special Operations Command
AFSOC	U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command
MARSOC	U.S. Marine Forces Special Operations Command
NSW	U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command

Source: DOD, SOCOM, USASOC, AFSOC, MARSOC, and NSW documentation and interviews with officials. | GAO-23-105168

^aPub. L. No. 116-283, § 557 (2021).

^bOffice of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, Annual Assessment Regarding the Full Integration of Women in the Armed Forces (Mar. 18, 2016).

Appendix V: GAO Interview Responses from Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

To inform our understanding of potential barriers to women serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), we interviewed 41 women currently serving in SOF. Responses to selected interview questions are shown in tables 3 through 19 on topics related to barriers and perceptions of equal treatment; experiences with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation; experiences with filing a complaint or report; and perceptions of leadership’s role in preventing and responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Because our interviews are not from a generalizable sample, the responses provided below are only representative of the women we interviewed and cannot be generalized to all women in SOF. For a more detailed discussion of our structured interview methodology, see appendix III.

Tables 3 and 4 are related to the women’s perceptions of barriers to get into SOF and while serving in SOF. Gender discrimination and the male-dominated culture were the first and second most-cited barriers reported by the women we interviewed.

Table 3: Responses by Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces to Questions about Barriers or Career Impediments to Get into U.S. Special Operations Forces (Questions 80 and 80a)

Response	Number of responses
Gender discrimination	22
Male-dominated culture	22
Physical ability tests	14
Facility availability	3
Prior experience or training	1
Family considerations	1
Limited recruiting	1
No combat experience	1
Other barriers	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could cite multiple barriers; therefore, totals may add up to more than total number of women interviewed. The specific questions were: (Question 80) Based on your personal experiences or the experiences of other women you’ve observed, do women face specific barriers or career impediments to get into U.S. Special Operations Forces that may impact women more than men? and (Question 80a) What are those barriers or impediments?

Table 4: Responses by Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces to Questions about Barriers or Career Impediments While Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (Questions 81 and 81a)

Response	Number of responses
Gender discrimination	21
Male-dominated culture	15
Pregnancy policies	13
Parental leave policies	5
Equipment issues	3
Physical ability/strength	3
Sexual harassment	3
Concern about being victim of military sexual trauma	1
Facility availability	1
Lower quality training than men	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could cite multiple barriers; therefore, totals may add up to more than total number of women interviewed. The specific questions were: (Question 81) Based on your personal experiences or the experiences of other women you' have observed, do women face specific barriers or career impediments while serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces that may impact women more than men?, and (Question 81a) What are those barriers or impediments?

Tables 5 and 6 show the women's perceptions regarding equal treatment within the unit they are currently supporting. About half of women responded yes and about half responded no to questions on whether men and women are given the same types of opportunities (table 5) and treated with the same level of professionalism (table 6).

Table 5: Within the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women are given the same types of opportunities; this would include similar training and job assignments? (Question 69)

Response	Number of responses
Yes	19
No	19
Yes and no	2
Do not know	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). | GAO-23-105168

Table 6: Within the SOF unit you are currently supporting or attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women are treated with the same level of professionalism? (Question 70)

Response	Number of responses
Yes	19
No	18
Yes and no	2
Do not know	2

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). | GAO-23-105168

Table 7 shows the number of women who reported experiencing gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation before and after January 1, 2016. For example, 25 of the 41 women currently serving in SOF that we interviewed reported they had experienced sexual harassment on or after January 1, 2016, while they were serving in SOF.

Table 7: Number of Women Who Experienced Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, or Retaliation While in SOF (Questions 10, 13, 21, 24, 33, 36, and 49)

	Experienced on or after January 1, 2016	Experienced prior to January 1, 2016	Did not experience	Total interviewed
Experienced gender discrimination	38	2	1	41
Experienced sexual harassment	25	6	10	41
Experienced sexual assault	13	5	23	41
Experienced retaliation	15	—	26	41

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). | GAO-23-105168

Note: The question for retaliation asked about experiences "after January 1, 2016." The questions for gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault asked about experiences "on or after January 1, 2016."

Table 8 shows women’s responses to whether their experiences caused them to consider leaving SOF or the military or both. A majority of women we interviewed who had experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation reported that their experience had caused them to consider leaving or separating from either SOF, the military, or both.

