

March 1995

# DOD SERVICE ACADEMIES

## Update on Extent of Sexual Harassment







United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

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March 31, 1995

The Honorable Strom Thurmond  
Chairman  
The Honorable Sam Nunn  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Dan Coats  
Chairman  
The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Personnel  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable John Glenn  
United States Senate

On January 31, 1994, we issued a report on sexual harassment at the three Department of Defense (DOD) service academies as part of a series of reports originally requested by Senator Nunn and Senator Glenn.<sup>1</sup> As requested, we updated that previous work, and this report compares the results of our 1990-91 survey with the extent to which sexual harassment was reported to have occurred at the academies in the 1993-94 academic year, the forms it took, and the views of academy men and women on the consequences of reporting it.

## Previous Findings

We previously reported that between half and three-quarters of academy women experienced at least one form of sexual harassment on a recurring basis during academic year 1990-91,<sup>2</sup> whereas the vast majority of men indicated never having experienced sexual harassment at the academy. Our surveys inquired about 10 forms of harassment that were derived from previous surveys conducted among federal workers by the Merit Systems

<sup>1</sup>DOD Service Academies: More Actions Needed to Eliminate Sexual Harassment (GAO/NSIAD-94-6, Jan. 31, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>We asked respondents to indicate how often they experienced each of 10 forms of harassment. The response categories were "Never," "One or two times a year," "A couple of times a semester," "A couple of times a month," "A couple of times a week," and "Daily or almost daily." For presentation purposes, we have combined the last three categories into one covering "A couple of times a month or more often," which we see as representing a recurring exposure.

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Protection Board in 1980 and 1987 and a 1988 survey of active duty military personnel conducted by the Defense Manpower Data Center. We tailored the items somewhat to the academy environments. The 10 forms of sexual harassment included: derogatory comments, jokes, or nicknames; comments that standards have been lowered for women; comments that women do not belong at the academy; offensive posters, signs, or graffiti; mocking gestures, whistles, or catcalls; derogatory letters or messages; exclusion from social activities or informal gatherings; target of unwanted horseplay or hijinks; unwanted pressure for dates by a more senior student; and unwanted sexual advances.

The most common forms of harassment academy women reported experiencing were gender-related verbal comments or visual displays, as opposed to sexual advances. While students perceived that reported incidents would be thoroughly investigated and offenders appropriately disciplined, they also perceived that those reporting sexual harassment would encounter significant negative consequences. These negative consequences played a role in the tendency for most sexual harassment not to be officially reported.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines and subsequent court decisions have delineated two types of sexual harassment in work environments: (1) quid pro quo harassment and (2) hostile environment harassment. Quid pro quo harassment involves the exchange of employment benefits by a supervisor or employer for sexual favors from a subordinate employee. Hostile environment harassment consists of conduct, such as verbal or physical abuse, that creates an intimidating or offensive working environment.<sup>3</sup>

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## Results in Brief

Similar to our previous findings, the majority of academy women reported experiencing at least one form of sexual harassment on a recurring basis in academic year 1993-94, while the highest percentage of men indicating exposure to some form of recurring sexual harassment was about 11 percent. The proportion of women at the Naval and Air Force academies who reportedly experienced some form of sexual harassment a couple of times a month or more often represented a statistically significant increase from the 1990-91 levels. Again, the most common forms of sexual harassment were verbal comments and visual displays. The comparison of the 1990-91 and 1994 results appears in appendix I.

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<sup>3</sup>For the most recent holding on what constitutes a hostile environment, see Harris v. Forklift Systems 114 S.Ct. 367 (1993).

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In our 1994 followup survey, we added a question on sexual harassment tailored after the wording of the DOD definition of sexual harassment issued in 1988. This was suggested at the Senate Armed Services Committee's hearing<sup>4</sup> on our January 1994 report. This new question focused on the incidence of more overt, physical forms of sexual harassment in addition to verbal forms. Responses to this new question indicated that between 36 percent and 42 percent of the women at each academy have been subjected at least once or twice over the year to (1) physical, gender-related behavior that interfered with their performance or created a hostile environment or (2) unwelcome, deliberate physical contact of a sexual nature. Also, from 11 percent to 22 percent of the academy women reported encountering sexual advances that were tied to some aspect of their academy careers. Responses to the questions added to the 1994 survey are shown in appendix II.

Academy men tended to perceive an improvement in the atmosphere for reporting sexual harassment, with significant declines in the percentages seeing negative consequences as likely to accrue to those who report sexual harassment. The responses of academy women, however, showed no such change in perceived consequences.

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## Scope and Methodology

We administered questionnaires at each of the three academies to randomly drawn samples of cadets and midshipmen in May 1994. We statistically compared the resulting data with corresponding responses from questionnaires administered to comparably drawn samples of academy students in the 1990-91 academic year. The maximum sampling errors at the 95-percent confidence level are about 5 percent for male students and about 10 percent for female students at each academy for each survey year. Where a difference is cited as significant, it means that there is a 5-percent chance or less that a difference as large as the one observed between our samples could have occurred when there was zero difference between the population figures. A detailed discussion of our survey methodology, including specific sampling errors for various data splits, appears in appendix III. Some of the differences may appear to be relatively large and yet are not cited as statistically significant. The reason for this is that those differences fall well within the error confidence interval for a zero difference. For example, if 45 percent of the women responded in a given way in 1991 and 30 percent responded that same way in 1994 we cannot definitively say that the two numbers are different.

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<sup>4</sup>DOD Service Academies: Further Efforts Needed to Eradicate Sexual Harassment (GAO/T-NSIAD-94-111, Feb. 3, 1994).

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Since the margin of error for each of the cited percentages is plus or minus about 10 percentage points, the 45-percent figure could actually be as low as 35 percent, while the 30-percent figure could actually be as high as 40 percent.

We performed our review at the Military Academy at West Point, New York; the the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; and the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. We performed our review from May 1994 to January 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

The service academies and DOD reviewed a draft of this report. Their informal comments have been incorporated where appropriate.

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Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 1 day after its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretaries of Defense, the Air Force, the Army, and the Navy; the superintendents of the three service academies; and interested congressional committees. We will also make copies available to other interested parties on request.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, I can be reached on (202) 512-5140. Major contributors to this report were William E. Beusse, Rudolpho G. Payan, and Robin Brooks.



Mark E. Gebicke  
Director, Military Operations  
and Capabilities Issues

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# Contents

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Letter		1
Appendix I Sexual Harassment at the Service Academies During the 1993-94 Academic Year	Overall Extent of Sexual Harassment Examples of the Kinds of Sexual Harassment Academy Women Reported Encountering Men Perceived Improvement in the Atmosphere for Reporting Sexual Harassment Women See No Improvement in the Atmosphere for Reporting Sexual Harassment Many Women Continue to Indicate Fear of Reprisal for Reporting Sexual Harassment	8 8 11 12 17 21
Appendix II DOD Definition of Sexual Harassment	Repeated, Unwelcome Verbal Comments Related to Gender Verbal Conduct That Interfered With Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment Physical Conduct That Interfered With Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment Unwelcome, Deliberate Physical Contact of a Sexual Nature Sexual Advances Being Implicitly or Explicitly Tied to Some Aspect of Their Academy Careers	24 25 26 27 28 29
Appendix III Description of Questionnaire Methodology	Questionnaire Development Sampling Methodology and Administration of the Surveys Questionnaire Response Rates and Weighing of Data Processing Completed Questionnaires Sampling Error Other Potential Sources of Error	31 31 31 32 32 34
Table	Table II.1: Sampling Errors for Various Academy Subgroups	33
Figures	Figure I.1: Extent of Recurring Sexual Harassment Reportedly Experienced by Academy Women, Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94 Figure I.2: Percentage of Military Academy Women Indicating They Experienced Recurring Sexual Harassment in Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94	8 9



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Figure I.3: Percentage of Naval Academy Women Indicating They Experienced Recurring Sexual Harassment in Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94	10
Figure I.4: Percentage of Air Force Academy Women Indicating They Experienced Recurring Sexual Harassment in Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94	11
Figure I.5: Male Student Perceptions of Positive Consequences of reporting Sexual Harassment	13
Figure I.6: Male Student Perceptions of Negative Consequences of Reporting Sexual Harassment	16
Figure I.7: Female Student Perceptions of Positive Consequences of Reporting Sexual Harassment	18
Figure I.8: Female Student Perceptions of Negative Consequences of Reporting Sexual Harassment	20
Figure I.9: Views of Academy Women Regarding Fear of Reprisal for Reporting Sexual Harassment, Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94	22
Figure II.1: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Repeated, Unwelcome Verbal Comments Related to Their Gender	25
Figure II.2: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Gender-Related Verbal Conduct That Interfered With Their Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment	26
Figure II.3: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Gender-Related Physical Conduct That Interfered With Their Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment	28
Figure II.4: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Unwelcome, Deliberate Physical Contact of a Sexual Nature	29
Figure II.5: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Explicit or Implicit Indications That Some Aspect of Their Academy Careers Would Be Affected by Their Acceptance or Rejection of Sexual Advances	30

