

## **Introduction**

This study offers a Company Grade Officer (CGO) perspective on the current challenge sexual assault poses to the US Air Force. The CGO perspective is especially relevant because CGOs are often the link between the upper echelons of leadership and the enlisted corps. They know the Airmen they lead and are therefore in an optimal position to assess a unit's climate, particularly in regard to sexual harassment and assault. Accordingly, the authors suggest the best way to increase the effectiveness of the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program is to extend it to the unit level. The Air Force's most recent and publicized sexual assaults—those at Lackland and the SAPR program chief's arrest—took place in completely different environments and were perpetrated by service members of varying rank and experience levels. Incidents like these highlight the shortcomings of a one-size fits all approach to sexual assault prevention.

In order to most effectively deal with a wide array of individuals and organizational cultures, the SAPR program should be tailored to individual units. This unit-based approach would utilize a revised SAPR framework in order to empower units and individuals with the end goal of fostering an environment in which sexual assault is prevented. The proposed Prevent-Detect-Respond-Accountable (PDRA) framework would include greater unit responsibility for sexual assault prevention and support systems such as peer leaders who are responsible for training, education, and reporting.

In order to develop this new approach, the authors addressed three questions:

1. How does the Air Force increase the current SAPR program's relevancy?
2. What framework would be optimal in attacking the crime of sexual assault, or is the D3A (Dissuade/Deter/Detect/Accountability) framework suitable to accomplish this objective?
3. Who is in the best position in an organization to increase SAPR relevancy, and what actionable plan would you develop and propose for implementation?

To answer these questions, the authors first began with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current SAPR program. Second, they developed a framework to approach the sexual assault problem in a comprehensive way. Based on the strengths and weaknesses analysis and framework development, the best course of action is a unit-level addition to the current SAPR program facilitated by a unit-level sexual assault advocate (USAA) who is assisted by unit-selected peer leaders. We believe that the unit-level approach to training and education is the best way to gain buy-in from Airmen and increase the overall relevancy of the SAPR program through tailored training.

### **Current SAPR program strengths and weaknesses**

The current Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program does have strengths that the Air Force should continue to utilize. First, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) provides centralized oversight of the SAPR program. Second, the SAPR program has full-time resources dedicated to solving the problem. These strengths enable the Air Force to approach the sexual assault problem strategically.

Centralized oversight is critical to managing any force-wide initiative. The SAPR program involves administrative and legal duties that would be redundant to carry out at the unit level. For instance, the SAPRO can provide uniform standards, training, and policy (AFI 36-6001 and AFPD 36-60) and keep the Air Force program in line with DOD requirements (DOD 6495.01). A centralized SAPRO is also necessary to provide a single point of data collection and analysis. Once the data is properly analyzed, the SAPRO can provide points of focus and lessons learned. This meta-analysis is also necessary in order to synthesize the annual report presented to Congress. For these reasons, oversight of the SAPR program should remain in its current form.

Full-time dedication to the problem is another advantage of the current program. The Air Force has 96 full-time SARC's with a plan to add 32 in FY13.<sup>1</sup> These individuals serve as a single point of contact and advisor to commanders. SARC's also coordinate the logistics of the response program at the base level. Due to their special training and experience, SARC's can be considered subject matter experts in the field of sexual assault prevention and response. Their full-time dedication to the problem is an invaluable resource for advising the commander and coordinating training and resources. For this reason, the SARC position should remain in any future SAPR program.

Despite these strengths, the SAPR program has been unable to decrease the rate of unwanted sexual contact (USC) over its lifespan. The statistics bear out that the SAPR program has proven to be ineffective in prevention and response. Additionally, the SAPR program is still struggling with a low reporting percentage. One reason for this lack of effectiveness may be the perception of SARC's as "outsiders" or external to the unit. These weaknesses should be examined in order to discover potential areas for improvement.

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1. The Department of Defense, "DOD Sexual Assault Annual Report, fiscal year 2012," *The United States Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response*, 2013, <http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-reports> (accessed 18 June 2013).

