

That Can't Be True

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In the PBS videos, “U.S. military gets an ‘F’ on sexual assault prevention,” “How personal experience is guiding this military corp’s attempt to combat sexual assault,” and “Sen. Gillibrand: sexual assault in military an ‘epidemic’ that’s getting worse,” interviewers and guests describe the abuse of power perpetuating countless sexual assault cases within the military. Victim advocates, sexual assault response coordinators, and survivors tell the interviewers that higher positions within the military, particularly the colonel rankings, protect abusers over victims, as well as the careers and reputations of those who are more known. Sexual assault, with 7,825 reported cases and an estimated 20,000 total cases, can be labeled as consensual by commanders and thus be dismissed from trial.

When victim advocates and report managers have confronted the issue, many, such as previous soldier and victim advocate Lindsey Knapp, have been fired. Teresa James, as described in *The National Guard welcomes and promotes women. That is, until they report a sexual assault* by author Katelyn Ferral, “went from glowing to subpar,” almost immediately after reporting being raped by a superior officer. The past proposal of her promotion for her honorable work in central Iraq was dismissed without question (Ferral).

With the Pentagon giving military services 90 days to coordinate a solution, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand recently spoke out saying that an entirely new entity not under the chief commander needs to be made to take necessary steps towards proper punishment of abusers and to show others that assault is not justifiable. Gillibrand hopes to receive bipartisan support on her proposal of new structures for sexual assault abuse within the military. Beyond legislation, Staff Sergeant Shameka Dudley calls for new training methods to combat sexual assault within the military, such as using virtual reality. She claims that the current training is not adequate being that the classes do not hold attention well with them being hours long and having more than 500 attendees. Instead, virtual reality classes can create scenarios where soldiers are faced with close to real situations and are able to learn through experience.

Finally and most importantly, I believe that it is vital to recognize how hierarchies of power and dominant-subordinate relationships are key contributors to sexual assault further than in military settings, for relations like these can be found in the workplace, at school, in sports, and so on. Nevertheless, I was aware of authoritative relationships exemplified in connections such as employer to employee, teacher to student, and coach to athlete, but I had not considered that of colonel to soldier, the main focus of these interviews. Even more so, these videos opened my eyes to the lengths that society is willing to go to protect abusers over survivors, focusing on preserving the reputation of the assaulter rather than fighting for justice for the victim. Despite the progress that needs to be done in advancing how sexual assault cases are dealt with, I applaud the efforts of people like Senator Gillibrand, Staff Sergeant Shameka Dudley, and countless sexual assault caseworkers for promoting new measures that will help survivors on their paths of healing.

NewsHour, PBS, director. *Sen. Gillibrand: Sexual Assault in Military an 'Epidemic' That's Getting Worse*. PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 24 Mar. 2021, www.pbs.org/newshour/show/sen-gillibrand-sexual-assault-in-military-an-epidemic-thats-getting-worse.

Schifrin, Nick and Dan Sagalyn, directors. *Victim Advocates Say U.S. Military Gets an 'F' on Sexual Assault Prevention*. PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 1 Mar. 2021, www.pbs.org/newshour/show/victim-advocates-say-u-s-military-gets-an-f-on-sexual-assault-prevention.

Schifrin, Nick, et al., directors. *How Personal Experience Is Guiding This Military Corp's Attempt to Combat Sexual Assault*. PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 24 Mar. 2021, www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-personal-experience-is-guiding-this-military-corps-attempt-to-combat-sexual-assault.

Ferral, Katelyn. "The National Guard Welcomes and Promotes Women. That Is, until They Report a Sexual Assault." *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 31 Mar. 2021, www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/nation/2021/03/31/national-guard-members-who-reported-sexual-assault-retaliated-against/6983139002/.

Photo Ideas:

Statue: <https://images.unsplash.com/photo-1558557396-e1af5647281c>

Woman on Steps: <https://images.unsplash.com/photo-1542328025-50d8b06fc769>