



Highlights of [GAO-10-215](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Sexual assault is a crime with negative implications to military readiness and esprit de corps. In response to a congressional request, GAO, in 2008, reviewed Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Coast Guard sexual assault prevention and response programs and recommended a number of improvements. GAO was subsequently asked to evaluate the extent to which (1) DOD has addressed GAO's 2008 recommendations and further developed its programs, (2) DOD has established a sexual assault database, and (3) the Coast Guard has addressed GAO's 2008 recommendations and further developed its programs. To do so, GAO analyzed legislative requirements and program guidance, interviewed officials, and compared database implementation efforts to key information technology best practices.

What GAO Recommends

To strengthen program implementation, GAO recommends that DOD take steps, including incorporating all key elements into its draft oversight framework and adhering to key system acquisition best practices, as it develops its database. GAO also recommends that the Coast Guard take steps, including establishing a systematic process to track program data and establishing quality control procedures. DOD and the Coast Guard concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-10-215](#) or key components. For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov or Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Additional Actions Are Needed to Strengthen DOD's and the Coast Guard's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Programs

What GAO Found

DOD has addressed four of GAO's nine recommendations from 2008 regarding the oversight and implementation of its sexual assault prevention and response programs. For example, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) evaluated department program guidance for joint and deployed environments, and it evaluated factors that may hinder access to health care following a sexual assault. But DOD's efforts to address the other recommendations reflect less progress. For example, GAO recommended that DOD develop an oversight framework, to include long-term goals and milestones, performance goals and strategies, and criteria for measuring progress. However, GAO found that the draft framework lacks key elements needed for comprehensive oversight of DOD's programs, such as criteria for measuring progress and an indication of how it will use the information derived from such measurement to improve its programs. Until OSD incorporates all key elements into its draft oversight framework, it will remain limited in its ability to effectively manage program development to help prevent and respond to sexual assault incidents. DOD acknowledges that more work remains in order to fully develop its oversight framework.

DOD has taken steps to begin acquiring a centralized sexual assault database. However, it did not meet a legislative requirement to establish the database by January 2010, and it is unclear when the database will be established because DOD does not yet have a reliable schedule to guide its efforts. Also, key system acquisition best practices associated with successfully acquiring and deploying information technology systems, such as economically justifying the proposed system solution and effectively developing and managing requirements, have largely not been performed. OSD officials said they intend to employ these acquisition best practices. Until this is accomplished the program will be at increased risk of not delivering promised mission capabilities and benefits on time and within budget.

While the Coast Guard has partially implemented one of GAO's two recommendations for further developing its sexual assault prevention and response program, it has not implemented the other. In June 2009, the Coast Guard began assessing its program staff's workload, which represents progress in addressing GAO's recommendation to evaluate its processes for staffing key installation-level positions in its program. However, it has not addressed GAO's recommendation to develop an oversight framework. Further, the Coast Guard lacks a systematic process for assembling, documenting, and maintaining sexual assault incident data, and lacks quality control procedures to ensure that the program data being collected are reliable. In fiscal year 2008, for example, different Coast Guard offices documented conflicting numbers of sexual assault reports: the Coast Guard Program Office documented 30, while the Investigative Office documented 78. The Coast Guard had to resolve this significant discrepancy before it could provide its data to DOD. Without a systematic process for tracking its data, the Coast Guard lacks reliable knowledge on the occurrence of sexual assaults.