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**Abbreviations**

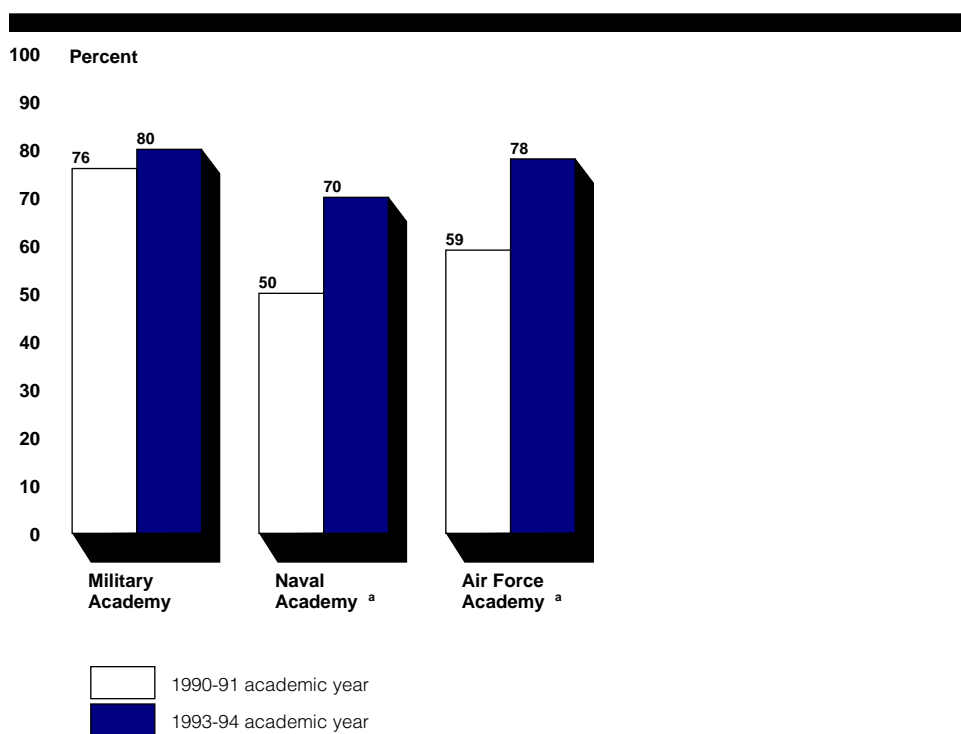
DOD            Department of Defense

# Sexual Harassment at the Service Academies During the 1993-94 Academic Year

## Overall Extent of Sexual Harassment

The percentage of female academy students indicating they had experienced at least 1 of the 10 forms of sexual harassment on a recurring basis was 80 percent at the Military Academy, 70 percent at the Naval Academy, and 78 percent at the Air Force Academy (fig. I.1). The percentages for the Naval and Air Force academies were significantly higher than when we surveyed students in 1990-91.

**Figure I.1: Extent of Recurring Sexual Harassment Reportedly Experienced by Academy Women, Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94**



<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant difference.

Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

No more than about 11 percent of the men at any of the academies indicated that they had experienced any form of sexual harassment on a recurring basis, and the average percentage of men citing recurring levels of sexual harassment across all 10 categories was 3 percent to 4 percent.

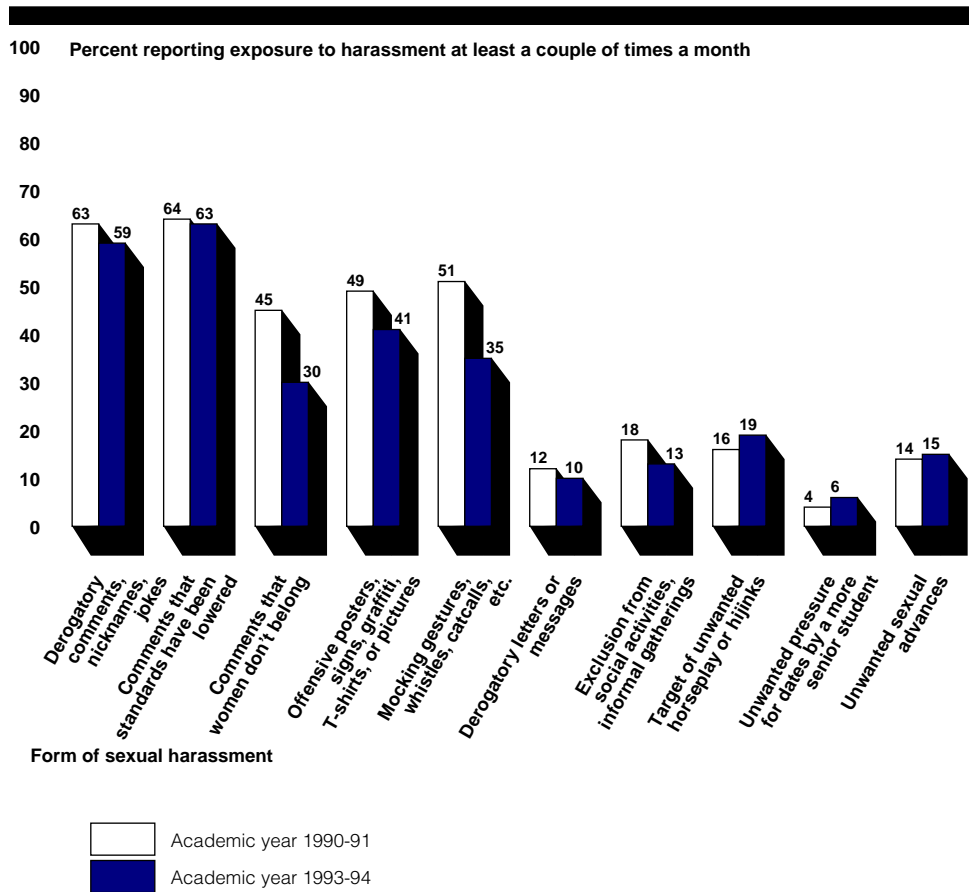
## Military Academy Women

While the percentages of women reporting recurring exposure to sexual harassment at the Military Academy appeared lower in 1994 for 7 of the 10

**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

forms, none of the differences was statistically significant. As in 1990-91, the most common forms of sexual harassment were verbal or visual (such as posters and graffiti) (fig. I.2).

**Figure I.2: Percentage of Military Academy Women Indicating They Experienced Recurring Sexual Harassment in Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94**



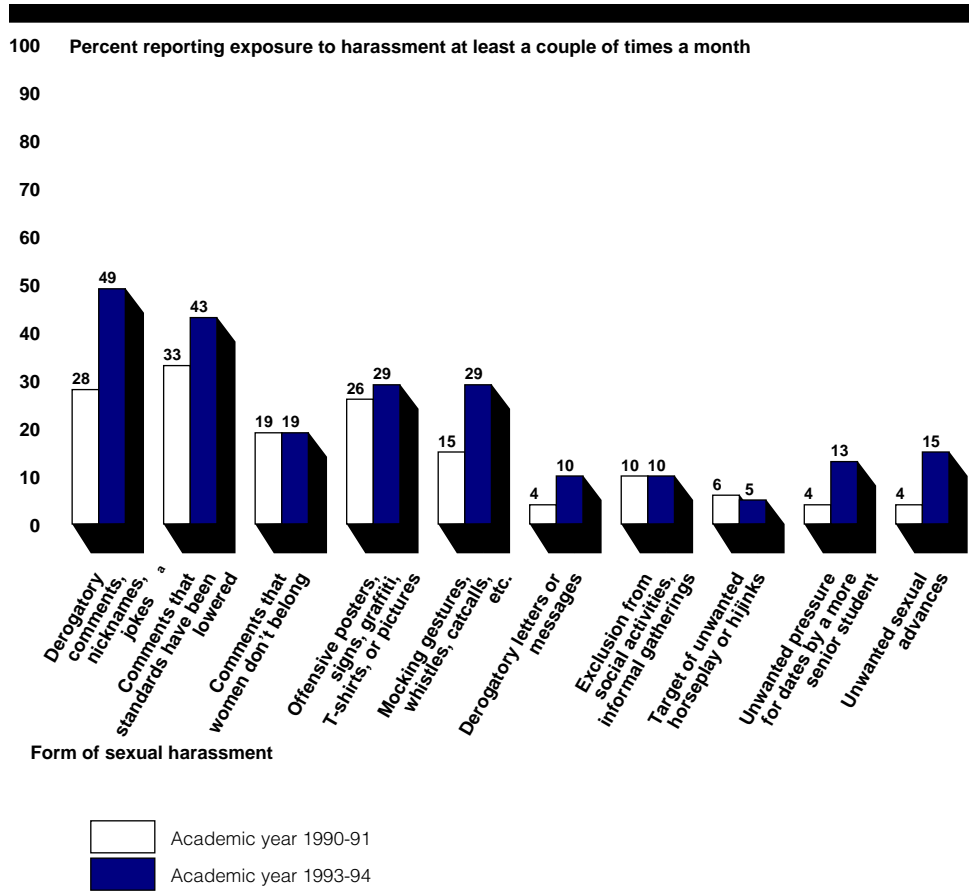
Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

**Naval Academy Women**

While the percentages of women reporting recurring exposure to sexual harassment at the Naval Academy appeared higher in a majority of areas, the only statistically significant change was the increased percentage of women reporting derogatory comments, nicknames, and jokes, etc. As was the case in 1990-91, the primary forms of sexual harassment were verbal and visual (fig. I.3).

**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

**Figure I.3: Percentage of Naval Academy Women Indicating They Experienced Recurring Sexual Harassment in Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94**



<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant difference.

