THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON LIKELIHOOD OF REENLISTING IN THE U.S. MILITARY, 2002

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Abstract

Using data from the “Armed Forces 2002 Sexual Harassment Survey,” this paper analyzes the extent to which type of harassment and labeling an incident as harassment has on respondent’s stated likelihood of reenlisting. Results indicate that sexual harassment has an important impact on climate and reenlistment intentions. Environmental harassment has a negative impact on the reenlistment intentions of both men and women, although the impact is stronger for women. “Individualized” harassment was not found to be related to reenlistment for women but was a significant predictor for male reenlistment. It seems clear that eradicating sexual harassment is an important component to keeping service members on active duty.

The content and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be construed to represent the official position of DEOMI, the U.S. military services, or the Department of Defense.
Table of Contents

Abstract .........................................................................................................................................................2

Introduction ..................................................................................................................................................4

   Sex and Organizational Commitment .................................................................................................5

   Organizational Climate and Sexual Harassment ................................................................................6

Method ....................................................................................................................................................9

   Variable Construction and Survey ..................................................................................................10

   Conceptualizing Sexual Harassment .................................................................................................12

Results ..................................................................................................................................................13

Discussion ..............................................................................................................................................16

References ..............................................................................................................................................18

Appendix A ............................................................................................................................................24

   Figure A1.

   Likelihood of Staying on Active Duty by Sex. .................................................................26

Appendix B ............................................................................................................................................27

   Table 1B.

   Hieratical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Reenlistment .............................28

   Table 2B.

   Hieratical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Reenlistment for Males ..........30

   Table 3B.

   Hieratical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Reenlistment for Females ..33

Footnotes .................................................................................................................................................34
One impact of experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace has largely been neglected in the literature. While the importance of experiencing sexual harassment and some of its negative impacts on individuals (Culbertson & Rosenfeld, 1994; Devilbiss, 1985; Firestone & Harris, 1994, 1999, 2004; Harris & Firestone, 1996, 1997) and organizational climate (Fain & Anderton, 1987; Firestone & Harris, 2004; Rosen & Martin, 1997) are well documented, there is a paucity of research focusing on the relationship between sexual harassment and reenlist intentions.

As an indicator of organizational/workplace climate, sexual harassment ought to be related to other climate variables (e.g., leadership attitudes/behaviors, cohesion, acceptance of women/minorities, reporting through official channels) and their outcomes. One such important outcome is a member’s stated intention to reenlist. It is clear that any organization, such as the military, can only be sustained by members continuing to participate. The intent to continue one’s work role has been shown to be an important predictor of actually continuing that role (Atchison & Lefferts, 1972; Butler & Holmes, 1984; Lakhani, 1988; Porter & Steers, 1973; Van Breukelen, Van Der Vlist, & Steensma, 2004). Similarly, Segal, Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, and O’Malley (1998) found that “[e]nlistment propensity has the most powerful effect on women’s (and men’s) actual enlistment” (p. 82). Further, Segal et al. (1998) found that women were less likely than men to enlist and a much smaller percentage of women expect to enlist than the percentage who indicate they would like to enlist. They further argue that the “norm” of masculinity in the military may create a climate in which women fear their opportunities would be limited because of their sex. It seems likely that sexual (and other forms of gender) harassment contribute to these perceptions.
In this research, we assess reenlist by responses to the question “How likely you would stay on active duty?” Response categories included: very unlikely, unlikely, neither likely nor unlikely, likely, or very likely. Thus, we are focused on whether respondents intend to make a long term commitment, rather than merely fulfill ones’ obligation to the current term of service. Early research on organizational commitment also emphasized the self-interest associated with continuing an association. Suggesting that individuals will attempt to change or terminate relationships which provide a negative net balance of rewards (Becker, 1960; Homans, 1961; Kanter, 1968; Schoenherr & Greeley, 1975; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Vroom, 1964). Therefore, if experiencing sexual harassment is perceived as part of a negative organizational experience, it seems likely that individuals who say they experienced harassment would be less likely to commit to a long term association with that organization. In addition, because there are a variety of harassment experiences, and some are more severe than others, it may be that the type of harassment experienced (i.e., individualized or environmental – see Firestone & Harris, 1994) may also impact whether individuals are willing to commit to a future association.