Table 8: Did the experience of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from SOF or the military? (Questions 12, 23, 35, and 57)

	Gender discrimination	Sexual harassment	Sexual assault	Retaliation
Yes, considered leaving SOF but not the military	7	7	3	1
Yes, considered leaving military	4	4	2	2
Yes, considered leaving both	16	9	8	7
No	12	9	5	4
Did not answer	1	2	-	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could have had more than one experience (e.g., gender discrimination and sexual harassment) and so could be counted in more than one column. Therefore, the total in the table does not equal 41.

Tables 9 through 13 relate to women’s experiences filing complaints or reports.

- Tables 9, 10, and 11 show the number of women who filed complaints or reports after experiencing gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation.
- Table 12 shows women’s degree of satisfaction with the resolution of the complaint or report.
- Table 13 shows responses to whether the experience of filing a complaint or report caused the women to consider leaving SOF, the military, or both.

Table 9: Number of Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Complaint, by Type, after Experiencing Gender Discrimination or Sexual Harassment on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 13, 15, 24, and 26)

	Gender discrimination	Sexual harassment
Filed	18	15
<i>Formal</i>	4	2
<i>Informal</i>	13	12
<i>Anonymous</i>	1	1
Did not file	19	10
Do not know	1	-
Total experienced on or after 1/1/16	38	25

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 10: Number of Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Report, by Type, after Experiencing Sexual Assault on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 36 and 38)

Filed	6
<i>Restricted</i>	4
<i>Unrestricted</i>	2
Did not file	7

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 11: Number of Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Retaliation Report after Experiencing Retaliation after January 1, 2016 (Questions 49 and 52)

Filed	4
Did not file	10
Did not answer	1
Total who experienced retaliation	15

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 12: How satisfied were you with the resolution of your complaint or report? (Questions 17, 28, and 41)

	Gender discrimination complaint	Sexual harassment complaint	Sexual assault report
Very satisfied	—	2	—
Somewhat satisfied	3	2	3
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	1	—	—
Somewhat dissatisfied	6	1	—
Very dissatisfied	9	10	3

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 13: Did the experience of filing a complaint or report cause you to consider leaving or separating from U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) or the military? (Questions 20, 32, 44, and 59)

	Gender discrimination complaint	Sexual harassment complaint	Sexual assault report	Retaliation report
Yes, considered leaving SOF but not the military	—	2	1	—
Yes, considered leaving military	2	1	1	1
Yes, considered leaving both	5	2	2	2
No	10	10	2	1
Did not answer	2	—	—	—

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in SOF. | GAO-23-105168

Tables 14 through 17 show the reasons women reported for not filing a complaint of gender discrimination or sexual harassment, or a report of sexual assault or retaliation. The top reason cited by women for each was that they were worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in their chain of command.

Appendix V: GAO Interview Responses from Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

Table 14: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Gender Discrimination Complaint (Question 18)

Response	Number of responses
Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command	7
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers	6
Did not think anything would be done	5
Thought it was not serious enough to report	4
Wanted to forget about it and move on	4
Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career	3
Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it	3
Dealt with it herself	2
Other reason	2
Didn't realize it was reportable	1
Did not want more people to know	1
Did not trust the process would be fair	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could cite multiple reasons; therefore, totals may add up to more than the total number of women asked the question.

Table 15: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Sexual Harassment Complaint (Question 29)

Reason	Number of responses
Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command	6
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers	4
Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career	4
Wanted to forget about it and move on	2
Did not trust the process would be fair	2
Did not think the complaint would be kept confidential	2
Did not think anything would be done	2
Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it	2

Appendix V: GAO Interview Responses from Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

Reason	Number of responses
Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get labeled a troublemaker	2
Dealt with it herself	1
Thought it was not serious enough to report	1
Did not want more people to know	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could cite multiple reasons; therefore, totals may add up to more than the total number of women asked the question.

Table 16: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Reporting Sexual Assault (Question 42)

Reason	Number of responses
Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command	4
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers	3
Did not want more people to know	3
Did not think the complaint would be kept confidential	2
Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career	2
Thought she might get in trouble for something she had done or get labeled a troublemaker	2
Did not trust the process would be fair	1
Did not think anything would be done	1
Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it	1
Did not want to hurt the offender's career	1
Did not want to hurt the offender's family	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could cite multiple reasons; therefore, totals may add up to more than the total number of women asked the question.

Table 17: Reasons Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing a Report of Retaliation (Question 55)

Reasons	Number of responses
Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee’s chain of command	4
Did not think anything would be done	3
Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career	3
Did not trust the process would be fair	3
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers	2
Felt ashamed or embarrassed	1
Wanted to forget it and move on	1
Did not know where to report	1
Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it	1
Other reason	1

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could cite multiple reasons; therefore, totals may add up to more than the total number of women asked the question.