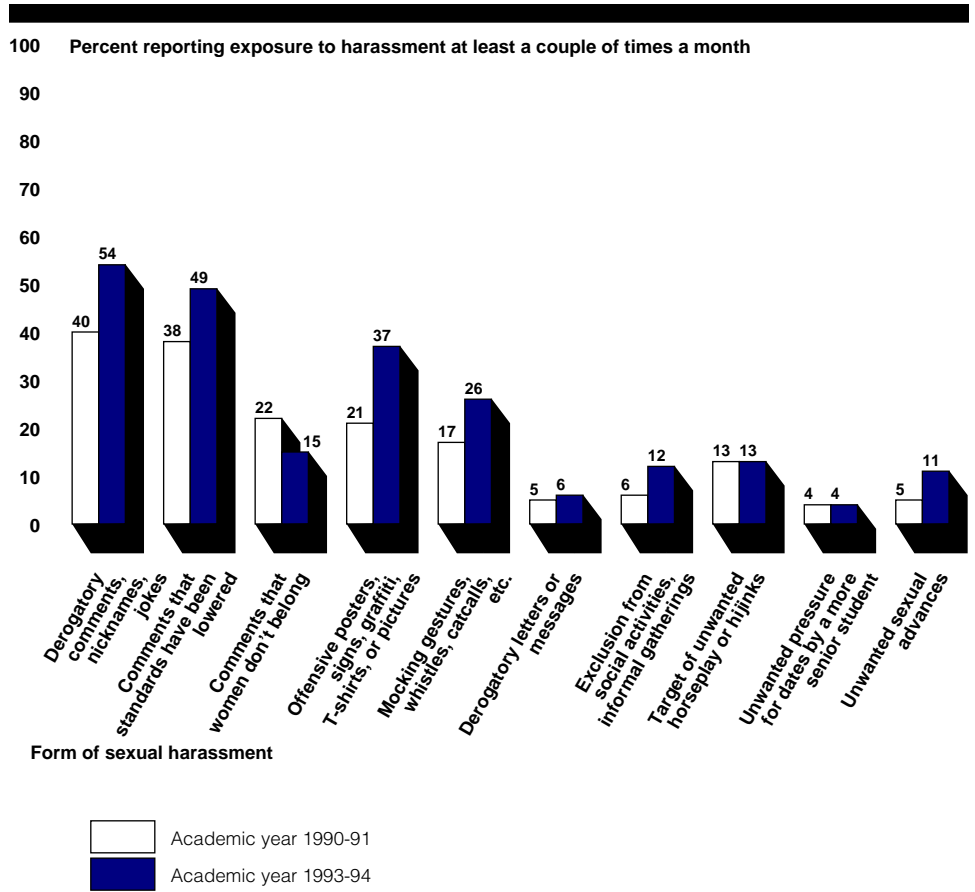
Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

**Air Force Academy Women**

While the percentages of women reporting recurring exposure to sexual harassment at the Air Force Academy appeared higher in a majority of areas, none of the differences was statistically significant. As in 1990-91, the most common forms of sexual harassment were verbal or visual (fig. I.4).

**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

**Figure I.4: Percentage of Air Force Academy Women Indicating They Experienced Recurring Sexual Harassment in Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94**



Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

**Examples of the Kinds of Sexual Harassment Academy Women Reported Encountering**

Write-in comments indicate some of the kinds of sexual harassment reported to have occurred at the academies over the 1993-94 academic year.

“I was assaulted and I am very displeased with the actions taken. The guy is still here and I wish people would do something even if it is just my word against his.” (USAFA cadet)

“People must wake up and realize there are many problems here. I hope I can help it change.” (USAFA cadet)

“Guys in my company specifically tell me girls shouldn’t be in the military. On our class boards are our class pictures and all the females have pinholes through our picture or were

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**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

---

‘X’ed out. I can’t express an opinion without being interrupted or I may just be scoffed at whatever was said.” (USNA midshipman)

“I’ve been called so many names that sometimes it doesn’t even register that they are inappropriate. The lack of respect that the men have here for women is appalling and challenging their actions only ostracizes women from the unit.” (USNA midshipman)

“I feel sexually harassed daily and feel I have nowhere to go and no one to tell. I get poor military grades from officers and cadets due to my gender. It makes me sick what I have to go through every day and I think about quitting all the time.” (USMA cadet)

“For instance, a professor’s comment that ‘guys should find themselves a girlfriend so that they have someone to cook, clean and wash clothes’ or to another male cadet that he likes running in the fast group because ‘there are no women there’ would never be complained about because it would not change anything.” (USMA cadet)

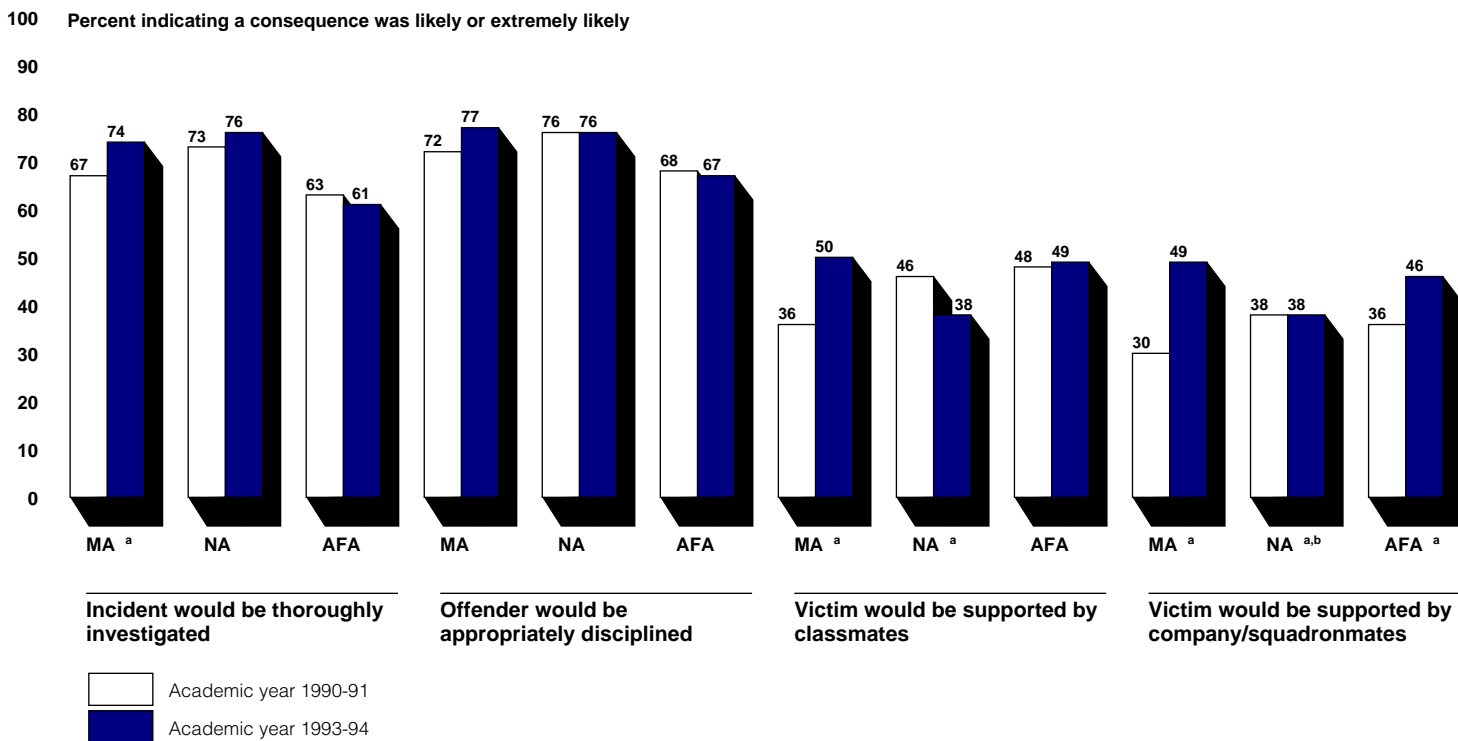
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## Men Perceived Improvement in the Atmosphere for Reporting Sexual Harassment

Male students had a general tendency to perceive improvement in the atmosphere for reporting sexual harassment at the academies. Figure I.5 shows the perceptions of men regarding the likelihood of positive consequences resulting from reporting sexual harassment. At the Military Academy, there were statistically significant increases in the percentages of men indicating that reported incidents would be thoroughly investigated and that a victim who reported sexual harassment would be supported by classmates and companymates. There was also an increase among Air Force Academy men in the perceived likelihood that a victim would be supported by squadronmates. However, the percentages of Naval Academy men who perceived that a victim would be supported by classmates and companymates both declined significantly.

**Appendix I  
Sexual Harassment at the Service  
Academies During the 1993-94 Academic  
Year**

**Figure I.5: Male Student Perceptions of Positive Consequences of Reporting Sexual Harassment**



Legend

NA = Naval Academy  
 MA = Military Academy  
 AFA = Air Force Academy

<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant difference.

<sup>b</sup>While the percentage perceiving that a sexual harassment victim would be supported by companymates remained the same, there was a statistically significant shift of responses from the “not sure” category to the two “unlikely” categories.

Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

The responses of men, particularly at the Military and Air Force academies, tended to show decreases in the percentage who saw negative consequences as a likely outcome of reporting sexual harassment (fig. I.6). Among men at the Military and Air Force academies, there were significant declines in the percentages who indicated that a victim who reported sexual harassment would be viewed as a crybaby, be shunned by others,

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**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

---

be viewed less favorably by either the student or officer chains of command, or receive lower military grades or additional duties. At the Military Academy, there was also a decrease in the percentages who perceived that nothing would be done or that harassment incidents would be swept under the rug. Among men at the Naval Academy, there was a decrease in the percentages who thought that a victim who reported sexual harassment would receive lower military grades or that nothing would be done, but an increase in the perceived likelihood that a complaining victim would receive additional duties. Men at all three academies showed an increase in the percentage who thought it was likely that a sexual harassment victim would be transferred to another company or squadron.