Sex and Organizational Commitment

With respect to sex and organizational commitment, previous findings are inconclusive. For example, Mowday, Steers, Richard, and Porter (1979) and Marsden and Kalleberg (1993) cite several studies from the 1970s and 1980s indicating that women are more committed than men, while other work found that women were more likely to express their intentions to leave the organization in which they were currently employed (Bar-Hayam & Berman, 1992; Miller & Wheeler, 1992). Much of the ambiguity in the early analyses have been attributed to using industry compared to individual characteristics as predictors (Miller & Wheeler, 1992), the fact that some of the studies which found significant differences between men and women were
Impact SH on Likelihood Reenlisting, 6

corated in countries other than America (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986), and recent cultural changes
in the U.S. with respect to women’s representation in various occupations and positions (changes
in women’s representation and occupational opportunities in the U.S. Military) have undoubtedly
impacted earlier findings (Miller & Wheeler, 1992). In addition, Miller and Wheeler (1992)
argued that “overall job satisfactions measures obscure the importance of certain identifiable
components of satisfaction which relates to the intention to leave” (p. 476). In more recent
examples, Metcalfe and Dick (2002) found no difference in the level of commitment between
men and women in the U.K. police department. Finally, Singh, Finn, and Goulet (2004) found
similar job related attitudes, including commitment, between men and women after controlling
for work-related variables (i.e., opportunity for promotion and sex distribution).

In one of the few studies investigating the impact of harassment on organizational
commitment, Savicki, Colley, and Gjesvold (2003) found that men and women did not differ in
their commitment; however, harassment was a pervasive contributor to decreasing commitment
and increasing intentions to leave for women but not for men. Their research is based on a
relatively small sample (129 men, 60 women) of correctional officers, but the findings are likely
to apply to women in other male-dominated occupations, such as the military. They contended
that the experience of sexual (and other gender-related) harassment created a very different work
context for women – one in which work-related stress was higher, and the chronic experience of
stress created a negative perception about the job and increased the likelihood of leaving.

Organizational Climate and Sexual Harassment

In spite of organizational efforts, rates of harassment remain high; suggesting that present
legal and organizational structures may be inadequate in controlling harassing behaviors (Hulin,
Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996; Rowe, 1996); the U.S. Military is no exception to this problem.
(Firestone & Harris, 1996; 1999; 2004; Harris & Firestone, 1997; 1999; Miller, 1997). Even if current emphasis on sexual harassment has legitimized claims and thereby increased complaints, the high proportion of respondents still alleging harassment suggests that policies may need amending. Furthermore, employees who have been harassed seldom respond by using established grievance procedures (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Firestone & Harris, 1997; Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Grundmann, O’Donohue, & Peterson, 1997; Hulin, et al., 1996; Riger, 1991).

Differential sex role socialization between men and women reinforces the organizational dynamics associated with sexual harassment. The male sex role encourages dominance and aggressiveness; while, the female sex role encourages subordination and submissiveness, which then spills over into the organizational environment (Gutak & Morasch, 1982; Firestone, 1984; Shields, 1988; Terpstra & Baker, 1986; Tangri & Hayes, 1997). One outcome of the gender socialization processes may be an environment in which harassing behaviors are consistent with the expectations associated with the male sex role. The U.S. Military provides a case in point. While a separate corps for women has been abolished and quotas on the numbers of women who could be recruited were lifted, women are still excluded from holding most positions related to the primary mission of the military (e.g., combat roles). While not based on empirical evidence, one important basis for this exclusion is that women are thought to intrude on the male bonding that is considered necessary for optimum combat performance (Harrell & Miller, 1997; Rosen, et al., 1996). This process clearly defines women as outsiders to the core military mission. Similar arguments have been used against homosexual men who are accused of intruding on male bonding and damaging the masculine image (Shawver, 1995).

