



February 2024

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106589](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Safety from sexual harassment and other harmful behaviors such as sexual assault helps ensure the effectiveness, retention, and morale of the federal workforce, according to federal government research. DOD and other federal agencies have taken steps to address such behaviors, but data show that sexual harassment persists and is underreported.

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 includes a provision for GAO to review sexual harassment prevention training at DOD and other federal agencies. This report examines (1) the extent to which selected DOD components and federal agencies have incorporated management practices to enhance the effectiveness of their required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees, and (2) the extent to which DOD conducted oversight of such training. GAO selected seven DOD components and six federal agencies and assessed their training, reviewed guidance, and interviewed relevant officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 14 recommendations, including that selected DOD components and federal agencies develop and implement training evaluation plans and DOD develop and implement a plan to conduct oversight of training. DOD and other federal agencies generally concurred with the recommendations and noted actions that they planned to take.

View [GAO-24-106589](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

February 2024

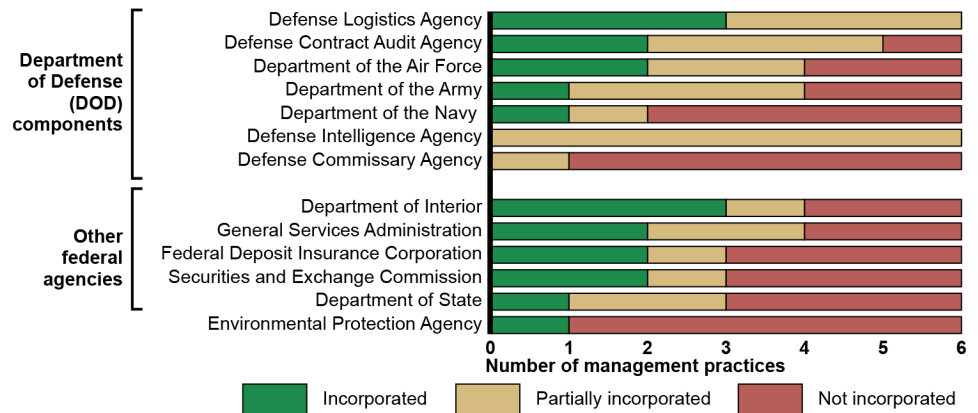
SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees

What GAO Found

Selected Department of Defense (DOD) components and other federal agencies vary in the extent to which they have incorporated management practices to enhance the effectiveness of the sexual harassment prevention training they require their federal civilian employees to complete. All seven DOD components and six other federal agencies in this review require their employees to complete some sexual harassment prevention training. However, none of them have fully incorporated GAO and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission management practices to enhance the effectiveness of their training content and the implementation of such training (see figure). They also do not know if their training needs improvements because they have not developed and implemented plans to evaluate its effectiveness. Without training evaluation plans to identify needed improvements, they may be missing opportunities to foster a climate free from harassment.

Number of Management Practices Selected DOD Components and Federal Agencies Incorporated to Enhance Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Implementation as of October 2023



Source: GAO analysis of selected agencies' training materials. | GAO-24-106589

DOD conducts limited oversight of required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees. For example, DOD's Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion requested that components self-assess their compliance with anti-harassment training programs. However, it does not routinely review civilian sexual harassment prevention training, as required by DOD policy, or have plans to do so. Developing and implementing a plan to oversee sexual harassment prevention training could help DOD to better ensure that it is consistent with DOD's requirements.

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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EEOC	U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
No FEAR	Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act
ODEI	Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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February 26, 2024

Congressional Committees

Safety from sexual harassment and other harmful behaviors in the workplace is key to helping ensure the effectiveness, retention, and morale of the federal workforce, according to federal government research.¹ In 2023, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness identified sexual harassment and sexual assault as persistent and corrosive problems across the Department of Defense (DOD) that require cultural and organizational change to improve accountability, prevention, and victim care and support.² Similarly, in April 2023, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported that harassment remains a concern in the federal sector, noting that it has been the number one issue alleged in federal agency employment discrimination complaints since at least fiscal year 2011.