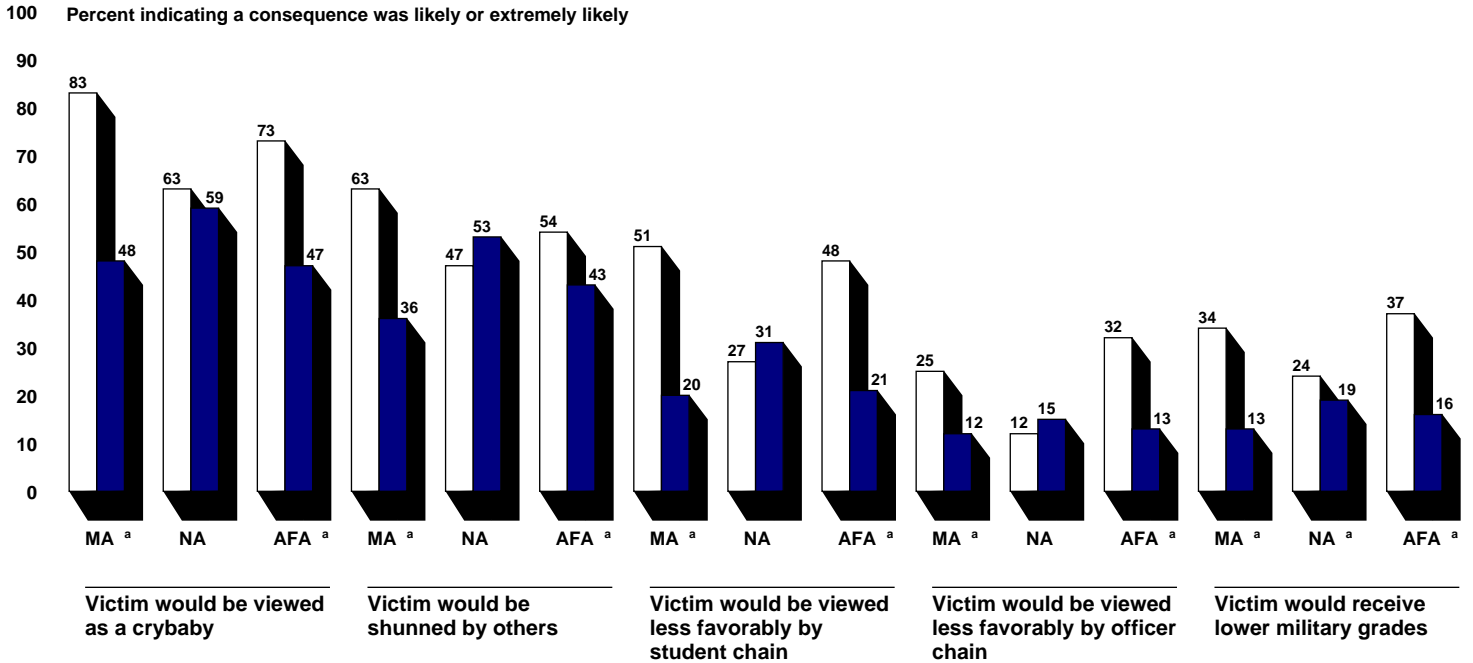
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**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

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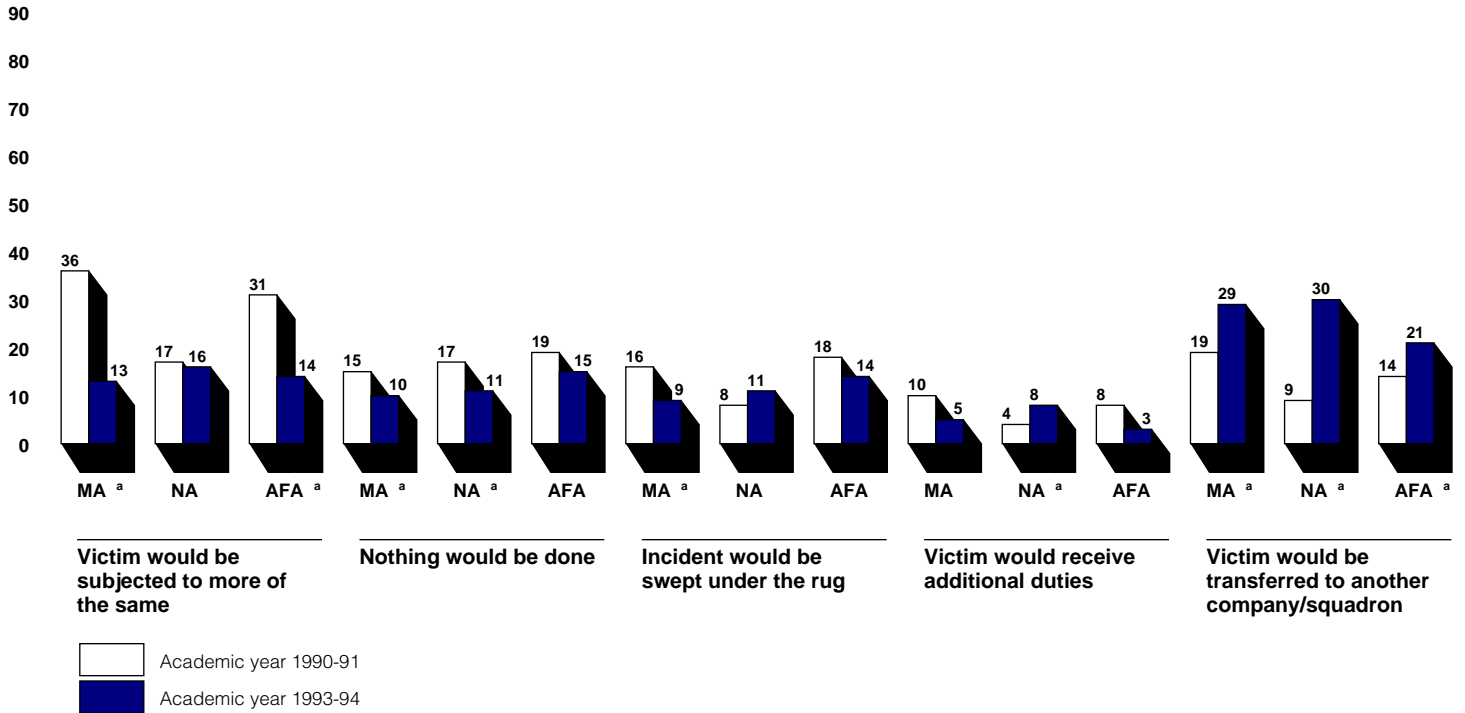
Appendix I  
 Sexual Harassment at the Service  
 Academies During the 1993-94 Academic  
 Year

Figure I.6: Male Student Perceptions of Negative Consequences of Reporting Sexual Harassment



**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

100 Percent indicating a consequence was likely or extremely likely



<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant difference.

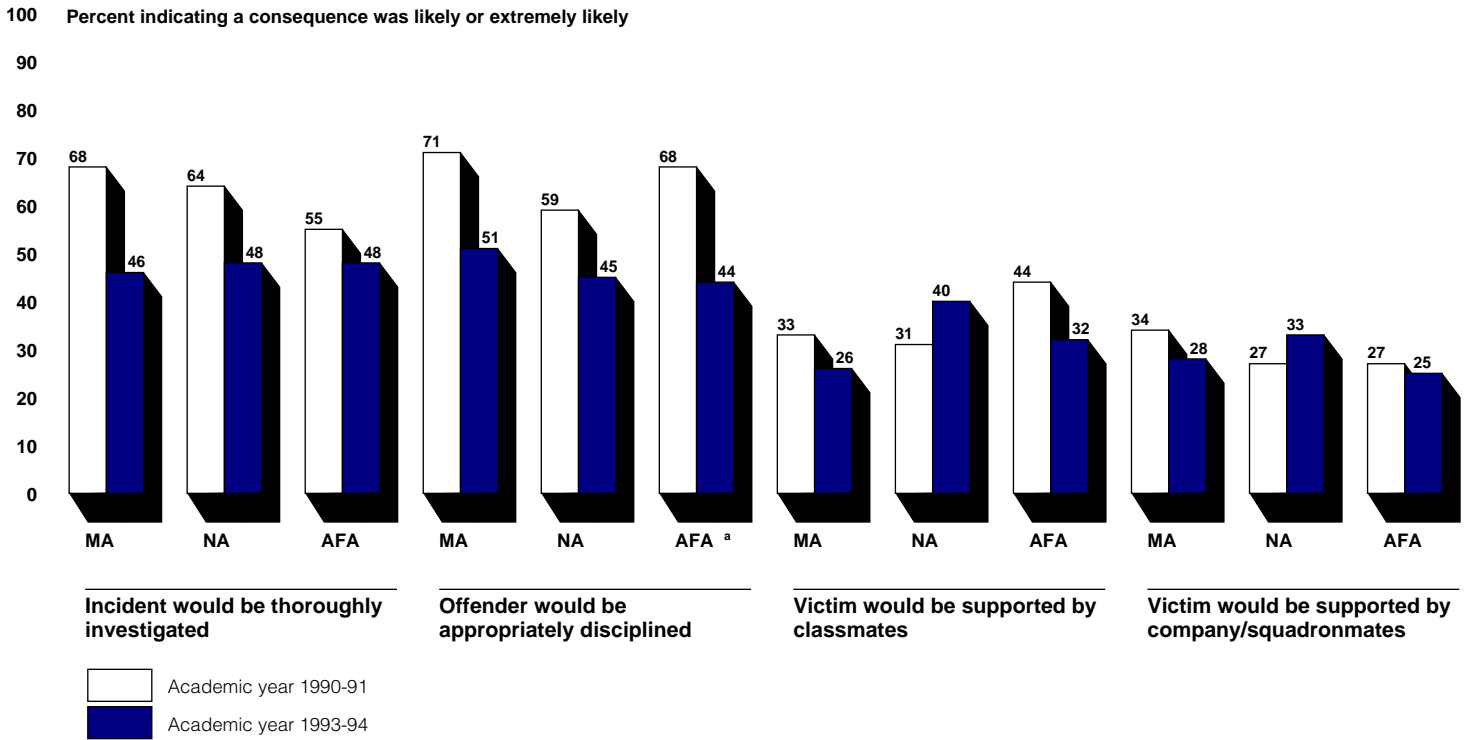
Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