Several elements of military culture may increase the likelihood that sexual harassment occurs and decrease targets frequency of reporting harassment through established channels. First,
organizational cohesion is highly valued within the military, thus divulging negative information about a fellow soldier is considered taboo (Rosen, et al., 1996). It is well established that men and women have different definitions about what actions become defined as intimidating, hostile, or offensive (see for example, Katz, Hannon, & Whitten, 1996; Saal, 1996; Thomas, 1995), and that only individuals who define a situation as sexual harassment will report it (Malovich & Stake, 1990). Indeed, those behaviors accepted as typical social interactions within a particular environment are much less likely to be viewed as sexual harassment and most likely to be viewed differently by men and women (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Thomas, 1995; Uggen & Blackstone, 2004). Second, these same behaviors have long been a part of military culture exacerbating reporting problems because “tattling” about time-honored practices (e.g., lewd jokes, whistles, obscene gestures) can label individuals as outsiders who do not fit into the organization (see Miller, 1997). Third, in an environment where hostile interactions toward and about women are the norm, there may be social pressure on men to engage in such behavior to maintain their standing among peers. Additionally, while cohesion is highly valued in the military, it has been used to exclude rather than include women into the organization (see for example, Harrell & Miller, 1997; Rosen, et al., 1996; 1999).¹

The fact that some women willingly conduct themselves in stereotypically male manners or engage in consensual sexual relations with male colleagues highlights the complex relationships of sex and gender in the masculine military culture. Women who attempt to become “one of the guys” may be expected to accept or even participate in behaviors that demean women. Those women who reject these masculine behaviors may be labeled lesbian, subject to investigation, and be forced out of the military. In other circumstances, women who engage in consensual sexual relations with male soldiers may be protected from some harassment and other
negative behaviors, but later they can be described as prostitutes. Alternatively, those women who refuse to sleep with male colleagues may again be labeled as lesbian.

Contrary to consistent findings that those with more organizational power are more likely to harass (Tangri & Hayes, 1997; Terpstra & Baker, 1986), Firestone and Harris (1994) found that military coworkers were more often responsible for harassment than were supervisors. While coworkers and subordinates may lack authority from organizational legitimacy, they may have individual power based on personality or from controlling and manipulating critical information (Thacker, 1996). Given the strong emphasis on male attributes in defining a “good” soldier, being male may provide enough power to engage in harassing behaviors in spite of being against military policy. Additional complicating factors exist because specific organizational characteristics (e.g., type of technology, worker proximity, sex ratios, and availability of grievance procedures) may moderate the extent of harassment, the types of responses, and perceptions about adequacy of responses (Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Gutak & Morasch, 1982; Hulin, et al., 1996; Kanter, 1968; Rowe, 1996).

Method

Our research examines a sample of respondents from the "Armed Forces 2002 Sexual Harassment Survey," (Lipari & Lancaster, 2003) conducted for the Office of the Secretary of Defense by the Defense Manpower Data Center. It was a "worldwide scientific survey of how men and women work together in the…Active-duty Military Services.” The stated purpose of the survey was, "[t]o assess the prevalence of sexual harassment and other unprofessional, gender-related behaviors. . ." (Lipari & Lancaster, 2003, p. 6). The instrument “was based on the 1995 Form B questionnaire and incorporated further psychometric and theoretical advances in sexual harassment research” (Lipari & Lancaster, 2003, p. 6).
Sample

A single-stage, stratified random sample of 60,415 respondents was drawn for the survey, representing male and female enlisted personnel and officers in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Data were collected by mail and via the Web, with one-third of respondents returning responses via the internet. A total of 19,960 usable surveys were returned for a response rate of 36% (see, Flores-Cervantes, Valiant, Harding, & Bell, 2003). The original sample includes 10,235 males and 9,725 females, illustrating the oversampling of women. The sampling frame was stratified by service branch, sex, pay grade, race/ethnicity, likelihood of deployment, and geographic location (Elig, 2003). A series of weighting schemes were developed by the original survey team at the Defense Manpower Data Center tied to branch of service, rank, sex, and race and to test for non-response bias. The full weights provide estimated numbers of respondents that approximate the total active force as of December 2001 (Lipari & Lancaster, 2003). To illustrate the impact of the weighting, there are 16,154 weighted male respondents (84.8%) and 2,906 weighted female respondents (15.2%), for a total of 19,060 weighted cases.