The most disheartening information in the 2012 *Workplace Gender Relations Survey for Active Duty Members* (WGRA) report is in the comparison of Department of Defense (DoD) USC percentages from 2006-2012. Despite the best efforts of the SAPR program, there is no statistical change in percentages of USC for men or women from 2006-2012.<sup>2</sup> Based on these statistics, one might conclude that the current SAPR program is ineffective in preventing sexual assault. If the SAPR program was even partially effective, one would expect to see a slight decrease in the percentage of USC from 2006-2012. The current percentages reflect the same trends as the Defense Manpower Data Center survey in 1988, with 5% of female respondents and 1% of male respondents stating that they had experienced USC in the past year.<sup>3</sup> Given this baseline, one can conclude that a level of USC around 5% for women and 1% for men would occur whether there was a SAPR program or not. This evidence is the most compelling argument that can be made for a DoD-wide change within the SAPR program.

Additionally, in those cases in which sexual assault is reported, the SAPR program is rated poorly for its response. According to the WGRA statistics, victims report a 61% satisfaction with sexual assault advocacy and 35% satisfaction with the reporting process overall.<sup>4</sup> Viewing the victim as a customer, these ratings are unacceptable. Significant strides must be made in the reporting process in order to increase customer satisfaction. As unfortunate as it may be, poor satisfaction with the reporting system may cause future victims not to report. According to the survey, 50% of women did not report their USC because either they did not think their report would be kept confidential or they did not think anything would be done.<sup>5</sup> In

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2. The Department of Defense, "Workplace Gender Relations Survey for Active Duty Members," *The United States Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response*, 2013, <http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-reports> (accessed 18 June 2013): 20.

3. Madeline Morris, "By Force of Arms: Rape, War, and Military Culture," *Duke Law Journal* 45 (1996): 657.

4. WGRA, p. 95.

5. WGRA, p.113.

the WGRA survey, 3.1% of Air Force women experienced USC; however, the Air Force only logged 790 total reports. The crime of sexual assault is universally underreported; however, if there are approximately 62,500 women in the Air Force then there may have been 1,936 episodes of USC in the past year.<sup>6</sup> In this case, 790 reports constitute 40% of total sexual assaults, meaning 60% go unreported. The SAPR program needs to find a way to improve reporting in order to protect victims and hold perpetrators fully accountable.

Under the current system, the SAPR program has had no significant impact on the incidence of USC and receives a poor customer service rating. Therefore, it is worth exploring alternate courses of action for significant reform. One such course of action is to decentralize the execution of the SAPR program to the unit level. In this alternate program, units will be given tools, information, and training in order to uniquely tailor their SAPR program. This ground-up approach to SAPR will hopefully capture the advantages of scale in order to identify best practices and effective strategies. It will also increase the number of stakeholders in the SAPR program since sexual assault can no longer be viewed as the problem of an “outside agency” to solve. By fostering prevention at the peer level, the unit-level approach is uniquely suited to handle the issue of sexual assault prevention and response. The Air Force therefore must determine whether current frameworks for sexual assault prevention and response should continue or be revised.

### **Evaluating the D3A structure concept**

The concept currently under investigation (Dissuade, Deter, Detect, and Accountability or D3A) was developed as a response to the commander-directed investigation (CDI) conducted

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6. The Air Force Personnel Center, “Military Demographics,” *Air Force Personnel Demographics*, 2013, <http://www.afpc.af.mil/library/airforcepersonneldemographics.asp> (accessed 18 June 2013).

by Major General Margaret Woodward after large scale misconduct, including sexual assault and unprofessional relationships, surfaced at Lackland AFB in 2011.<sup>7</sup> Her report highlighted “MTI culture” and an imbalance of power within the basic military training environment. D3A was identified as a method to combat this culture and the abuses which occurred as a result.