Although DOD and other federal agencies have taken steps to address harmful behaviors in their respective workforces, U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board data show that sexual harassment persists and is significantly underreported. Specifically, 12.6 percent of federal employees surveyed by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board in 2021—nearly 4,200 in total—reported that they experienced sexual

¹For purposes of this report, we use the term “harmful behaviors” as an umbrella term that collectively refers to hazing, bullying, and other types of interpersonal and self-directed harm, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and suicide.

²Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Actions to Address and Prevent Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military* (Apr. 26, 2023). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the DOD define sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. This conduct constitutes unlawful sexual harassment when it is so severe or pervasive that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision. DOD defines sexual assault as intentional sexual contact characterized by the use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent. Sexual assault includes a broad category of sexual offenses, including rape, sexual assault, aggravated sexual contact, abusive sexual contact, forcible sodomy (forced oral or anal sex), or attempts to commit these offenses. DOD Directive 6495.01, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program* (Jan. 23, 2012) (incorporating change 5, Nov. 10, 2021).

harassment in the prior 2 years.³ According to the survey, the percent of women stating they experienced sexual harassment ranged across federal agencies from a low of 9 percent to a high of 28 percent. The percent of women overall at DOD stating they experienced sexual harassment over this period was 13 percent. For the departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force it was 16, 20, and 15 percent, respectively. However, according to EEOC officials, they receive relatively few related complaints per year from federal employees government wide.⁴

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board has reported that while rates of sexual harassment in the federal government have trended down over the past 2 decades, they are still unacceptable. To that end, the EEOC has identified practices that it notes have generally proven effective in preventing and addressing harassment, including sexual harassment, such as committed and engaged leadership; strong and comprehensive anti-harassment policies; and regular, interactive training tailored to the audience and organization.⁵

In February 2021, we identified challenges with DOD's prevention of and response to sexual harassment and sexual assault involving its federal civilian employees, including challenges with respect to related training. We made 19 recommendations aimed at improving the tracking of,

³We used U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board data to calculate the approximate number of surveyed federal employees who reported they were sexually harassed on the job. There were 33,138 respondents to the 2021 survey and 12.6 percent of those respondents reported experiencing harassment (nearly 4,200 in total). Per the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, the survey population is functionally almost identical to the corresponding government-wide population and the survey can provide a useful measure of employee experiences government-wide. There were 27 federal departments and agencies that participated in this survey and they account for approximately 98 percent of the permanent full-time federal workforce covered by the Enterprise HR Integration–Statistical Data Mart (a government-wide workforce data repository maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management). U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: Understanding and Addressing the Problem* (December 2022), *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: 2021 Update* (June 2023), and *2021 Merit Principles Survey Design and Methodology*.

⁴EEOC officials stated that they receive about 600 sexual harassment complaints annually from a total of about 3 million federal employees.

⁵EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector* (April 2023).

response to, and prevention of these behaviors, among other things.⁶ Our prior work has identified similar challenges in preventing and responding to harmful behaviors at other federal agencies. We have made more than 20 recommendations to address agencies' prevention and response efforts, including improving employee training.⁷

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 included a provision for us to review training to prevent sexual harassment at DOD compared to other federal agencies as well as to review data collected by colleges and universities and other relevant outside entities on harmful behaviors.⁸ This report assesses (1) the extent to which selected DOD components and federal agencies have incorporated management practices to enhance the effectiveness of their required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees, and (2) the extent to which DOD conducted oversight of required federal civilian sexual harassment prevention training. We also reviewed what is known about the data organizations and researchers collected regarding the occurrence of harmful behaviors at colleges, universities, and workplaces from calendar years 2018 through 2023 (see appendix I). For purposes of this report, we use "required sexual harassment prevention training" to refer to the sexual harassment prevention training that the selected DOD components and federal agencies included in our review told us they require of all their employees.

For our first objective, we reviewed our prior work and EEOC documentation and identified management practices to enhance the

⁶As of December 2023, DOD has implemented four of the 19 recommendations. GAO, *Sexual Harassment and Assault: Guidance Needed to Ensure Consistent Tracking, Response, and Training for DOD Civilians*, [GAO-21-113](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 9, 2021).

⁷A listing of these reports is included in the Related GAO Products page at the end of this report.

