

Lawmakers surprised at amount of military sex

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Lawmakers who toured U.S. military bases found surprisingly high levels of consensual sex among service members and varying attitudes among commanders about sexual misconduct.

Members of the House National Security Committee reported interim findings yesterday from an inquiry that took them to military installations across the country and around the world.

"That's my surprise — how much consensual sex was going on," said Rep. Stephen Buyer, Indiana Republican and chairman of the National Security personnel subcommittee. "Then the question is, when does consensual sex start to undermine the good order and discipline of the military?"

Mr. Buyer and two congresswomen, who conducted the inquiry, said they are grappling with how to enforce order and discipline in the ranks without invading private lives of consenting adults.

Rep. Jane Harman, California Democrat, said the military must become more sensitive to issues involving sexual harassment as women assume growing importance in the ranks. But she said the military must be careful not to overshoot the goal.

"It's not that women are supposed to be given special treatment," Mrs. Harman said.

"They're supposed to be given the same treatment."

Generally, the military does not punish consensual sex unless it involves a service member of a higher rank engaging in sex with a subordinate. That is considered fraternization.

Although the congressional panel found that the behavior uncovered at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., was the exception in the military rather than the rule, an interim report identified several problems in military training and discipline:

- Service members involuntarily chosen to be drill sergeants are not required to go through psychological screening. The much smaller number who volunteer for the training duty undergo psychological testing that the report described as "only a 'check-the-box' routine."
- Many soldiers interviewed said they consider drill-sergeant duty a career-ending assignment.
- Some drill sergeants complain that basic training has become "kinder and gentler," with such techniques as "stress cards" that recruits can pull out when a training situation becomes more than they can handle.
- Lawmakers found that some commanders "take preventing sexual misconduct much more seriously than others."