According to the report, to dissuade undesired behavior, Maj Gen Woodward determined that there was a need to “strengthen the inclination of training instructors toward professional behavior.” Success in dissuading behavior means that an instructor is strongly inclined to uphold Air Force core values.<sup>8</sup>

Detering inappropriate behavior involves “convincing [instructors] that the risks associated with unprofessional behavior are greater than the rewards...” This deterrence is based upon the knowledge of the negative consequences of engaging in inappropriate behaviors. Part of these consequences involves MTI peer pressure. Detection includes finding those MTIs who have already engaged in undesirable sexual misconduct. Detection normally involves reports filed by a person other than the victim, but as stated in the report, units have also used video surveillance. Finally, to ensure accountability, Maj Gen Woodward suggests tools such as “counseling, removal from MTI duty, denial of end-of-tour medals, downgraded performance reports, and punitive actions such as nonjudicial punishment and court-martial.”<sup>9</sup>

The D3A, as it is currently utilized, is not the most effective framework to address sexual assault. D3A was written as a specific response to the very public misconduct at Lackland AFB and is therefore tailored to MTIs and the Basic Military Training environment. As constructed, D3A is an incomplete framework to deal with the majority of sexual assaults within the United

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7. Margaret Woodward, “AETC Commander’s Report to the Secretary of the Air Force,” *AF.mil Shared Media*, 2012, <http://www.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-121114-056.pdf> (accessed 18 June 2013).