⁸Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 547(b) (2022).

effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.⁹ We then used those practices to assess the sexual harassment prevention training that DOD components and federal agencies require their federal civilian employees to complete.¹⁰ Specifically, we selected seven DOD components based on their inclusion in our February 2021 report, and six other federal agencies based on workforce size, geographic spread, and inclusion in recent surveys on sexual harassment prevalence in federal workplaces.¹¹ We reviewed sexual harassment prevention training and anti-harassment training, which includes sexual harassment, that the selected DOD components and federal agencies included in our review

⁹We identified two sets of management practices focused on enhancing the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training: (1) 13 leading practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content that were developed and reported in our prior work and (2) six promising practices to enhance the effectiveness of training implementation that were identified by the EEOC. See GAO, *Sexual Harassment and Assault: Guidance Needed to Ensure Consistent Tracking, Response, and Training for DOD Civilians*, [GAO-21-113](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 9, 2021) and EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector*. We collectively refer to these as management practices for the purposes of this report. See tables 1 and 2 for lists of these practices.

¹⁰Our review focused on DOD's sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees because DOD has different guidance for service members. Thus, a review of service member training may not be comparable to the training provided to civilian employees at the other federal agencies included in our review. Training provided to federal contractors was not included in the scope of our review because, according to DOD officials, the response to sexual harassment incidents involving federal contractors depends in part on the contracting company and the terms of the federal contractor's employment.

¹¹The seven DOD components included in our review are the Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, Department of the Air Force, Defense Commissary Agency, Defense Contract Audit Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and Defense Logistics Agency; see [GAO-21-113](#) for the selection methodology. The six other selected federal agencies included in our review are the Department of the Interior, Department of State, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, General Services Administration, and Securities and Exchange Commission.

told us all their employees must complete. The required training we reviewed includes statutorily-required training, in some instances.¹²

For our second objective, we reviewed applicable DOD guidance and interviewed appropriate officials. Specifically, we reviewed relevant DOD policies and guidance specifying oversight responsibilities for sexual harassment prevention training as well as related documentation. We also conducted interviews with DOD officials about those responsibilities. We compared our review of documents and interviews to our work on substantive program planning. See appendix II for a detailed description of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2023 to February 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Harmful Behaviors and the Effect on Workplace Environments

DOD has found that harmful behaviors do not exist in isolation but are part of a continuum of harm.¹³ DOD has described the continuum of harm as a range of interconnected, inappropriate behaviors that are connected to the occurrence of sexual assault and support an environment that tolerates these behaviors. DOD has reported that by increasing attention to less harmful behaviors, such as sexual harassment, it can reduce the

¹²We asked the selected DOD components and federal agencies to identify and provide the current (as of October 2023) training that they require all their federal civilian employees to complete related to the prevention of sexual harassment. In response to our request, agencies submitted a variety of material, ranging from required training that specifically addressed sexual harassment to statutorily-required No FEAR Act training that addressed harassing conduct more generally. Anti-harassment training is applicable to a range of harassing behavior on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, protected activity, age, or disability. This ranged from one to three distinct trainings per component or agency. Unless otherwise specified, we refer to these agency-identified trainings as required sexual harassment prevention training for the purposes of this report. See appendix II for more details.

¹³DOD defines harmful behaviors as self-directed harm and prohibited abuse and harm, including sexual assault, harassment, retaliation, suicide, domestic abuse, and child abuse. DOD Instruction 6400.11, *DOD Integrated Primary Prevention Policy for Prevention Workforce and Leaders* (Dec. 20, 2022) (incorporating Change 1, Apr. 4, 2023).

prevalence of those behaviors as well as the prevalence of more egregious behaviors, such as sexual assault.