## Women See No Improvement in the Atmosphere for Reporting Sexual Harassment

The responses of women students at the three academies generally showed no statistically significant changes in the perceived likelihood of positive consequences accruing from reporting sexual harassment (fig. I.7). The actual percentages perceiving positive consequences appeared generally lower, although the only statistically significant decline occurred in the case of Air Force Academy women's perception of the likelihood that offenders would be appropriately disciplined, which went from 68 percent in 1991 to 44 percent in 1994.

**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

**Figure I.7: Female Student Perceptions of Positive Consequences of Reporting Sexual Harassment**



<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant difference.

Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

In general, among women at the three academies, there were no significant changes in the percentage who saw negative consequences as likely to accrue to those who reported sexual harassment (fig. I.8). The one exception was an increase in the percentage of women at the Naval Academy who thought that a complaining victim would be transferred to another company.

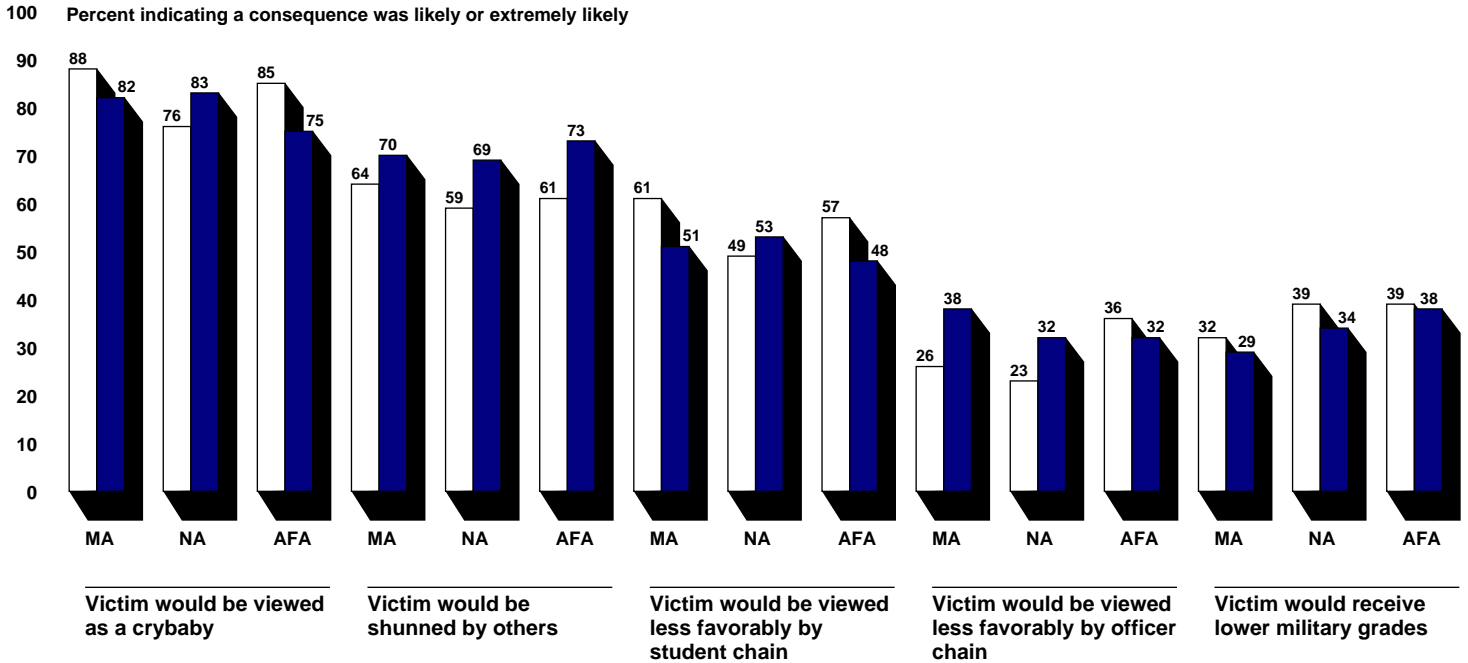
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**Appendix I  
Sexual Harassment at the Service  
Academies During the 1993-94 Academic  
Year**

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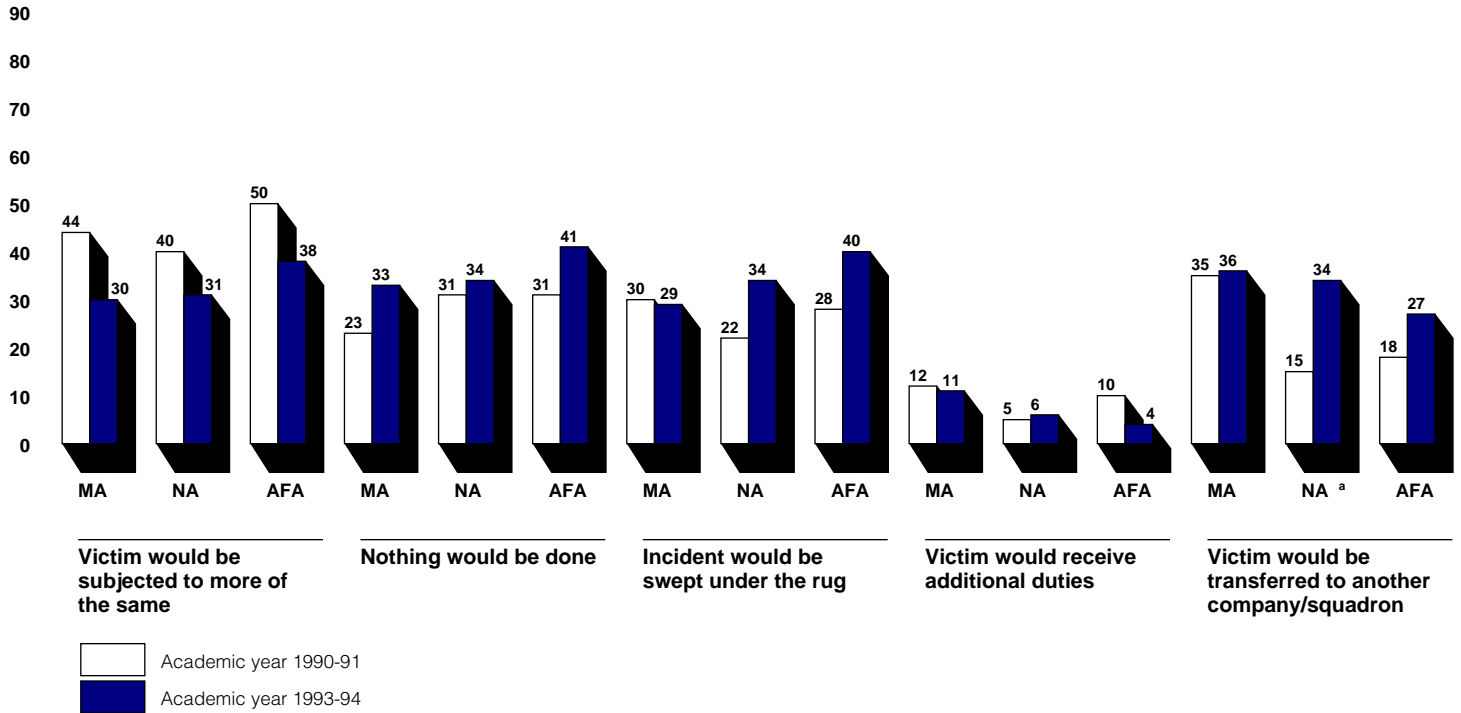
**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

**Figure I.8: Female Student Perceptions of Negative Consequences of Reporting Sexual Harassment**



**Appendix I  
Sexual Harassment at the Service  
Academies During the 1993-94 Academic  
Year**

100 Percent indicating a consequence was likely or extremely likely



<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant difference.

