
The Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence in the Military: Problems and Recommendations for Improvement

Mijeong Lee
Soo-yeon Jung
In-sook Gwon

The purpose of this study was to examine the problem of protection of victims of sexual violence in the military and to seek ways to improve it. It is an important policy task to raise the reporting rate of sexual violence incidents in the military and establish a system that raises the quality of victim grievance counseling to raise the effectiveness of victim support. For these reasons, we collected research data as follows. We collected policies on the prevention of sexual violence and prevention policy in Korea, as well as related policy cases from foreign countries. Through interviews with soldiers who have been discharged from the military, persons in charge of policy, sexual violence grievance counselors, and sexual violence prevention specialists, we examined problem points of reporting sexual violence within the military and the protection of victims.

From the research, the following are policy recommendations related to victim reporting of sexual violence in the military. First, the awareness of military authorities, who think negatively about the exposure that occurs through reporting of sexual violence in the military, should change. Confidentiality for victims of sexual violence in the military and support services have to be strengthened. Second, the method of evaluation for commanders and troops should change in relation to the prevention and eradication of sexual violence. It is worth reviewing whether the commander takes prompt and appropriate action to protect victims and attackers when an incident of sexual violence occurs, in order to give distinguished units that are selected extra points and find measures for awarding creative efforts related to prevention. Third, we recommend the introduction of restricted reporting, which is used in the United States in relation to reporting sexual violence in the military. The advantage of limited reporting is that through contact with medical and counseling services, relevant evidence can quickly be obtained, which can be used later as important evidence in criminal justice investigations if the victim agrees. Fourth, the military authorities need to implement inspections of the actual conditions and problem points of grievance system management related to transmitting grievances from victims of sexual violence, and seek improvement.

The following are policy suggestions related to the prevention of sexual violence in the military and protection of victims.

First, the expansion of a specialized personnel for sexual violence, such as gender equality officers. In order to provide high-quality services to members of the military, it is necessary to expand the scale of the labor force of the counselors with expertise in barracks life, including counselors with expertise in sexual violence grievances and gender equality officers. Secondly, improvement of support for soldiers whose blind spot is help for victims of sexual violence. In the military code of conduct, active preventive measures are demanded regarding actions related to sexual harassment, including prohibition of

inappropriate physical contact. Third, providing education and counseling to improve commander awareness. It is necessary to support a budget to convene separate education that targets the opinion-leader level. Fourth, strengthening education on the protection of the human rights of sexual minorities is needed. Military authorities will have to make efforts to ensure that education related to “The Protection of the Human Rights of Sexual Minorities” recommended by the Ministry of Defense Military Administration Directive (No. 1932) is stably proceeded.

Finally, a policy proposal related to the policy of the prevention of sexual violence in the military. First, install an organization exclusively dedicated to sexual violence in the military and foster a specialist workforce. The Ministry of Defense Women's Policy Department is in charge of the job of preventing sexual violence in the military, but there are many male soldiers who make up the vast military workforce, so a larger scale of organization is demanded. In this regard, it is worth considering establishing an independent sexual assault response agency such as the U.S. military's SAPRO (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office). Second, rejection of the approach of separating female soldiers in relation to the prevention of sexual violence is not recommendable. When the commander's responsibility for eradicating sexual violence within the military is strengthened, there is a tendency to associate the possibility of the occurrence of sexual violence incidents with the presence of women in the unit. In order to prevent sexual violence, it is an important policy task to improve the consciousness of military executives who are influential because a culture organized and formed with gender equality is important. In order to prevent sexual violence, the power of influence of a culture organized and formed with gender equality, which can greatly improve the consciousness of executive members of the military, is an important policy task