

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104673](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Reports of sexual harassment and assault in the Army continue to rise. Soldiers reported about 1,000 and 2,500 incidents occurring during military service, respectively, in fiscal year 2020. According to DOD survey data, many additional incidents go unreported. While the Army has taken steps to respond to such incidents through its SHARP Program, a November 2020 independent review of the command climate at Fort Hood found structural flaws in the program Army-wide. The review also found a pervasive lack of confidence in it among soldiers at that installation.

GAO was asked to review the Army's administration of the SHARP program. This report examines, among other things, the extent to which the Army has (1) implemented policies and programs to prevent, respond to, and resolve incidents of sexual harassment and assault; and (2) mechanisms in place to oversee the SHARP program and determine its effectiveness. GAO reviewed policies and guidance; conducted a generalizable survey of SHARP personnel; interviewed DOD and Army officials; and interviewed officials and commanders at three Army installations selected based on risk level, among other factors.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making nine recommendations, including that the Army expedite and establish a timeline for the issuance of a consolidated SHARP regulation, design its oversight structure to address identified challenges, develop a suite of performance measures, and develop and implement a continuous evaluation plan. The Army concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-22-104673](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or [farrellb@gao.gov](mailto:farrellb@gao.gov).

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# SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

## The Army Should Take Steps to Enhance Program Oversight, Evaluate Effectiveness, and Identify Reporting Barriers

### What GAO Found

The Army Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program has policies to prevent, respond to, and resolve incidents of sexual harassment and assault. Program implementation, however, is hindered by disjointed policy, among other things. Key provisions related to the SHARP program are spread across multiple Army guidance documents, creating confusion for SHARP personnel. Long-standing efforts to consolidate SHARP policy into a single regulation have been delayed due to competing priorities, according to SHARP program officials. Without expediting and establishing a timeline for the issuance of a consolidated SHARP regulation, the Army risks continued confusion among program personnel.

Several factors limit the Army's oversight of command SHARP programs. A 2019 reorganization decreased SHARP Program Office staff by half, eliminating dedicated key positions and limiting the office's ability to conduct oversight functions. Further, the office lacks visibility over program funding and staffing. Without designing an oversight structure that addresses these challenges, the Army may continue to face difficulties with program implementation.

In addition, two issues limit the Army's ability to gauge program effectiveness. First, GAO found that none of the SHARP program's performance measures fully exhibit key attributes of successful performance measures (see figure). SHARP personnel identified the number of reported incidents as a key measure, but it is neither clear nor objective. An increase in reports may indicate either increased trust in the program or an increase in incidents, indicating a lack of effectiveness. Without developing a suite of performance measures, the Army is unable to measure progress towards achieving its goals. Second, the Army has not systematically evaluated the SHARP program for effectiveness, despite prioritizing such an effort since its inception in 2009. Without developing and implementing a continuous evaluation plan to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the SHARP program, the Army may miss opportunities to prioritize promising approaches and address challenges.

**Comparison of Army Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program Performance Measures to GAO's Key Attributes of Successful Measures**

Measures		Reports of sexual harassment and assault	Estimated prevalence	Ratio of reports to estimated prevalence
Attributes for individual measures	Linkage	○	◐	○
	Baseline and trend	●	◐	◐
	Measurable target	○	○	◐
	Clarity	○	◐	○
	Objectivity	○	●	●
	Reliability	◐	◐	◐
Attributes for an overall suite of measures	Limited overlap	◐	◐	◐
	Core program activities	◐	◐	◐
	Government-wide priorities	○	○	○
	Balance	○	○	○

● Attributes exhibited   ◐ Attributes partially exhibited   ○ Attributes not exhibited

Source: GAO analysis of Army information. | GAO-22-104673