Harmful behaviors in the federal workplace negatively affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal government. According to DOD, its data have shown that climate factors such as toxic leadership, harassment (including hazing and bullying), discrimination, and lack of social support increase the risk of multiple harmful behaviors occurring. DOD has found that these behaviors affect force readiness, disrupt mission effectiveness, tax scarce resources, and take a human toll. According to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, employees who either experience or observe sexual harassment witness its negative impact on productivity and work satisfaction. These employees may use annual leave or sick leave either to avoid their harasser or to address illness resulting from the stress of being harassed. Ultimately, these employees may choose to leave or may be involuntarily reassigned or relocated to separate them from their harasser and prevent retaliation.¹⁴

Similarly, a 2016 EEOC select task force co-chairs' report found that employees who experience workplace harassment experience mental, physical, and economic harm, and that all workers are affected. The report also stated that the true cost of workplace harassment includes decreased productivity, increased turnover, and reputational harm.¹⁵

Given the shared risk of many harmful behaviors, DOD has increased its focus on finding shared solutions for preventing their occurrence.¹⁶ Specifically, DOD has emphasized the importance of integrated primary prevention—prevention activities that simultaneously address multiple harmful behaviors through a cohesive and comprehensive approach. For example, DOD has developed a Prevention Plan of Action that outlines

¹⁴U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: Understanding and Addressing the Problem*.

¹⁵EEOC, *Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace: Report of Co-Chairs Chai R. Feldblum & Victoria A. Lipnic* (June 2016).

¹⁶DOD defines protective factors as individual or environmental characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events (e.g., inclusion, help-seeking behavior, financial literacy). These factors increase the ability to avoid risks and promote healthy behaviors to thrive in all aspects of life. DOD defines risk factors as factors that increase the likelihood of self-directed harm and prohibited abusive or harmful acts. DOD Instruction 6400.09, *DOD Policy on Integrated Primary Prevention of Self-Directed Harm and Prohibited Abuse or Harm* (Sept. 11, 2020).

the department's strategic approach to preventing harmful behaviors.¹⁷ It has also established an integrated prevention research agenda.

Legal Framework Prohibiting Workplace Sexual Harassment

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) prohibits covered employers from discriminating against job applicants or employees because of their race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, and pregnancy), or national origin.¹⁸ The Supreme Court has held that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title VII when it meets certain criteria.¹⁹ Private, state, and local government employers with 15 or more employees, as well as federal employers, are generally covered by Title VII.²⁰

According to EEOC guidelines, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute unlawful sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions, or (3) the conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.²¹ For sexual harassment to constitute a "hostile environment" in violation of Title VII, it must be sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the victim's employment and create a hostile working environment.

Federal Agency Roles and Responsibilities for Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response

All federal agencies have roles and responsibilities related to sexual harassment prevention and response. Federal agencies must have a process for investigating and resolving formal Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints of discrimination, including complaints of sexual harassment. They must also have an affirmative program of equal employment opportunity. As part of such programs, the EEOC expects federal agencies to have an effective anti-harassment policy that is

¹⁷DOD, *Prevention Plan of Action 2.0 2022-2024* (May 2022).

¹⁸42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2; see also, *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, 140 S. Ct. 1731 (2020).

¹⁹See, e.g., *Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57 (1986).

²⁰See 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000e(b), (f), 2000e-16(a).

²¹29 C.F.R. § 1604.11(a).

designed to prevent harassing behaviors, in addition to the formal EEO complaint process.

Regulations implementing the Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (No FEAR Act) require federal agencies to provide training to their employees, including managers, at least every 2 years on the rights and remedies available, by law, to those who have experienced discrimination or other types of harassment, including sexual harassment.²² In addition, the EEOC states that anti-harassment training should be provided periodically to non-supervisory employees as well as supervisors and managers at all levels of the agency.²³ The EEOC notes that to help prevent and properly address sexual harassment, employees and management must be aware of prohibited conduct, how to prevent it, and how to correct it.

The EEOC is the primary federal agency responsible for enforcing federal laws on employment discrimination, including sexual harassment, and oversees federal agencies' EEO programs. Among other things, the EEOC ensures federal agency compliance with EEOC requirements by reviewing agencies' EEO policies, including policies on sexual harassment, and by assisting agencies with identifying and addressing any deficiencies. Agencies submit annual reports to the EEOC on the status of EEO activities, which the EEOC reviews.²⁴ If the EEOC finds an agency's program is not in compliance, and the agency does not successfully undertake efforts to achieve compliance, the EEOC can publicly identify agencies' noncompliance.²⁵

The EEOC also provides guidance to private and public sector entities on preventing and addressing discrimination in the workplace, including sexual harassment. For example, in April 2023, the EEOC issued

²²The No FEAR Act training requirements more broadly cover rights and remedies available under employment discrimination and whistleblower protection laws, including sexual harassment. Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-174 (2002), *as amended*, 5 U.S.C. § 2301 note. See 5 C.F.R. § 724.203.