Table 18 and 19 show women’s perceptions of leadership’s role in preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault and whether leadership adequately responded to allegations.

Table 18: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not play an active role in preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault? (Questions 71 and 75):

	Preventing sexual harassment	Preventing sexual assault
Does play active role	22	21
Does not	16	15
Do not know	3	5

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

**Appendix V: GAO Interview Responses from
Women Currently Serving in U.S. Special
Operations Forces**

Table 19: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit you are currently supporting or attached to does or does not adequately respond to allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault? (Questions 72 and 76):

	Responding to allegations of sexual harassment	Responding to allegations of sexual assault
Does adequately respond	22	21
Does not adequately respond	10	7
Do not know	9	13

Source: GAO interviews with women currently serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Appendix VI: GAO Interview Responses from Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

To inform our understanding of potential barriers to women serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), we interviewed 10 women who had formerly served in SOF. Responses to selected interview questions are shown in tables 20 through 36 on topics related to barriers and perceptions of equal treatment; experiences with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation; experiences with filing a complaint or report; and perceptions of leadership’s role in preventing and responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Because our interviews are not from a generalizable sample, the responses provided below are only representative of the women we interviewed and cannot be generalized to all women formerly serving in SOF. For a more detailed discussion of our structured interview methodology, see appendix III.

Tables 20 and 21 identify women’s responses regarding equal treatment within the unit or units they supported or were attached to.

Table 20: Within the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women were given the same types of opportunities; this would include similar training and job assignments? (Question 72)

Response	Number of responses
Yes	2
No	7
Some yes, some no	1

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 21: Within the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to, do you feel that equally qualified men and women were treated with the same level of professionalism? (Question 73)

Response	Number of responses
Yes	2
No	6
Some yes, some no	2

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 22 identifies the number of women who reported experiencing gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation before and after January 1, 2016. For example, three of the 10 women formerly serving in SOF that we interviewed reported they had

experienced sexual harassment on or after January 1, 2016 while they were serving in SOF.

Table 22: Number of Women Who Experienced Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, or Retaliation While Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces (Questions 15, 18, 27, 30, 40, 43, and 57)

	Experienced on or after January 1, 2016	Experienced prior to January 1, 2016	Did not experience	Total interviewed
Experienced gender discrimination	7	1	2	10
Experienced sexual harassment	3	2	5	10
Experienced sexual assault	2	2	6	10
Experienced retaliation	5	-	5	10

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: The question for retaliation asked about experiences “after January 1, 2016.” The questions for gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault asked about experiences “on or after January 1, 2016.”

Table 23 shows women’s responses to whether their experiences caused them to consider leaving SOF or the military. A majority of women we interviewed who had experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation reported that their experience caused them to consider leaving or separating from either SOF, the military, or both.

Appendix VI: GAO Interview Responses from Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces

Table 23: Did the experience of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation cause you to consider leaving or separating from U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) or the military? (Questions 17, 29, 42, and 65)

	Gender discrimination	Sexual harassment	Sexual assault	Retaliation
Yes, considered leaving SOF but not the military	2	1	1	3
Yes, considered leaving the military	2	—	-	1
Yes, considered leaving both	3	3	3	—
No	1	1	-	-
Did not experience	2	5	6	5
Did not answer	—	—	—	1

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in SOF. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could have had more than one experience (e.g. both gender discrimination and sexual harassment) and so could be counted in more than one column. Therefore, the total in the table does not equal 10.

Tables 24 through 28 are related to women’s experiences filing complaints or reports. Tables 24 through 26 show the number of women who filed complaints or reports after experiencing gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or retaliation. Table 27 shows women’s degree of satisfaction with the resolution of their complaint or report. Table 28 shows women’s responses to whether the experience of filing a complaint or report caused them to consider leaving SOF, the military, or both.

Table 24: Number of Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Complaint, by Type, after Experiencing Gender Discrimination or Sexual Harassment on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 18, 20, 30, and 32)

	Gender discrimination	Sexual harassment
Filed	5	1
<i>Formal</i>	1	—
<i>Informal</i>	3	1
<i>Anonymous</i>	1	—
Did not file	2	2
Total experienced on or after 1/1/16	7	3

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 25: Number of Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Report, by Type, after Experiencing Sexual Assault on or after January 1, 2016 (Questions 43 and 45)

Filed	2
<i>Restricted</i>	1
<i>Unrestricted</i>	1
Did not file	—
Total experienced on or after 1/1/2016	2

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 26: Number of Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Who Filed a Retaliation Report after Experiencing Retaliation after January 1, 2016 (Questions 57 and 60)

Filed	—
Did not file	5
Total who experienced retaliation	5

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 27: How satisfied were you with the resolution of your complaint or report? (Questions 22, 34, and 48)

	Gender discrimination complaint	Sexual harassment complaint	Sexual assault report
Very satisfied	—	—	—
Somewhat satisfied	—	—	1
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	—	—	—
Somewhat dissatisfied	1	—	—
Very dissatisfied	4	1	1

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 28: Did the experience of filing a complaint or report cause you to consider leaving or separating from U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) or the military? (Questions 26, 39, and 52)

	Gender discrimination complaint	Sexual harassment complaint	Sexual assault report
Yes, considered leaving SOF but not the military	4	—	2
Yes, considered leaving the military	—	—	—
Yes, considered leaving both	—	1	—
No	—	—	—

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in SOF. | GAO-23-105168

Tables 29 through 31 show the reasons women reported for not filing a complaint of gender discrimination or sexual harassment, or a report of retaliation.

Table 29: Most Frequently Cited Reasons Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Gender Discrimination Complaint (Question 23)

Response	Number of responses
Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career	1
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers	1

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 30: Most Frequently Cited Reasons Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing Sexual Harassment Complaint (Question 35)

Reason	Number of responses
Thought it might hurt her performance evaluation/fitness report or her career	1
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers	1

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 31: Most Frequently Cited Reasons Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces Identified for Not Filing a Report of Retaliation (Question 63)

Reasons	Number of responses
Wanted to forget it and move on	2
Worried about potential negative consequences from a supervisor or someone in interviewee's chain of command	1
Worried about potential negative consequences from the person(s) who did it	1
Did not think anything would be done	1
Worried about potential negative consequences from coworkers or peers	1

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Note: Individual interviewees could cite multiple reasons; therefore, totals may add up to more than the total number of women asked the question.

Tables 32 and 33 show women's perceptions of leadership's role in preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault and whether leadership had adequately responded to allegations.

Table 32: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not play an active role in preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault? (Questions 74 and 77)

	Preventing sexual harassment	Preventing sexual assault
Did play active role	1	5
Some did, some did not	2	1
Did not play active role	7	4

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 33: Do you feel that leadership in the U.S. Special Operations Forces unit or units you supported or were attached to did or did not adequately respond to allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault that they were made aware of? (Questions 75 and 78)

	Responding to allegations of sexual harassment	Responding to allegations of sexual assault
Did adequately respond	2	3
Some did, some did not	1	1
Did not adequately respond	4	3
Do not know	3	3

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Tables 34 through 36 show women’s responses related to the need for and access to transition-related resources.

Table 34: Did you need any resources related to transitioning from the military due to being in U.S. Special Operations Forces, for example due to a U.S. Special Operations Forces-related injury or experience? (Question 84)

Response	Number of responses
Yes	4
No	1
Still in the military	5

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Table 35: Did you have any difficulty accessing resources related to transitioning from the military? (Question 84a)

Response	Number of responses
Yes	2
No	2
Did not need resources or still in the military	6

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

**Appendix VI: GAO Interview Responses from
Women Formerly Serving in U.S. Special
Operations Forces**

Table 36: Did you have any difficulty accessing any other transition-related resources that you tried to use when separating from the military? (Question 85)

Response	Number of responses
Yes	2
No	3
Still in the military	5

Source: GAO interviews with women formerly serving in U.S. Special Operations Forces. | GAO-23-105168

Appendix VII: Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

SPECIAL OPERATIONS /
LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

November 17, 2022

Ms. Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report GAO-23-105168, "WOMEN IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS: Improvements to Policy, Data, and Assessments Needed to Better Understand and Address Career Barriers," dated October 25, 2022 (GAO Code 105168).

We appreciate the analysis conducted by the GAO which supports our continued efforts to eliminate barriers to women and minorities within the Special Operations Forces (SOF) formation. While we concur with the GAO recommendations, we are disappointed that the scope of the study is inconsistent with what the title of the report implies, i.e., a broad examination of barriers to women's advancement in the SOF community. The scope of the study was limited to the incidence of women who experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault while serving in SOF and the GAO researchers only interviewed female Service members with those experiences.

