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## DOD Sex Assault Reports up 8 Percent

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The number of sexual assaults reported by military service members increased 8 percent in 2014, but details set for release Thursday and a new anonymous survey suggest victims are becoming far more willing to come forward and seek help or file complaints than in years past, officials told The Associated Press.

The officials said there were nearly 6,000 victims of reported assaults in 2014, compared with just over 5,500 last year. **The Pentagon** changed its method of accounting for the assaults this year, and now each victim counts for one report.

Using last year's accounting methods, there were roughly 5,400 sexual assaults reported as of the end of the 2014 fiscal year on Sept. 30, compared with a little more than 5,000 last year. That increase comes on the heels of an unprecedented 50 percent spike in reporting in the previous year.

Based on those numbers, and the anonymous survey conducted by the Rand Corp., officials said that about 1 in every 4 victims filed a report this year, in sharp contrast to 2012, when only about 1 in every 10 military victims came forward.

Two years ago, the anonymous survey conducted by the Defense Department found that about 26,000 services members said they had been the victim of unwanted sexual contact ? a number that stunned officials and outraged lawmakers, triggering a barrage of congressional hearings and legislative changes.

This year, that number dropped to about 19,000 ? including about 10,500 men and 8,500 women ? which officials said suggested that there was a trend of sexual assaults declining.

Officials discussed the latest reports on condition of anonymity because the survey results and sexual assault statistics have not been publicly released. Many of the numbers are preliminary and could change a bit as the reports are finalized.

Officials said the decision to change the accounting system to have a report for every victim, rather than one report for an incident that could have multiple victims, would provide greater accuracy. Using that system, there were 3,604 victims in 2012, 5,518 in 2013, and 5,983 in 2014.

Defense officials discussed the results with the White House on Tuesday and were expected to release the reports publicly on Thursday.

The reports come as Congress continues to press for an overhaul of the military justice system to change the way that sexual assault cases are handled. Lawmakers complain that the Pentagon has not done enough to combat sexual assault across the military and make it easier and more acceptable for victims to report harassment and assaults.

Victims had complained that they were not comfortable going to commanders to report assaults, particularly in the stern military culture that emphasizes rank, loyalty and strength.

In fact, one of the ongoing problems highlighted in the new survey is that more than 60 percent of the women who said they reported some type of unwanted sexual contact complained they also experienced retaliation. Most said they felt social backlash from co-workers or other service members.

"Pending the report's public release tomorrow, assuming news accounts are correct ? reporting of assaults being up and incidents of assault being down are exactly the combination we're looking for. I'm sure there's more work to do, and I'm anxious to hear how victims feel about the services and support offered to them when they report an assault," said Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo.