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# Sexual Assault in the Military Widely Seen as Important Issue, But No Agreement on Solution

*A Pew Research Center/Washington Post Survey*

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# Sexual Assault in the Military Widely Seen as Important Issue, But No Agreement on Solution

A substantial majority of Americans (81%) view sexual assault in the military as an extremely or very important issue. But the public does not believe the problem of sexual assault is a bigger problem in the military than outside it: Just 11% say it is more of a problem inside the military, 23% say it is more of a problem outside the military, while 63% say it is about the same.

And while 40% say the reports of sexual assault in the military represent underlying problems with military culture, a majority (54%) says they represent individual acts of misconduct.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center and The Washington Post, conducted June 6-9 among 1,004 adults, finds that the public is evenly divided over whether the better way to handle the problem of sexual assault in the military is for Congress to make changes in military laws (45%) or for military leaders to address the problem internally (44%).

By 57% to 32%, Republicans say it would better for military leaders to handle the problem internally. By about the same margin (58% to 33%), Democrats say it would be better for Congress to make changes in military law.

About half of Americans (52%) have a great deal or fair amount of confidence that military leaders will make the right decisions when it comes to the problem of sexual assault in the military, but just 36% express at least a fair amount of confidence in Congress on this issue.

This in part may reflect the wide gap in underlying opinions about the two institutions: [In January](#), just 23% viewed Congress favorably, [while a month earlier](#) 71% had a favorable opinion of military leaders.

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## Views of Sexual Assault in the Military

<i>Importance of issue of sexual assault in military ...</i>	<b>June 6-9</b> %
Extremely/Very important	81
Somewhat/Not too important	18
Don't know	1
	100
<i>Sexual assault is more of a problem ...</i>	
Inside the military	11
Outside the military	23
About the same	63
Don't know	3
	100
<i>Sexual assaults by military personnel represent ...</i>	
Individual acts of misconduct	54
Underlying problems with military culture	40
Don't know	6
	100
<i>Better way to handle problem ...</i>	
For Congress to make changes in military laws	45
For military leaders to address it internally	44
Other/Don't know	11
	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/  
WASHINGTON POST June 6-9, 2013.  
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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The new survey finds a sizable gender gap in views of the seriousness of this issue. About half of women (51%) say the issue of sexual assault in the military is extremely important, compared with 37% of men. But similar shares of men (56%) and women (51%) say the problem is rooted in individual misconduct rather than military culture.

Moreover, there are no significant gender differences in views of whether the military or Congress can better handle this problem: 48% of women favor Congress making changes in military laws while nearly as many (42%) say military leaders can better deal with the problem internally. Men also are divided (46% military leaders, 43% Congress).

### What to Tell a Young Woman Who's Thinking of Joining Military

Most Americans (59%) say that if they or a friend had a daughter who was thinking of joining the military, the allegations of sexual misconduct would not be a sufficient reason to tell her to stay out of the military. About four-in-ten (38%) say these allegations are a sufficient reason to dissuade a young woman from joining.

These views are largely unchanged from 1997, amid widespread allegations of sexual harassment in the armed forces. In a survey by the Associated Press, 65% said allegations of sexual misconduct in the military were not a sufficient reason to tell a young woman interested in joining the military not to join, while 31% viewed the allegations as a sufficient reason to discourage her from joining the military.

Comparable shares of women (58%) and men (61%), as well as parents (59%) and non-parents (61%), say reports of sexual misconduct are not a sufficient reason to tell a daughter not to join the military.

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#### Sex Misconduct Not a Reason to Dissuade Daughter from Joining

<i>Allegations of sexual misconduct a sufficient reason to tell daughter to stay out of the military?</i>	<b>Yes</b> %	<b>No</b> %
Total	38	59
Men	36	61
Women	40	58
Parents	39	59
Non-parents	36	61
Republican	29	69
Democrat	39	59
Independent	39	59
Military household	30	67
Non-military household	40	57

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST  
June 6-9, 2013. Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

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## Perceptions of the Sexual Assault Problem

Just 11% say sexual assault is more of a problem in the military than outside it; twice as many (23%) think it is more of a problem *outside* of the armed forces, while 63% say it is about the same in and out of the military.

While nearly identical percentages of women (9%) and men (12%) say sexual assault is a bigger problem in the military, men are more likely than women to say it is a bigger problem outside the armed forces (29% vs. 17%). A larger majority of women (70%) than men (57%) see the problem about the same inside and outside the armed forces.

People who have served in the military or live in a household with someone serving or a veteran have similar views as those in non-military households about the problem of military sexual assault. Nearly identical majorities in both groups say it is about the same inside the military as outside it (63% of military households, 64% of non-military households).

However, more people in non-military households (43%) than in military households (33%) say sexual assault reports represent underlying problems with military culture.

Republicans by more than two-to-one (69% to 25%) say reports of sexual assault in the military represent individual acts of misconduct. Democrats are more evenly divided, with 44% saying they represent individual acts and 49% saying they point to underlying problems with military culture.