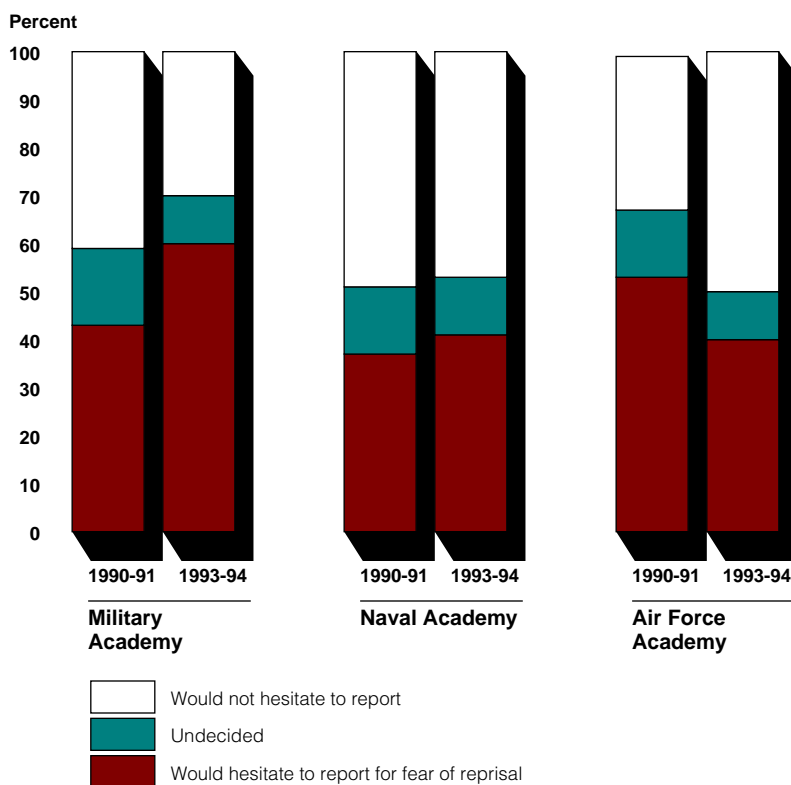
Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

## Many Women Continue to Indicate Fear of Reprisal for Reporting Sexual Harassment

The percentage of women who indicated that they would hesitate to report an incident of sexual harassment for fear of reprisal was 60 percent at the Military Academy, 41 percent at the Naval Academy, and 40 percent at the Air Force Academy. These figures indicate no significant change from 1991 (fig. I.9).

**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

**Figure I.9: Views of Academy Women Regarding Fear of Reprisal for Reporting Sexual Harassment, Academic Years 1990-91 and 1993-94**



Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

Given that there has been no apparent change in the perceptions of women regarding the negative consequences of reporting harassment, it is likely that sexual harassment will continue to be underreported. Narrative comments also seem to support this conclusion:

“I feel reporting sexual harassment is a 2-edged sword. Some of it is crying wolf and relatively innocent people get slammed for things that aren’t sexual harassment, it just so happens that the 2 people involved are of the opposite sex. But the Academy is so afraid of appearances that the male gets slammed hard. I think everyone would have a much better attitude towards reporting it and eliminating harassment if they knew it would be investigated fairly and punished or exonerated accordingly. As it is now, if someone cries sexual harassment the male is always punished.” (USMA cadet)

“I think that sexual harassment problems arise from the fact that male cadets are too immature to realize how rude, vulgar, offensive and mean they can be. However, women



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**Appendix I**  
**Sexual Harassment at the Service**  
**Academies During the 1993-94 Academic**  
**Year**

---

(especially cadets) have become accustomed to this 'harassment' (as some would call it), so we don't see a need to report it. No matter what anyone complains about, the verbal harassment won't go away because you can't change 17-23 year old guys into polite gentlemen. The only harassment that I would ever report would be sexual assault (physical). I think this is pretty much an accurate description of the feelings of many female cadets." (USMA cadet)

"I know there have been cases of sexual harassment by both cadets and officers directed toward cadets of the opposite sex. . . . and the reasons I was told by these individuals as to why they failed to report it were (1) fear of putting themselves in a position of being unaccepted by peers and officers or (2) they decided to tell themselves it was really not that big of a deal. Also, I think sexual harassment is accepted because little is done to let people know what sexual harassment actually encompasses." (USMA cadet)

"The negative perception that many cadets have regarding turning in gender-related violations is that many times a trivial matter that could and should have been handled on a 1 vs. 1 basis has been blown out of proportion with disproportionate consequences." (USFAFA cadet)

"As a general rule, any sort of harassment based on race or gender will go unreported at USNA. 'On the strength of one link in the cable dependeth the might of the chain. . . .' is drilled into our heads plebe summer. . . . The general consensus, unfortunately, is that someone who would report such an offense is the 'weak link', or a 'bilge' [informant]. Nobody wants to be a 'bilge'." (USNA midshipman)

"A 'p' [professor] is proven to have made a sexist comment in class, but only gets a slap on the wrist - has to read 2 books to get 'sensitized.' These are personal experiences, not made up. But they went unpunished and I got bad grades. Do something, because I got shunned and ridiculed when I did." (USMA cadet)

# DOD Definition of Sexual Harassment

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In our 1994 followup survey, we added a question on sexual harassment tailored after the wording of the DOD definition of sexual harassment. That definition was issued on July 20, 1988, in a memorandum from the Secretary of Defense directing the services to incorporate the definition of sexual harassment into their regulations. The DOD definition states:

“Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- (1) submission to or rejection of such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person’s job, pay, or career, or
- (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career employment decisions affecting that person, or
- (3) such conduct interferes with an individual’s performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

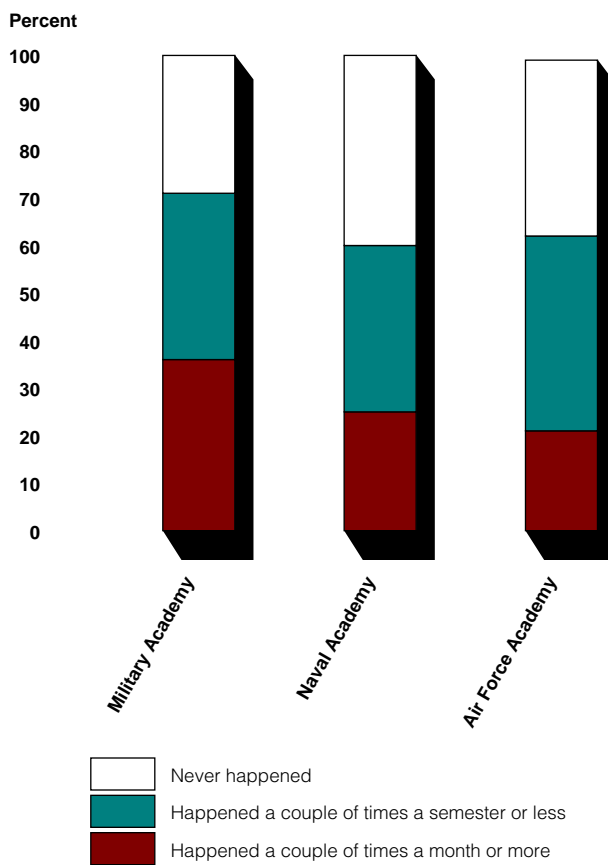
Any person in a supervisory or command position who uses or condones implicit or explicit sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, pay, or job of a military member or civilian employee is engaging in sexual harassment. Similarly, any military member or civilian employee who makes deliberate or repeated unwelcome verbal comments, gestures, or physical contact of a sexual nature is also engaging in sexual harassment.”

Figure II.1 addresses the reported frequency of exposure to “repeated, unwelcome verbal comments” related to gender cited in the last sentence of the definition. Figure II.2 presents responses regarding verbal conduct, and figure II.3 presents responses regarding physical conduct that “interferes with an individual’s performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment,” as cited in section (3) of the definition. Figure II.4 addresses the reported frequency of “physical contact of a sexual nature” cited in the last sentence of the definition. Figure II.5 addresses responses concerning exposure to explicit or implicit indications that some aspect of the respondent’s academy career would be affected by submission to or rejection of unwelcome sexual advances, as cited in sections (1) and (2) of the definition.

## Repeated, Unwelcome Verbal Comments Related to Gender

Between 60 percent and 71 percent of the women reported at least some exposure to repeated, unwelcome verbal comments related to their gender, with from 21 percent to 36 percent citing a frequency of a couple of times a month or more (fig. II.1).

Figure II.1: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Repeated, Unwelcome Verbal Comments Related to Their Gender

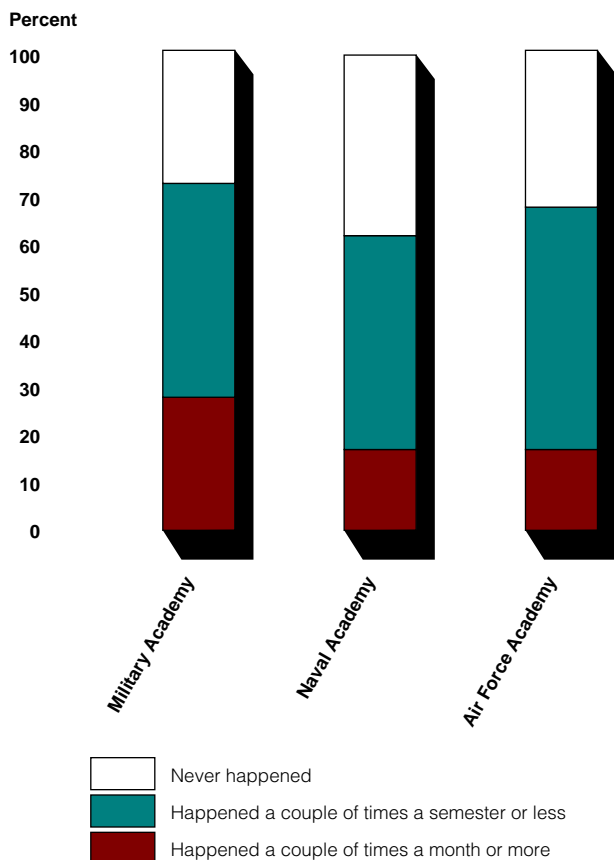


Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

## Verbal Conduct That Interfered With Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment

Between 62 percent and 72 percent of the women reported at least some exposure to verbal conduct, related to their gender, that interfered with their performance or created an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment, with from 17 percent to 28 percent citing a recurring level (fig. II.2).