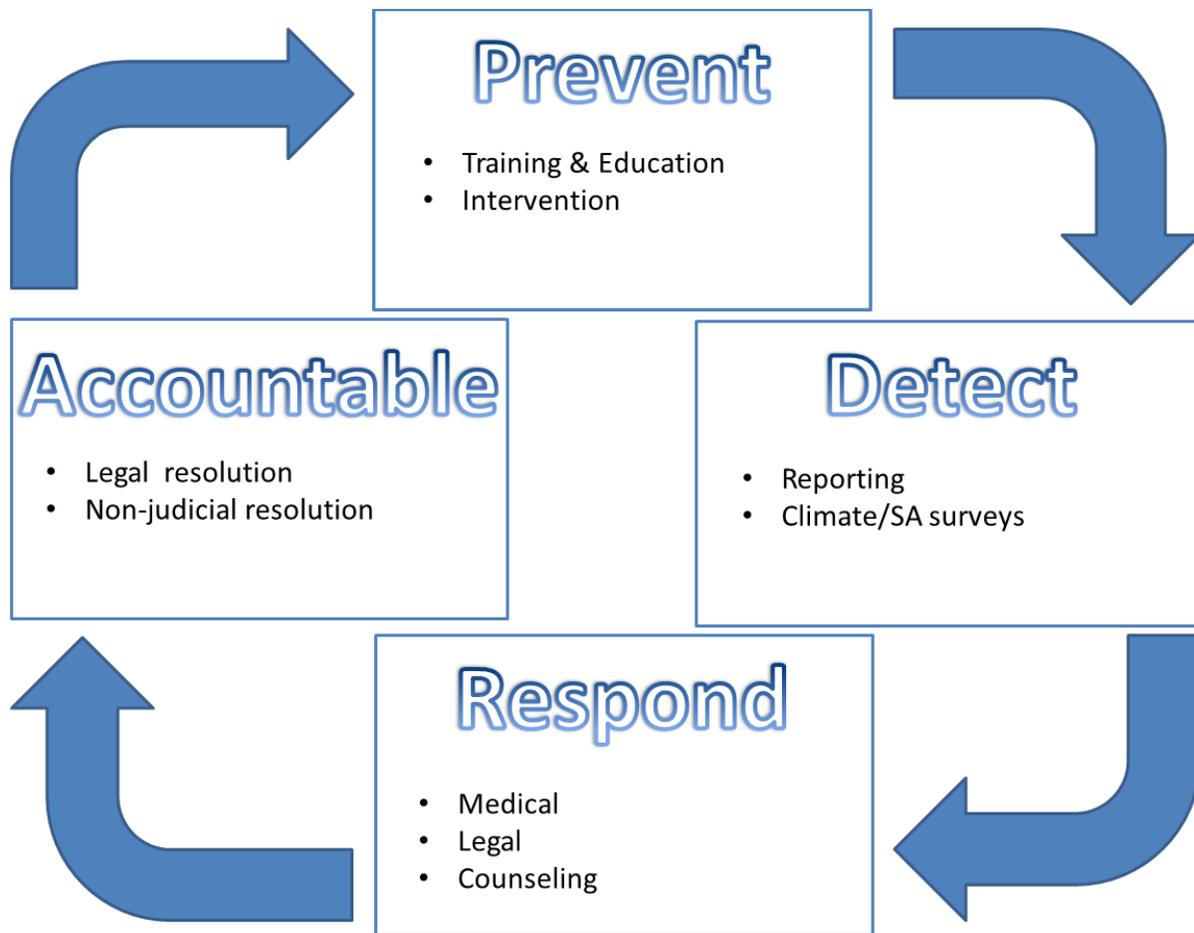
8. *Ibid.*, 18

9. *Ibid.*, 19

States Air Force. For instance, D3A solely focused on the perpetrator and is lacking in any consideration for the victim's needs. D3A should be significantly expanded to include more than just MTIs and the BMT environment, but all officers and NCOs in a command or supervisory position. An expanded, more comprehensive SAPR program would include the following revised framework to combat sexual assault: Prevent, Detect, Respond, Accountability (PDRA).

PDRA should be viewed as a continuum of action and is based on the stated priorities of the current Air Force SAPR program: to institutionalize prevention strategies, increase reporting, improve sexual assault response, and improve system accountability.<sup>10</sup> In this continuum of action, the first goal is to prevent the crime before it occurs. Prevention includes the sum of training, education, and Airmen actions that stop the sexual assault from occurring in the first place. However, it is reasonable to assume that even the best prevention strategy will not be 100% effective. Detection is a key part of sexual assault response. Without detection, the continuum cannot progress to victim support and perpetrator accountability. In order to increase detection, victims must have full confidence and trust in the SAPR program.

Currently the SARC is responsible for coordinating the response services at the base level, and under the PDRA framework the SARC would continue providing these services. After a sexual assault is detected, the first action should be response to the victim, to include medical care, counseling, and advocate services. The final step in the continuum is accountability. If service members see failure in any part of the process, it will lose its credibility and efficacy. All four aspects of the framework are necessary to effectively deal with the problem of sexual assault within the Air Force.



**Fig. 1 PDRA Model**

**Recommendation: A Unit-focused Approach**

**Part One: Empowering Units**

PDRA is a comprehensive solution to the Air Force’s sexual assault problem. In order to improve prevention, units should be allowed to tailor SAPR prevention training and education based on their unique needs and culture. The addition of unit-level SAPR resources should also increase trust and dialogue that will lead to increased reporting. The response function will remain with the base SARC. However, as the unit gains more ownership of its SAPR program, it

should also hold itself accountable for the success or failure of the program. This framework will include two primary approaches: empowering units and empowering individuals.

Empowering units will enable them to lead sexual assault prevention at the most basic level. Unit empowerment can be achieved through decentralizing the SARC's training and education responsibilities down to the unit, equipping the units with tools they need to increase their unit's SAPR readiness. Since the prevention aspect of SAPR will be conducted at the unit level, leadership at all levels, especially the unit commander, should be held responsible for fostering a unit culture that does not tolerate sexual assault and establishes healthy, team-focused social norms.

The success of this program is dependent on developing an accountability structure that includes all levels of the Air Force officer and enlisted corps. In this context, accountability should not be seen solely as a punitive response to a negative situation. According to the *Servant Leadership Survey: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Measure*, accountability is a mechanism by which responsibility for outcomes is given to individuals and teams.<sup>10</sup> It ensures that members at all levels of the organization know what is expected of them. It is a powerful tool to show confidence in one's followers by providing boundaries within which one is free to achieve one's goals. If leadership is to exemplify Air Force core values, part of "service before self" means accepting accountability for successes *and* failures of the members they lead.<sup>11</sup> Holding commanders accountable may seem unfair or difficult to accomplish, but the military command structure requires a leader to assume responsibility at all times.

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10. Dirk Van Dierendonck and Inge Nuijten, "The Servant Leadership Survey: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Measure," *The Journal of Business and Psychology* 26, no. 3 (2011): 249–267.

11. The Department of Defense, "DOD Sexual Assault Annual Report, fiscal year 2012."

The CDI report that followed the Lackland AFB investigation recommended that wing commanders be informed of sexual assault allegations. However, strengthening accountability of leadership should include requiring the wing commander to be informed, to maintain oversight of every unrestricted report, and to require squadron commanders to follow up with the base legal office and promptly report a course of action (COA) to the wing commander. Failures of effective oversight should be highlighted in performance reports, regardless of rank. CGOs need to see that all ranks are held accountable for the situations for which they hold others accountable. Learning to embrace accountability at this stage will help CGOs lead by example at all stages of their careers and be more proactive in combatting issues within their area of responsibility.

Under the current SAPR program, the Installation Sexual Assault Response Coordinator bears much of the duty for sexual assault prevention, education, training, and response. Currently, the installation SARC must “implement and manage the installation level sexual assault prevention and response programs” (AFI 36-6001, 1.8.2). Within the current SAPR program, SARC responsibilities include sexual assault response and victim care and support. Both require coordination with on and off base agencies along with prevention efforts which include education, training, awareness, and community involvement (AFI 36-6001, 2.3). The commander’s responsibility under the current program is to provide initial and continuing support to the victim (AFI 36-6001, 6 & Attachment 2). We recommend decentralization of several SARC responsibilities and delegation down to the unit level. The unit should handle the responsibilities of prevention, education, and training. Enabling and equipping units to handle these activities will empower units to develop a unit-specific culture of zero tolerance for sexual assault and conduct unit-focused education and training.

In the unit-based approach, commanders will have a wide range of tools available to equip them to achieve the objectives outlined above. The commander's toolkit for sexual assault education, prevention, and support, at the unit level, will include the installation SARC and a commander appointed Unit Sexual Assault Advocate (USAA). The Installation SARC will still provide subject matter expertise on all issues of sexual assault for their unit. The SARC will also be equipped to offer a commander a Sexual Assault Situational Awareness Tool (SA<sup>2</sup>) to provide them with an assessment of the unit's comprehension of this dynamic issue as well as providing a realistic portrait of the unit's current culture and attitude related to the topic (see appendix A for example survey). Commanders will have the option of using the SA<sup>2</sup> as a tool or metric to assist with assessing where their unit stands on their sexual assault prevention and response readiness (SAPR readiness). This tool will also allow commanders to target specific areas of improvement or weaknesses related to this issue in their organization.

The Unit Sexual Assault Advocate (USAA) will work directly with the unit commander to assist them in achieving the desired objectives. In order for the USAA to thrive in their role, it is imperative that the commander empower the USAA to employ specific unit education and training techniques targeted at strengthening that unit's areas of weakness in SAPR readiness. It is essential that each unit commander and USAA work cohesively to develop a plan tailored for that specific unit. The USAA will also have the capability of relying upon the SARC for reach-back. The SARC will provide the USAA with educational resources, survey tools, and specialized training to take back to their units.

## **Part 2: Empowering individuals**

Developing effective training methods to combat sexual assault is a key component of prevention. Computer-based training modules () are not an effective source of training for this issue, nor is training where top leadership briefs the subject to all Airmen. A better approach is peer to peer initiatives that utilize Airmen at all levels as facilitators of discussions, briefings, and prevention training. From this perspective there are several training programs that: utilize “peers” as an effective means to develop awareness on various issues; give opportunities for discussion in a non-attribution environment; and provide an outlet for those in need. Relevant peer training techniques will include a unit-grown bystander intervention training and appointment of natural helpers. Increasing the relevancy of the SAPR program to all members of the Air Force means increasing the buy-in of each Airman in preventing and responding to sexual assault. Increasing the equity that each Airman has in this problem further distributes the responsibility of the issues across all specialty codes and all ranks. This issue affects every Airman. Thus, the responsibility to prevent this problem rests with everyone. Increasing the buy-in of all Airmen will additionally serve to empower each Airman. This empowerment is a bottom-up approach that will provide a venue for preventing sexual assault.