²³EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector*.

²⁴EEOC's Management Directive 715 requires federal agencies to annually submit a report on the status of activities undertaken pursuant to their EEO programs under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, including a plan that sets forth the steps they will take in the future to correct deficiencies. See EEOC, *EEO Management Directive 715* (Oct. 1, 2003).

²⁵29 C.F.R. § 1614.102(e).

Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector.²⁶ It lists practices that are required per EEOC guidance as well as additional promising practices that federal agencies are strongly urged to consider incorporating to improve their anti-harassment programs, prevent workplace harassment, and promote effective compliance with the law.

DOD Roles and Responsibilities for Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response

DOD has the same roles and responsibilities as other federal agencies for sexual harassment prevention and response among federal civilian employees. Within DOD, multiple offices share these roles and responsibilities.

- The **Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness** is responsible for establishing and overseeing DOD-wide sexual harassment prevention and response policies and procedures for DOD federal civilian employees, among other things.²⁷
- The **Director, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI)** is responsible for developing and implementing DOD policy to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. This Director oversees DOD's civilian EEO program, among other things.²⁸ Specifically, the Director is to conduct compliance reviews of DOD component policies and procedures regarding sexual harassment prevention and response, including training compliance.
- **DOD components** are responsible for establishing policies and procedures to prevent and respond to sexual harassment; mechanisms to collect, track, assess, and analyze data related to sexual harassment; and workforce training concerning policies and procedures to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. Specifically, DOD components are responsible for establishing their respective EEO programs and maintaining informal and formal complaint processes within the component.²⁹ They are also responsible for providing training programs to teach civilian

²⁶EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector*.

²⁷DOD Instruction 1020.04 outlines departmental responsibilities for harassment prevention and response more broadly, including sexual harassment.

²⁸DOD Instruction 1020.04 and DOD Directive 1020.02E, *Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity in the DOD* (June 8, 2015) (incorporating change 2, June 1, 2018).

²⁹DOD Instruction 1020.04 and DOD Directive 1020.02E.

employees at all levels how to identify and prevent sexual harassment.³⁰

Selected Agencies Incorporated Some Management Practices, but Have Not Evaluated Training for Needed Improvements

The 13 selected DOD components and other federal agencies in our review vary in the extent to which they have incorporated management practices for enhancing the content and implementation of sexual harassment prevention training. In addition, these selected DOD components and other federal agencies have not evaluated their sexual harassment prevention training to identify if improvements are needed.

Incorporating management practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content. Our prior work has identified 13 management practices, such as clearly defining key terms and describing reporting processes, that help ensure training comprehensively covers topics related to the prevention of and response to sexual harassment (see table 1).³¹ We previously identified these practices through a review of relevant reports and studies, consultation with internal and external subject-matter experts, and an analysis to identify areas of overlap across the practices identified.³²

Table 1: Management Practices for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Content

- | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Clearly defines and describes prohibited sexual harassment and conduct that, if left unchecked, might ultimately rise to the level of prohibited sexual harassment. |
| 2. Clarifies what type of conduct is not considered sexual harassment. |
| 3. Provides explanations of the range of possible consequences for engaging in conduct unacceptable in the workplace, including that corrective action will generally be proportionate to the severity of the conduct. |
| 4. Includes information about non-supervisory and supervisory employees' respective rights and responsibilities if they experience, observe, or become aware of conduct that they believe may be prohibited. |
| 5. Encourages employees to report harassing conduct. |

³⁰DOD Instruction 1400.25, Volume 410, *DOD Civilian Personnel Management System: Training, Education, and Professional Development* (Sept. 25, 2013) (incorporating change 1, Aug. 2, 2021).

³¹[GAO-21-113](#).