Figure II.2: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Gender-Related Verbal Conduct That Interfered With Their Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment



Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

The two questions concerning verbal comments and conduct (figs. II.1 and II.2) show basically similar patterns and percentages, indicating that negative gender-related comments appear to rise to the level of harassment in the minds of most academy women. However, there were a number of write-in comments that indicated that not all such comments were considered harassment:

“The jokes made to me are the good humor of friends. I have not witnessed or heard of any deliberate name-calling or derogatory statements made to people on sporadic or a continuous basis. People would not stand for it. What goes on mainly goes on between friends and it is a fun nature on both sides.” (USMA cadet)

“When I say I hear gender based comments all the time, that doesn’t mean I am necessarily offended by them or that they are meant maliciously. Most of the guys here are very good about it, and there are few who actually feel that way.” (USFAFA cadet)

“Some derogatory comments are meant in playful terms but stem from college immaturity.” (USFAFA cadet)

“My friends and I tease each other all the time with no offense given or taken.” (USNA midshipman)

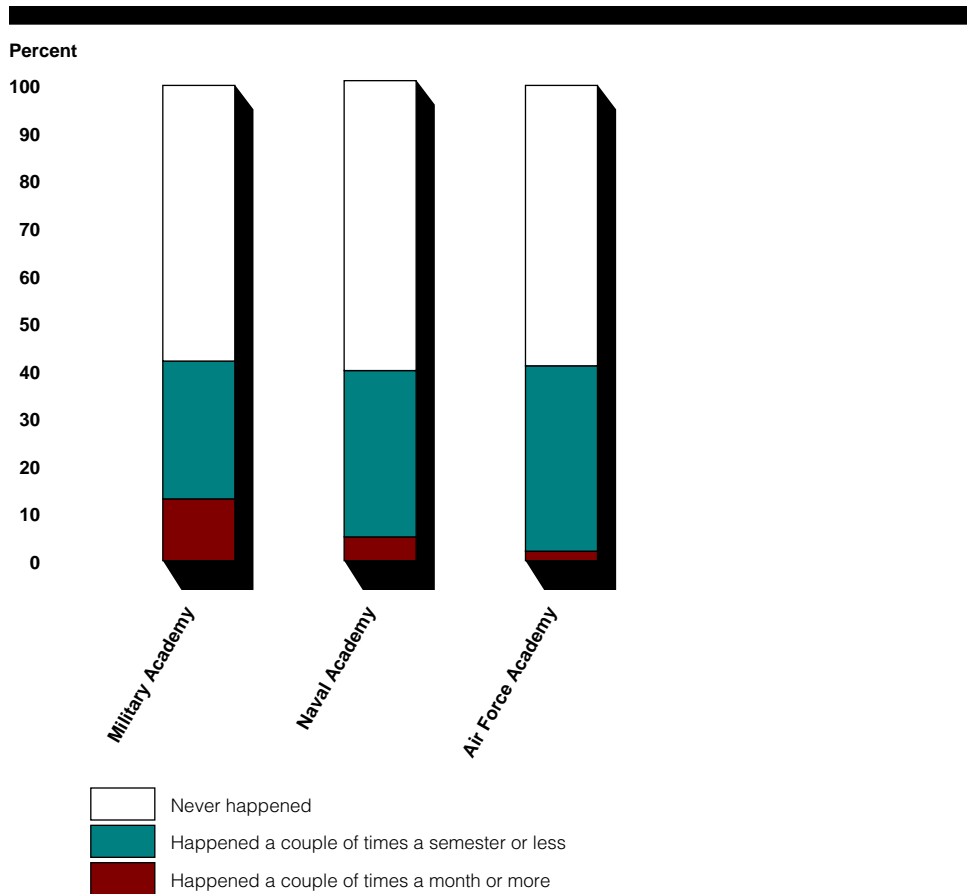
“I think there is a BIG difference between an intentional insult and a joking one, and mids [midshipmen], on the whole, understand the difference. For this reasons I answered never to Question 19 [the question that asked about whether respondents had experienced any of 10 forms of harassment].” (USNA midshipman)

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## Physical Conduct That Interfered With Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment

The percentage of women who reported being exposed at least one or two times a year to physical, gender-related conduct that interfered with their performance or created an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment ranged from 39 percent to 42 percent, with 2 percent to 13 percent indicating recurring exposure (fig. II.3).

**Figure II.3: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Gender-Related Physical Conduct That Interfered With Their Performance or Created an Intimidating, Hostile, or Offensive Environment**

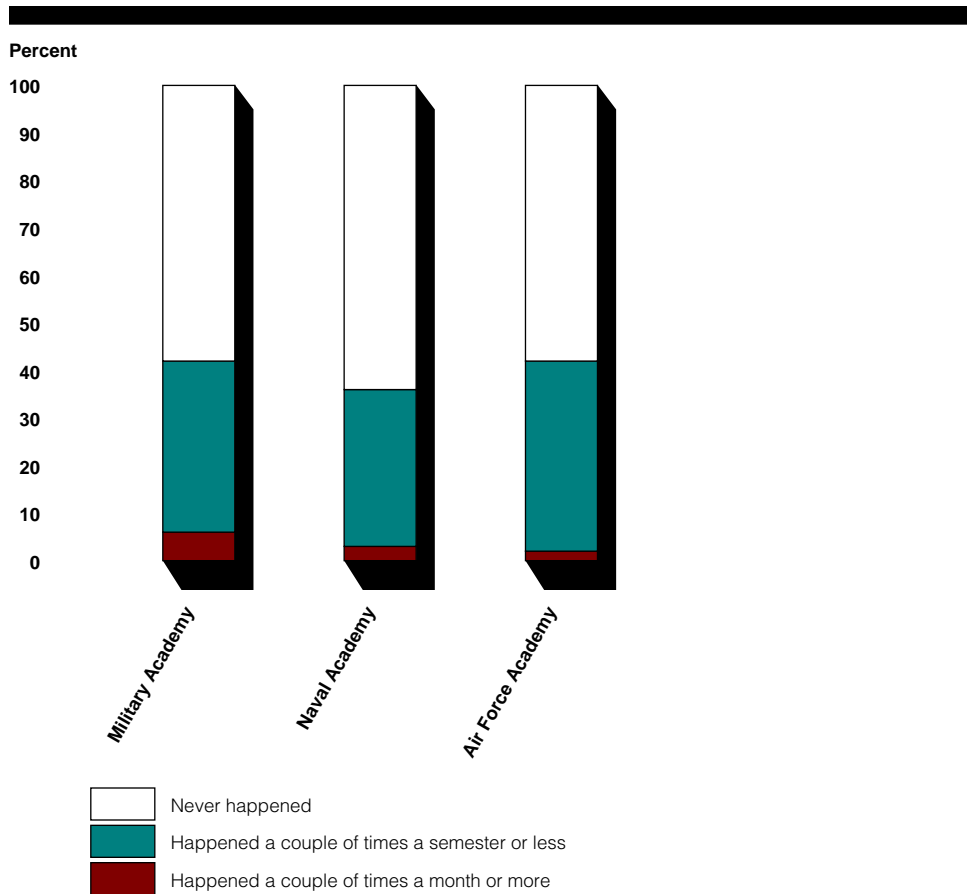


Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

## Unwelcome, Deliberate Physical Contact of a Sexual Nature

As shown in figure II.4, the percentage of women at each academy who reported being exposed at least one or two times a year to “unwelcome, deliberate physical contact of a sexual nature (e.g., groping, patting, fondling, kissing, hugging, etc.)” ranged from 36 percent to 42 percent, with 2 percent to 6 percent indicating that it happened a couple of times a month or more often.

**Figure II.4: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Unwelcome, Deliberate Physical Contact of a Sexual Nature (e.g., groping, patting, fondling, kissing, hugging, etc.)**



Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.