Creating the largest positive effect from the SAPR program will result from focusing on the largest group of Airmen—bystanders. By empowering the bystanders with the ability to deter and dissuade sexual assault, units can garner the greatest effect. In order for this to become a reality, the proper education and support system must be in place. It is at the unit level that Airmen will be empowered with the ability and courage to properly recognize the symptoms of this problem. There are numerous ways in which this can be facilitated at the unit level. The unit

commander must play an active role in order to ensure that these measures are in place for them to be effective.

First, the unit commander must establish and encourage positive social and group norms. The commander should consider utilizing the SA<sup>2</sup> tool to gauge possible toxic aspects of the organizational culture. Countering these toxic aspects with positive social norms will exert a passive peer pressure on unit members. This is perhaps the most important tool commanders can leverage to prevent and respond to sexual assault within the unit. An established positive social culture will be resistant to negative changes. The unit's culture in general must be a tailored atmosphere conducive to mutual respect among unit members. Inappropriate material, jokes, references, discussions, and actions cultivate negative social norms, thus subtly creating an environment which may encourage inappropriate sexual behavior. Discussion will be a key element of this culture. Airmen are more likely to respond to a discussion among peers than a rote presentation from a stranger. Units should be encouraged to participate in candid and open discussion among peers on methods of deterring and dissuading sexual assault. A frank discussion about the dangers of sexual assault may be enough to create a prevention mindset. This method will allow for a bottom-up and peer-led education system that is casual in nature, yet still effective.

On a similar note, commanders must encourage unit pride in resisting and preventing sexual assault. Units should be recognized for creating a positive and professional working environment that is conducive to preventing sexual assault. While a positive working environment may not entirely prevent incidents of sexual assaults, it creates an atmosphere where unit members can take pride in their own professionalism and awareness of the problem of sexual assault. Though caution should be taken to not dissuade victims from reporting, unit

commanders can incentivize or reward the unit for creating a positive working environment and positive social and group norms. To put these methods in place, the unit commander should be empowered to tailor the program to match the needs of the unit. While many units follow the same basic construct, no two units are exactly the same. Each unit develops its own intrinsic personality. The unit commander should be permitted to have the flexibility to customize the SAPR program to match and meet the needs of the unit.

Another key element of the unit-based approach is a robust education program to help prevent sexual assaults, raise sexual assault awareness, and create an organizational culture where sexual assault is a reality, and not something that is removed from individual members. First, the education program needs to create an atmosphere where military members feel comfortable talking about issues related to sexual assault and sharing personal experiences. One recent study offers useful insight into educational barriers such as the factors that prevent sexual assault reporting and the attitudes people have towards sexual assault.<sup>12</sup> The researchers explain that some communities stigmatize sexual assault, and as a result, the victims feel fearful or embarrassed. Additionally, societal beliefs about masculinity may discourage men from reporting their own sexual assault victimization (Farrell, 1986; DeKeseredy, 1997, 259).<sup>13</sup> The military must create a program that will address these topics and change the way individuals view reporting sexual assaults and talking about sexual assault.

The second part of the education program needs to be focused on peer counselors and USAA representatives. Orchowski and Gidycz (2012) posited education as a crucial part of peers

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12. Brian Payne, Jessica Ekhomu, and Diane Carmody, "Structural barriers to preventing and responding to sexual assaults: Distinctions between community and campus-based advocates," *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 11, no. 4 (2009): 258-276.