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### Partisan Gap on Whether Assaults Point to Wider Problem in Military

<i>Reports of sexual assaults by military personnel represent...</i>	<b>Individual acts of misconduct</b>	<b>Underlying problems w/military culture</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
	%	%	%
Total	54	40	6=100
Men	56	38	6=100
Women	51	43	6=100
18-29	59	37	4=100
30-49	54	41	5=100
50-64	53	40	7=100
65+	47	44	10=100
Republican	69	25	6=100
Democrat	44	49	6=100
Independent	56	41	3=100
<i>Military household</i>			
Yes	62	33	6=100
No	51	43	6=100
<i>Following story</i>			
Very closely	42	52	6=100
Less closely	56	38	6=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST June 6-9, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## Wide Partisan Gap over How to Handle Military Sexual Assaults

Republicans and Democrats have sharply different views about whether military leaders or Congress would be better able to handle the sexual assault problem. By 57% to 32%, Republicans say it would be better for military leaders to handle the problem internally.

By about the same margin (58% to 33%), Democrats say it would be better for Congress to make changes in military law.

### Republicans Favor Letting Military Handle Issue; Democrats Want Congress to Change Law

*Better way to handle problem of sexual assault ...*

	Congress to change military law	Military leaders to handle internally	Other/DK
	%	%	%
Total	45	44	11=100
Men	43	46	11=100
Women	48	42	10=100
Republican	32	57	11=100
Democrat	58	33	9=100
Independent	43	47	10=100
<i>Military household</i>			
Yes	37	57	7=100
No	48	40	12=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/WASHINGTON POST June 6-9, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

People in military households also are more likely than those in non-military households to say that military leaders can better handle the problem of sexual assaults internally (57% to 40%).

There also are large gaps in confidence in military leaders to make the right decisions on the problem of sexual assault in the military. While 62% of Republicans express at least a fair amount of confidence in military leaders, only about half of Democrats (47%) say the same. Democrats (47%) are more likely than Republicans (29%) to have at least a fair amount of confidence in Congress to make the right decisions on this issue.

Most of those in military households (63%) have confidence in military leaders to do the right thing in handling the problem of sexual assault; just 31% have confidence in Congress. Among non-military households, 49% have confidence in military leaders and 38% have confidence in Congress.

## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted June 6-9, 2013, among a national sample of 1,004 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (501 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 503 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 247 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,004	3.7 percentage points
Men	471	5.4 percentage points
Women	533	5.1 percentage points
Military household	229	7.8 percentage points
Non-military household	774	4.2 percentage points
Republicans	224	7.9 percentage points
Democrats	337	6.4 percentage points
Independents	352	6.3 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**June 6-9, 2013 OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,004**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY "Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?"]**

**PEW.1a-b, d-g PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

c. Reports about sexual assaults in the military					
June 6-9, 2013	18	28	19	35	1
<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:</b>					
March 25-29, 1998: <i>The trial of Army Sergeant Major Gene McKinney on charges of sexual misconduct and obstruction of justice</i>	10	27	36	27	*
May 15-18, 1997: <i>Sexual harassment charges against Army Sergeants</i>	18	43	24	14	1

**PEW.2-PEW.3 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE  
NO PEW.4-PEW.5****ASK ALL:**

PEWWP.1 From what you've seen and heard, do you think the issue of sexual assault in the military is an extremely important issue, very important, somewhat important, or not too important?

Jun 6-9	
<u>2013</u>	
44	Extremely important
36	Very important
13	Somewhat important
5	Not too important
1	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**ASK ALL:**

PEWWP.2 Do you think sexual assault is **[READ AND RANDOMIZE ITEMS 1 AND 2]**

Jun 6-9	
<u>2013</u>	
11	More of a problem inside the military
23	More of a problem outside the military
63	About the same
3	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**Time/CNN TREND FOR COMPARISON:**

*Do you think sexual harassment is more of a problem inside the military or more of a problem outside the military?*

Jun 4-5	
<u>1997</u>	
23	More of a problem inside the military
42	More of a problem outside the military
24	Same/No difference <b>(VOL.)</b>
11	Not sure <b>(VOL.)</b>

**ASK ALL:**

PEWWP.3

What's the better way to reduce the problem of sexual assault in the military **[READ IN ORDER]**?

Jun 6-9

2013

44 For military leaders address the problem internally, or  
 45 For Congress to make changes to military laws  
 5 Both **(VOL.)**  
 2 Neither **(VOL.)**  
 5 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

**ASK ALL:**

PEWWP.4

How much confidence do you have that **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** will make the right decisions in addressing the problem of sexual assault in the military – a great deal of confidence, a fair amount of confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?

		A great <u>deal</u>	A fair <u>amount</u>	Not too <u>much</u>	No confidence <u>at all</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	Military leaders Jun 6-9, 2013	10	42	33	13	2
b.	Congress Jun 6-9, 2013	7	30	37	26	1

**ASK ALL:**

PEWWP.5

If you or your friend had a daughter who was thinking of joining the military, would the allegations of sexual misconduct be sufficient reason to tell her to stay out of the military, or not?

**TREND FOR COMPARISON:**

Jun 6-9

2013

38 Yes  
 59 No  
 3 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

*AP*  
 Feb 18-23

1997

31 Yes  
 65 No  
 4 Don't know **(VOL.)**

**ASK ALL:**

PEWWP.6

Do you think reports of sexual assaults committed by military personnel represent individual acts of misconduct, or do they represent underlying problems with military culture?

Jun 6-9

2013

54 Represent individual acts of misconduct, or  
 40 Represent underlying problems with military culture  
 6 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

**WP.1-WP.4 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****NO QUESTION WP.2**