Variable Construction and Survey

Among the items in the “Gender Related Experiences in the Military in the Past 12 Months” section of the survey, respondents were asked the following:

In this question you are asked about sex/gender related talk and/or behavior that was unwanted, uninvited, and in which you did not participate willingly.

How often during the past 12 months have you been in situations involving

- Military Personnel
  - On- or off-duty
  - On-or off installations or ship; and/or

- Civilian Employees and/or Contractors
  - In your workplace or on your installation/ship
Where one or more of these individuals (of either gender)…

Respondents were then provided a list of 19 items and asked whether that item had occurred “very often,” “often,” “sometimes,” “once or twice,” or “never.” We recoded the first four responses in an “ever” occurred category with a value of 1. “Never” was coded 0. Based on the original statements, we identified individualistic forms of sexual harassment that are personal and frequently directly physical in nature, and leave little room for misinterpretation by either the victim or the perpetrator (e.g., sexual assault, touching, sexual phone calls). This form of harassment can be differentiated from a broader category of more public, environmental harassment (e.g., jokes, whistles, suggestive looks). The latter actions can be experienced even if directed at another individual and are ambiguous enough to leave their interpretation dependent on the environmental context. Respondents were initially classified as having experienced individualistic or environmental unwanted, uninvited sexual behavior, or both. We focus on the separate categories of environmental and individual harassment for this research.

Respondents were then asked whether they considered “ANY of the behaviors…which YOU MARKED AS HAPPENING TO YOU…to have been sexual harassment [emphases part of original survey].” Responses included: “none were sexual harassment,” “some were sexual harassment,” “some were not sexual harassment,” and “all were sexual harassment.” This variable was dichotomized to indicate whether any events were labeled as sexual harassment, or none were labeled as harassment. Another question asked, “Did you report this situation to any of the following installation/Service/DoD individuals or organizations.” The responses included references to the various official channels for reporting. Individuals who responded “yes” to any of the categories were classified as having used official channels to report the incident.
Independent variables utilized include sex of respondent, rank (i.e., junior enlisted, senior enlisted, junior officer, or senior officer), marital status, and service branch.

Conceptualizing Sexual Harassment

The survey furnished a detailed set of statements from which the respondents could evaluate conditions in the worksite, including a set of questions which asked them “about sex/gender related talk and/or behavior that was unwanted, uninvited, and in which [the respondent] did not participate willingly” (DMDC, 2003, p. 10). Based on these latter statements, we identified individualistic and environmental forms of sexual harassment. Respondents were classified as having experienced individualistic and/or environmental unwanted, uninvited sexual behavior.

Nineteen behaviorally based statements were used to “represent a continuum of unprofessional, gender-related behaviors---not just sexual harassment…” (Lipari & Lancaster, 2003, p. 5). The responses were collected on a scale measuring frequency incidents with an occurrence range from “never” to “very often.” The respondents were provided with a framework that would allow them to make meaningful and reasonably comprehensive judgments about conditions in the workplace. The specificity of the list and the questionnaire format allowed individuals to report about behaviors that they had experienced in past 12 months, and that they defined as unwanted and uninvited, rather than offering more general statements about whether they had experienced any sexual harassment.

The data allows us to compare harassment experiences based on within group and cross group relationships. In other words, we can determine the likelihood that women of color are more likely to be harassed than white women and whether harassment is likely to occur by members of the same or different race/ethnic group.
Finally, those reporting harassment within the last 12 months were asked which of the incidents had the greatest effect on them, as well as a series of questions concerning the context of that incident and their response to it. While this tiered format allows for detailed analysis of those reporting harassment, it does not allow for predicting harassment. This is because the questions regarding the organizational context were not asked to those not reporting harassment.