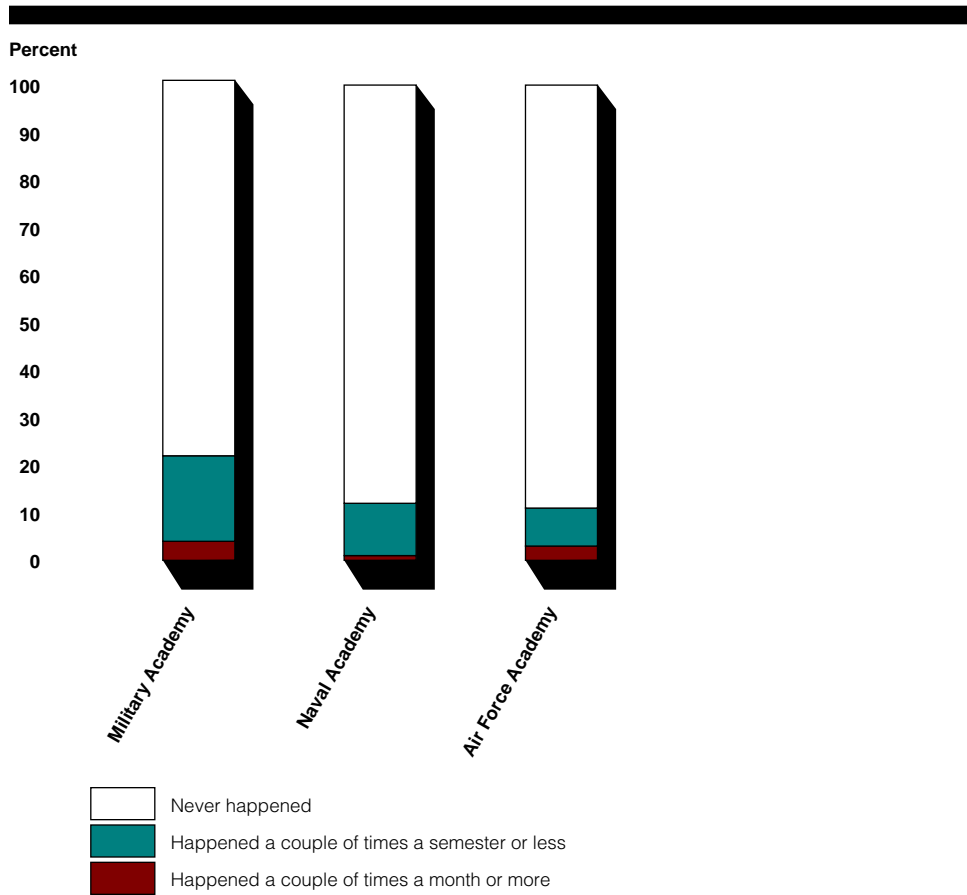
## Sexual Advances Being Implicitly or Explicitly Tied to Some Aspect of Their Academy Careers

Figure II.5 shows the responses of academy women regarding what is generally referred to as “quid pro quo” sexual harassment. We asked respondents whether, during the 1993-94 academic year, they had experienced any explicit or implicit indications that some aspect of their academy careers (e.g., grades, performance ratings, disciplinary actions, duty assignments, etc.) would be affected by their acceptance or rejection of sexual advances. While the overwhelming majority of women at each academy (79 percent to 89 percent) reported that they had not encountered this form of sexual harassment, from 11 percent to 22 percent indicated that it had happened to them at least once during the year, with

Appendix II  
DOD Definition of Sexual Harassment

1 percent to 4 percent citing a frequency of at least a couple of times a month.

**Figure II.5: Reported Frequency That Academy Women Experienced Explicit or Implicit Indications That Some Aspect of Their Academy Careers Would Be Affected by Their Acceptance or Rejection of Sexual Advances**



Source: Responses to GAO questionnaires.



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# Description of Questionnaire Methodology

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The purpose of this appendix is to set forth our questionnaire development process, our sampling approach, the response rates, the weighing of the data, the processing of completed questionnaires, the sampling error, and other methodological issues.

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## Questionnaire Development

We originally developed an omnibus questionnaire in 1990-91 to address the full scope of the broader review.<sup>1</sup> The 1994 version of the questionnaire was shortened by omitting most of the items that did not pertain to the honor and conduct systems or the issue of sexual harassment. The wording of items repeated in the 1994 survey was identical to their wording in the 1990-91 version. In addition, the 1994 survey included a new question tailored after the wording of the DOD definition of sexual harassment (see app. II).

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## Sampling Methodology and Administration of the Surveys

To ensure that an adequate number of women would be included, we used a stratified random sample design, which allowed us to oversample women. We used the last digit of the social security number to randomly select respondents from each strata.<sup>2</sup> We selected one final digit for all cadets and midshipmen and an additional final digit for women.

The 1994 questionnaires were administered at all three academies in May 1994. The original administration of the academy student questionnaires occurred in December 1990 at the Naval Academy and in March 1991 at the Military and Air Force academies.

The questionnaires were mass-administered to the academy students. Those selected for the sample were notified through academy channels to report to rooms designated for the questionnaire administration. The questionnaires were administered by our staff during what would otherwise be free time for the respondents. Respondents were assured of anonymity. There was a make-up session for Air Force Academy cadets and Naval Academy midshipmen who had scheduling conflicts. Our survey administration time at the Military Academy conflicted with a scheduled academic placement exam for a portion of the Class of 1995. To ensure that this would not have an impact on the representativeness of our

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<sup>1</sup>A more detailed description of the questionnaire development process and the 1990-91 survey administration can be found in *DOD Service Academies: More Actions Needed to Eliminate Sexual Harassment* (GAO/NSIAD-94-6, Jan. 31, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>The last four digits of social security numbers are essentially a random field based on the order in which individual social security offices process the applications they receive. Selecting one final digit could be expected to yield a sample of about 10 percent.

sample, those cadets scheduled for the placement exam were subtracted from the population before the random sample selection was made.

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## Questionnaire Response Rates and Weighing of Data

Completed questionnaires were received from 430 Military Academy cadets (a response rate of about 92 percent), 470 Naval Academy midshipmen (a response rate of about 90 percent), and 428 Air Force Academy cadets (a response rate of about 77 percent).

Since we oversampled the women, we needed to apply weights to the responses to allow them to represent the total academy population. Raw weights were computed by dividing the number of subgroup responses into the subgroup population. However, applying raw weights would artificially increase the number of cases and inflate tests of statistical significance. To avoid such inflation, we used the raw weights to compute constrained weights, which when applied to the data make the number of weighted cases equal to the number of unweighted cases.<sup>3</sup> Weights applied in this manner yield data that represent the total population without distorting significance tests.

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## Processing Completed Questionnaires

We reviewed and edited each returned questionnaire. Responses were double-keyed, creating two files for each completed questionnaire. The two files were then compared for consistency, and corrections were made as necessary. We checked the overall accuracy of the keyed data by verifying every 10th record back to the responses in the completed questionnaire. None of the three sets of questionnaires reached an error level of 1 percent.

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## Sampling Error

Since we surveyed samples of cadets and midshipmen rather than the entire populations, the results we obtained were subject to some degree of uncertainty, or sampling error. Sampling errors represent the expected difference between our sample results and the results we would have obtained had we surveyed the entire populations. Sampling errors are smallest when the percentage split responding to a particular question is highly skewed, such as 5 percent responding “yes” and 95 percent responding “no” and greatest when there is about a 50-50 percentage split in responses.

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<sup>3</sup>SPSS-X User’s Guide, 3rd edition, Chicago, IL: SPSS, Inc., 1988.

**Appendix III**  
**Description of Questionnaire Methodology**

Based on our response rates, we estimate that our results can be generalized to the cadet and midshipman populations at the 95-percent confidence level, with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 4.6 percent at the Military Academy, 4.4 percent at the Naval Academy, and 4.6 percent at the Air Force Academy.

The sampling errors for various subgroups for which data are cited in this report appear in table II.1. The decimal figures in the table are the sampling errors that correspond to various percentages of respondents selecting a particular response alternative. For example, if we state that 15 percent of Military Academy cadets responded in a given way, the table shows a sampling error of 3.3 percent corresponding to “all cadets” and a 15-percent to 85-percent response split. This means that we can be 95-percent confident that the percentage of cadets responding that way in the population would be within 15 percent plus or minus 3.3 percent, or between 11.7 percent and 18.3 percent.

**Table II.1: Sampling Errors for Various Academy Subgroups**

Subgroup	Population Sample		Percentage split in responses									
			05% 95%	10% 90%	15% 85%	20% 80%	25% 75%	30% 70%	35% 65%	40% 60%	45% 55%	50% 50%
<b>Military Academy</b>												
All cadets	3,638	430	2.4	3.0	3.3	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.6
Males	3,232	341	2.8	3.5	4.0	4.2	4.5	4.7	4.9	5.1	5.1	5.2
Females	406	79	6.6	7.9	8.8	9.5	9.9	10.2	10.2	10.4	10.6	10.6
<b>Naval Academy</b>												
All midshipmen	4,049	470	2.3	2.9	3.2	3.5	3.8	4.0	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.4
Males	3,564	382	2.6	3.3	3.8	3.9	4.2	4.5	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.9
Females	485	88	6.4	7.5	8.3	9.0	9.4	9.7	9.6	9.9	10.0	10.1
<b>Air Force Academy</b>												
All cadets	4,012	428	2.5	3.1	3.3	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.6
Males	3,495	338	2.8	3.5	4.1	4.2	4.6	4.8	5.0	5.1	5.2	5.2
Females	517	90	6.3	7.4	8.3	8.9	9.3	9.6	9.6	9.8	10.0	10.0

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## Other Potential Sources of Error

In order to encourage candid responses, our methodology for administering the 1994 surveys, as well as the 1990-91 surveys, did not permit us to identify those students who failed to attend the group administration sessions. As a result, we are unable to evaluate how, if at all, the percentages cited in this report might change if these nonrespondents had provided responses. In some cases, respondents failed to answer some of the questions they were asked to respond to. The nonresponse rates for each of the questions in our surveys ranged from 0.2 percent to 1.4 percent.

A variety of factors also temper our ability to make clear comparisons about the respondents from the 1990-91 period and the 1994 period. Our percentages represent the results for two different, but partially overlapping, cohorts of students. Members of the class of 1994 at each academy, although not necessarily the same students, participated in both surveys. The data cited, therefore, may mask individual changes in perceptions and reported experiences.

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