Reducing risk factors for gender-based discrimination and violence cannot be achieved without fostering protective factors in the organization. To break down barriers, it is necessary to assess the full range of women's experiences in SOF and inform the process to cultivate an inclusive work environment where women feel valued and safe as equal teammates.

An example of a broader look at women's experience in SOF is the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) recently conducted study, "Women in the Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF)." This study revealed that 62 percent of women reported their desire and intent to stay in ARSOF, and 72 percent of women reported they would support their daughters' decision to serve in ARSOF. We are working to identify contributing factors for these positive ratings among ARSOF women. The SOF enterprise will continue pursuing innovative ways to break down barriers by eliminating what is not working and promoting what is working to attract and retain women in the SOF formation.

Attached is DoD's response to the recommendations made in the subject report. My point of contact is Dr. Yuko K. Whitestone, who can be reached at 703-614-4701 or via email at yuko.k.whitestone.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,



Erin M. Logan

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for
Special Operations Policy and Programs

Enclosure:

The DoD response to the GAO Draft Report GAO-23-105168, "WOMEN IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS: Improvements to Policy, Data, and Assessments Needed to Better Understand and Address Career Barriers"

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED OCTOBER 25, 2022
GAO-23-105168 (GAO CODE 105168)

“WOMEN IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS: IMPROVEMENTS TO POLICY, DATA, AND
ASSESSMENTS NEEDED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS CAREER
BARRIERS”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Secretary of the Army should revise Army policy for prohibited discrimination - specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments - to ensure that it aligns with DOD policy.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

RECOMMENDATION 2: The Secretary of the Navy should ensure that the Commandant of the Marine Corps revises Marine Corps policy for prohibited discrimination and harassment - specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments - to ensure that it aligns with DOD policy.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Secretary of the Air Force should revise Department of the Air Force policy for prohibited discrimination and harassment - specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments - to ensure that it aligns with DOD policy.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command; the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; and the Secretaries of the Military Departments, establishes a collaborative process for the timely sharing of accurate and complete data on SOCOM personnel, including data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness clearly documents and communicates which office has

responsibility for the required annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness establishes a consistent process for use of the required annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions. The process should include a plan of action to guide efforts to address any barriers to women's service in special operations forces identified in the assessments.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, completes a comprehensive analysis of barriers regarding women in special operations forces.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, upon completion of a comprehensive analysis of barriers regarding women in special operations forces, develops a plan of action to address any barriers or career impediments to women's service in special operations forces identified in the analysis, with goals, objectives, metrics, and milestones.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur

Appendix VIII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brenda S. Farrell, (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kimberly Mayo (Assistant Director), Jennifer Weber (Analyst in Charge), Vincent M. Buquicchio, Molly Callaghan, Cynthia Grant, David Jones, Mae Jones, Mollie Lemon, Benjamin Moser, Andrew Ringlee, Michael Silver, William Tedrick, and Trevor Warner made significant contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

Military Service Academies: Actions Needed to Better Assess Organizational Climate. [GAO-22-105130](#). Washington, D.C.: July 29, 2022.

Sexual Harassment and Assault: The Army Should Take Steps to Enhance Program Oversight, Evaluate Effectiveness, and Identify Reporting Barriers. [GAO-22-104673](#). Washington, D.C.: May 27, 2022.

Sexual Assault: DOD and Coast Guard Should Ensure Laws Are Implemented to Improve Oversight of Key Prevention and Response Efforts. [GAO-22-103973](#). Washington, D.C.: March 28, 2022.

Special Operations Forces: Additional Actions Needed to Effectively Manage the Preservation of the Force and Family Program. [GAO-22-104486](#). Washington, D.C.: December 16, 2021.

Military Hazing: DOD Should Address Data Reporting Deficiencies, Training Limitations, and Personnel Shortfalls. [GAO-22-104066](#). Washington, D.C.: December 15, 2021.

Sexual Assault in the Military: Continued Congressional Oversight and Additional DOD Focus on Prevention Could Aid DOD's Efforts. [GAO-21-463T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 24, 2021.

Sexual Harassment and Assault: Guidance Needed to Ensure Consistent Tracking, Response, and Training for DOD Civilians. [GAO-21-113](#). Washington, D.C.: February 9, 2021.

Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts. [GAO-20-61](#). Washington, D.C.: May 19, 2020.

Sexual Violence: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Efforts to Address the Continuum of Unwanted Sexual Behaviors. [GAO-18-33](#). Washington, D.C.: December 18, 2017.