Results

For the analyses that follow, the full weight was divided by the mean weight, retaining estimates of the approximate total number of cases in the original survey. Figure 1A presents the distribution of the dependent variable, “Likelihood of Staying on Active Duty” by sex of respondent. A series of staged OLS regressions are used to test whether the independent variables impact likelihood of staying on active duty (see Table 1B). Finally, separate staged regressions are completed for men and for women (see Tables 2B and 3B).

Results indicate that a larger percentage of men say “very likely” to reenlist, while a larger percentage of women say “very unlikely” to reenlist. Women are a bit more likely to say both “unlikely” and “likely” or “neither likely nor unlikely.” (Please refer to Figure 1A for a graphical representation for the likelihood of staying on active duty by sex.)

In the full sample (including both men and women) staged regressions, we found that sex of respondent was initially significant and negative, indicating that women are more likely to say they will not remain on active duty. Sex remains significant and negative through models 2 (controlling for demographic indicators) and 3 (controlling for demographic indicators, service branch, and rank). However, in model 4, which also controls for both individual and environmental harassment, sex becomes non-significant. Further, sex remains non-significant when both types of harassment and the labeling an event as harassment are controlled. In the full
sample, both individual and environmental harassment have a significant and negative impact on likelihood of staying on active duty. Labeling the event as harassment also has a negative impact and is moderately significant \( (p = .06) \). In addition, the impact of being Hispanic is not significant in model 2, but becomes significant in models 3, 4, and 5. Being in the Coast Guard is not significant for any of the models in which branch of service are controlled. The full model explains about 12% of intentions to remain on active duty for all respondents \( (R^2 = .118; \text{see Table 1B}) \).

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, our findings are different when separate regressions are completed for men and women. For men, the results for being Hispanic and being a member of the Coast Guard are consistent with the overall results. This is likely due to the fact that in sheer numbers of military members, men drive the results of the survey. It is interesting to note that in spite of the fact that men report less harassment (of both types), experiencing both types of harassment has a significant and negative impact on the likelihood that they say they will remain on active duty. This remains true when the impact of labeling an event as harassment is controlled, although both experiencing environmental harassment and labeling harassment are only moderately significant \( (p = .07; p = .06, \text{respectively}) \). The full model, including all sets of controls, explains about 9% of the variability in intentions to remain on active duty for men \( (R^2 = .091; \text{see Table 2B}) \).

For women, the impact of being Hispanic is not significant in any of the models. Furthermore, having a high school degree is significant only in model 1 and becomes non-significant when branch and rank was controlled (model 2) and remains non-significant in models 3 and 4. This same pattern is true for having a bachelor’s degree and for being married. Being in the Navy or the Coast Guard each has a non-significant impact in all models that
control for branch of service. Most importantly, in model 3, which controls for individual and environmental harassment, only environmental harassment is statistically significant \((p < .01)\). This remains the case when labeling an event as harassment is controlled and labeling an event itself is moderately significant \((p = .08)\). The full model explains over 12% in the variation in likelihood of remaining on active duty for women \(R^2 = .125\;\text{; see Table 3B).}

In addition, the strength of the impact of variables differs by sex. Looking at the full models (i.e., model 4), for men being in a junior enlisted rank has the strongest impact \((\beta = -.35)\), such that those who are classified as junior enlisted are less likely to say they will remain on active duty. Being married has the second strongest and positive impact \((\beta = .13)\), such that married men are more likely to say they will remain on active duty. Being a senior enlisted member has the third strongest and also negative impact \((\beta = -.12)\). Being Black has the fourth strongest impact, such that Black men are more likely to say they will remain on active duty \((\beta = .07)\). Consistent with the general literature, having a bachelor’s degree is negatively associated with intentions to remain on active duty for men \((\beta = -.06)\). Experiencing individualized harassment also has a negative impact \((\beta = -.06)\), along with being a junior level officer \((\beta = -.06)\). (Having a bachelor’s degree, experiencing individualized harassment, and being a junior level officer are tied for having the fifth strongest impacts on stated intentions to remain on active duty.) While, statistically significant and negative, experiencing environmental harassment and labeling an event as harassment has among the weakest relationships in the model \((\beta = -.02\) for environmental harassment; \(\beta = -.02\) for labeling).

