

Reports of sexual assault rise sharply at elite U.S. military academy



New York, Feb 10 (RHC)-- There was a sharp rise in reports of sexual assault at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, in the last academic year, according to a new Pentagon study, underscoring an issue that has long plagued the military and its academies.

The annual report said 50 cases of sexual assault had been reported at the elite military academy during the 2016-2017 academic year, nearly double the number from the previous school year.

The U.S. Military Academy is funded by the U.S. Army, the land warfare service branch of the U.S. armed forces. It is one of the four U.S. military service academies.

The number of reports of sexual assault at the U.S. Air Force Academy and Naval Academy also increased. Overall, reports of sexual assault across the three academies increased 30 percent in the past school year.

The report also said that late in the academic year, the military found significant evidence of mismanagement and unprofessionalism at the sexual assault prevention office at the Air Force Academy.

Sexual assault in the U.S. military has long been a massive problem, with service members reporting more than 20,000 allegations of sexual assault at military installations over the past four years. Sexual violence in the U.S. armed forces is largely under-reported and came under renewed scrutiny last year after a scandal surfaced involving some Marines sharing nude photos of women on the Internet.

In a report released in November, the U.S. military's Sexual Assault and Prevention Office (SAPRO) said 20,300 sexual assault cases have been filed since 2013. But many victims never report incidents, so the real number is likely far higher, according to a Pentagon report, which also found victims often face retaliation for coming forward.

The new report comes amid an ongoing wave of revelations about sexual harassment in the US, which has toppled a number of powerful men in entertainment, politics, business and the media.

Last month, a group of active and retired U.S. troops gathered in freezing temperatures outside the Defense Department near Washington to protest against sexual harassment. The protesters expressed support for a proposed legislation in Congress that would make it easier for victims to report sexual misconduct in the US armed forces.

The protesters, most of them women and none in uniform, carried placards that read "Denial is not a policy", "Stop the retaliation", and "#MeTooMilitary," a reference to the social media campaign with the #MeToo hashtag denouncing sexual assault in the workplace.

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