13. *Ibid.*, 259.

and confidants having the ability to successfully respond to a sexual assault victim.<sup>14</sup> The authors suggest that it is necessary to train individuals in the most effective manner of responding such as “reflecting what the survivor may be feeling, letting her tell her story, conveying belief, and asking how one can be of help. College students can also be provided with information on what strategies to avoid when responding to sexual assault disclosure, including putting a label on the experience, pressing for details, or questioning the survivor’s actions in the situation.”<sup>15</sup>

In the proposed plan, trained SARC members will provide ongoing education to the USAA member selected by the commander. The USAA will further train selected peer counselors at the unit level. Many CGOs feel that SARC-led discussions and briefings are ineffective. USAA representatives must train peer leaders in how to lead open forum discussions and how to educate squadron members. Peer leaders will also be trained on how to respond to a sexual assault victim if the victim reports an assault to them.

The proposed plan will use peer leaders as in-squadron SARC representatives, and a USAA as the liaison between the unit and the base SARC representative. The USAA will be selected by the commander and attend initial training maintain, while also ensuring annual currency. Peer leaders will be selected based on squadron inputs to the commander. Squadron members will have the opportunity to choose who they feel comfortable with as a peer leader, and individual squadron members will also have the opportunity to volunteer to be a leader. In the program there must be representatives from each rank structure from lower-level enlisted, to NCOs, to Senior NCOs, CGOs, and FGOs. Squadrons should strive to have at least one male and one female representative, but research indicates that females can form a bond with male peers;

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14. Lindsay Orchowski and Christine Gidycz, “To whom do college women confide following sexual assault? A prospective study of predictors of sexual assault disclosure and social reactions,” *Violence Against Women* 18, no. 3 (2012): 264-288.

15. *Ibid.*, 265.

therefore, if a female is not able to become a leader, a trained male can perform the job as well.<sup>16</sup> Each individual selected must be interested and willing to take part in the training associated with being a peer leader and must understand performance reports should not reflect their participation in the program.

The role of the USAA is to be a subject matter expert on sexual assault prevention within the squadron. It will be more effective to have a sexual assault subject matter expert at the unit level to support the PRDA model. The role of peer leaders is to represent a peer who is trained to respond to sexual assault reporting, has the proper tools to help victims, and can help guide a victim to the necessary resources should a victim need additional help. The peer leader will be a comfortable, safe, and non-threatening person that Airmen can contact if they have any problems relating to sexual assault or harassment. The goal is to provide support for military members within the squadron and from the bottom ranks to the top.

## **Conclusion**

Sexual assault is a social and cultural issue. Since much of the perpetration or response to sexual assault is based upon culture and the unique situation of the individual, the rightful place of the SAPR program is within the unit. The current SAPR program has worked diligently to combat sexual assault, but the current one-size-fits-all approach is proving ineffective. A new approach is necessary. Using the PDRA framework and a unit-level approach, the Air Force can increase the relevancy of the SAPR program for all Airmen. By transferring the prevention functions of training and education down to the unit level, the Air Force can gain buy-in and reform organizational cultures that may breed sexual assault.

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16. Orchowski and Gidycz.



Not at all like me <----->Very

Much Like Me

1 2 3 4

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- I think all this emphasis on sensitivity is hurting our military

Not at all like me <----->Very

Much Like Me

1 2 3 4

5

2. **Adversarial sexual beliefs**, the view that sexual relationships are inherently exploitative

Possible Questions:

- I believe that a lot of times women use men for what they want, just like men use women for what they want.

Not at all like me <----->Very

Much Like Me

1 2 3 4

5

- I think that many times manipulation is a necessary evil in the dating process.

Not at all like me <----->Very

Much Like Me





- I know it is the policy of the military to be inclusive of women, but it is hurting our effectiveness as a fighting force

Not at all like me <----->Very

Much Like Me

1 2 3 4

5

- I miss the good old days when guys went to work and women stayed home and raised the children.

Not at all like me <----->Very

Much Like Me

1 2 3 4

5

- I would be upset if the woman in the relationship earned more than the man.

Not at all like me <----->Very

Much Like Me

1 2 3 4

5

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