For women, being a junior enlisted member has by far the strongest and negative impact on stated intentions to remain on active duty \((\beta = -.39)\). Being senior enlisted rank has the second strongest and negative impact \((\beta = -.13)\). Being junior officer in rank has the third strongest and
negative impact ($\beta = -0.11$). Being a member of the Army or the Marine Corp has the fourth ($\beta = -0.09$) and fifth ($\beta = -0.06$) strongest and negative impacts, respectively. Most interesting, individualized harassment is not significant for women ($\beta = 0.00; p = 0.91$), but experiencing environmental harassment has the sixth strongest and negative impact on stated intentions to remain on active duty ($\beta = -0.05$). Having a bachelor’s degree has the seventh strongest and negative impact on reenlistment intentions ($\beta = -0.05$). Finally, labeling an event as harassment and being Black were tied for the eighth strongest impact, which is also negative ($\beta = -0.04$).

**Discussion**

Our results suggest that type of harassment has an important impact on whether individuals express intentions to remain on active duty, for both men and women. Men who experience any type of harassment are less likely to say they intend to remain on active duty, even after individual characteristics and organizational context (i.e., service branch and rank) are controlled. While this relationship holds for both men and women, the model explains more of the variability in intentions to reenlist for women ($R^2 = 0.125$ compared to $R^2 = 0.091$ for men). In addition, experiencing individualized harassment is not significant for women, while experiencing environmental harassment is significant ($p = 0.02$) and has one of the strongest impacts in the model. It may be the case that experiencing individualized types of harassment is more likely to be associated with other types of personal threats which could seem more threatening to women than men (see for example, Savicki, et al., 2003). This could lead some women to experience high levels of stress and mean they are more likely to leave the military early; therefore they may be less likely to be included in the analysis. This would be exacerbated if the perpetrator of the harassment were a superior who could retaliate against anyone reporting incidents, especially if it is the target’s word against the superior’s. Because environmental harassment often occurs in a more public setting, it may be easier to corroborate and officially
Impact SH on Likelihood Reenlisting, 17

report; therefore, targets may be more likely to remain with the military at least through their required tour of duty.

Also worthy of note is that being married is not a significant predictor of intentions to remain on active duty for women, but is a significant, positive, and strong predictor for men. As Segal, et al., (1998) noted, it may be the case that women either perceive or experience difficulty in fulfilling their roles as mothers while on active duty (see also Metcalfe & Dick, 2002; Miller, 1997). Men on the other hand, are far less likely to experience difficulties in fulfilling military roles and family responsibilities.

Our findings reinforce one more time the importance of sexual harassment in general, and the specific forms of harassment in understanding the organizational context of the U.S. Military. If the future reenlistment (or lack of turnover) of military men and women, who have received training and experience, is important for the integrity of the military, it seems clear that eradicating sexual harassment is an important component to keeping service members on active duty. In particular, with respect to retaining women, dealing with environmental harassment, which is often classified as more difficult to identify and therefore to regulate, may be an important part of the organizational climate which impacts individuals intentions to remain on active duty.
References


Figure Caption

Figure A1. Likelihood of Staying on Active Duty by Sex.
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Note. $R^2 = .067$ for Step 1; $R^2 = .120$ for Step 2; $R^2 = .125$ for Step 3; $R^2 = .125$ for Step 4.
Table 3B

*Hieratical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Reenlistment for Females (N = 9,725)*

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Note. $R^2 = .015$ for Step 1; $R^2 = .084$ for Step 2; $R^2 = .090$ for Step 3; $R^2 = .091$ for Step 4.
Footnotes

1 We acknowledge that there are multiple masculinities within the military culture (based on rank, race, ethnicity, age, and branch of service). However, they are still based on the idea of the military as a “manly” organization (see for example Herbert, 1998; Mumby, 1998.)

2 Because the questions used in the 2002 survey were not an exact match to the questions from the original 1988 survey, our conceptualizations for individual and environmental harassment are a broad match, but not an exact match of our earlier research. For a description of the statements classified as individual or environmental harassment, see Firestone & Harris, 1994.