Military Personnel: Observations on the Department of Defense's Career Intermision Pilot Program. [GAO-17-623R](#). Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2017.

Sexual Assault: Better Resource Management Needed to Improve Prevention and Response in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve. [GAO-17-217](#). Washington, D.C.: February 27, 2017.

Military Personnel: DOD Has Processes for Operating and Managing Its Sexual Assault Incident Database. [GAO-17-99](#). Washington, D.C.: January 10, 2017.

Military Personnel: Oversight Framework and Evaluations Needed for DOD and the Coast Guard to Help Increase the Number of Female Officer Applicants. [GAO-16-55](#). Washington, D.C.: November 13, 2015.

Sexual Assault: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Prevention Strategy and to Help Ensure It Is Effectively Implemented. [GAO-16-61](#). Washington, D.C.: November 4, 2015.

Military Personnel: DOD Should Develop a Plan to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Its Career Intermission Pilot Program. [GAO-16-35](#). Washington, D.C.: October 27, 2015.

Military Personnel: DOD Is Expanding Combat Service Opportunities for Women, but Should Monitor Long-Term Integration Progress. [GAO-15-589](#). Washington, D.C.: July 20, 2015.

Military Personnel: Actions Needed to Address Sexual Assaults of Male Servicemembers. [GAO-15-284](#). Washington, D.C.: March 19, 2015.

Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Take Further Actions to Prevent Sexual Assault during Initial Military Training. [GAO-14-806](#). Washington, D.C.: September 9, 2014.

Military Personnel: DOD Has Taken Steps to Meet the Health Needs of Deployed Servicewomen, but Actions Are Needed to Enhance Care for Sexual Assault Victims. [GAO-13-182](#). Washington, D.C.: January 29, 2013.

Military Personnel: Prior GAO Work on DOD's Actions to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Assault in the Military. [GAO-12-571R](#). Washington, D.C.: March 30, 2012.

Military Child Care: DOD Is Taking Actions to Address Awareness and Availability Barriers. [GAO-12-21](#). Washington, D.C.: February 3, 2012.

Preventing Sexual Harassment: DOD Needs Greater Leadership Commitment and an Oversight Framework. [GAO-11-809](#). Washington, D.C.: September 21, 2011.

Military Justice: Oversight and Better Collaboration Needed for Sexual Assault Investigations and Adjudications. [GAO-11-579](#). Washington, D.C.: June 22, 2011.

Military Personnel: DOD's and the Coast Guard's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Programs Need to Be Further Strengthened. [GAO-10-405T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 24, 2010.

Military Personnel: Additional Actions Are Needed to Strengthen DOD's and the Coast Guard's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Programs. [GAO-10-215](#). Washington, D.C.: February 3, 2010.

Military Personnel: DOD's and the Coast Guard's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Programs Face Implementation and Oversight Challenges. [GAO-08-924](#). Washington, D.C.: August 29, 2008.

Military Personnel: The DOD and Coast Guard Academies Have Taken Steps to Address Incidents of Sexual Harassment and Assault, but Greater Federal Oversight Is Needed. [GAO-08-296](#). Washington, D.C.: January 17, 2008.

Women in the Military: Attrition and Retention. [GAO/NSIAD-90-87BR](#). Washington, D.C.: July 26, 1990.

GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through our website. Each weekday afternoon, GAO posts on its [website](#) newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence. You can also [subscribe](#) to GAO's email updates to receive notification of newly posted products.

Order by Phone

The price of each GAO publication reflects GAO's actual cost of production and distribution and depends on the number of pages in the publication and whether the publication is printed in color or black and white. Pricing and ordering information is posted on GAO's website, <https://www.gao.gov/ordering.htm>.

Place orders by calling (202) 512-6000, toll free (866) 801-7077, or TDD (202) 512-2537.

Orders may be paid for using American Express, Discover Card, MasterCard, Visa, check, or money order. Call for additional information.

Connect with GAO

Connect with GAO on [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).
Subscribe to our [RSS Feeds](#) or [Email Updates](#). Listen to our [Podcasts](#).
Visit GAO on the web at <https://www.gao.gov>.

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact FraudNet:

Website: <https://www.gao.gov/about/what-gao-does/fraudnet>

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7700

Congressional Relations

A. Nicole Clowers, Managing Director, ClowersA@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125, Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149
Washington, DC 20548

Strategic Planning and External Liaison

Stephen J. Sanford, Managing Director, spel@gao.gov, (202) 512-4707
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7814,
Washington, DC 20548