³²See appendix II for a complete description of the development of the 13 GAO-identified practices for enhancing the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training content.

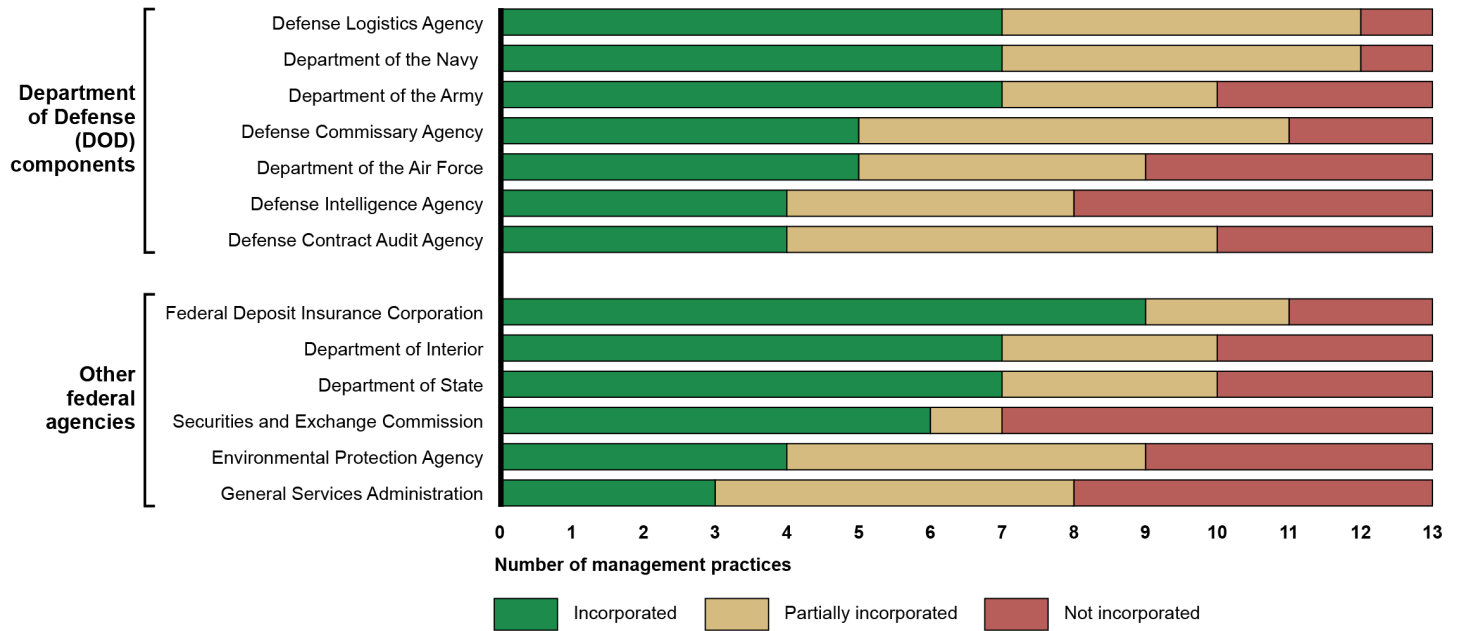
-
-
6. Includes information that explains, in practical terms, the agency's federal sector Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) process and its alternative complaint process, including that:
 - a. the federal sector EEO process and an agency's internal complaint process exist for different purposes;
 - b. filing a claim under the agency's internal complaint process does not extend the time deadline for initiating EEO contact in the federal sector EEO process; and
 - c. the internal complaint process will likely be concluded before the EEO process and the investigation may be considered if the matter goes formal.
 7. Describes, in a clear and concise manner, the processes for reporting sexual harassment and other lesser forms of sexual misconduct that are experienced, observed, or that employees otherwise become aware of. Distinguishes between reporting pursuant to internal agency policy and initiating an EEO complaint of discrimination.
 8. Describes in simple terms how allegations reported pursuant to internal agency policy will be investigated, including:
 - a. an assurance that, to the extent possible, the agency will protect the confidentiality of participants;
 - b. how an investigation will take place; and
 - c. the information that may be requested during an investigation, including: the name or a description of the alleged harasser(s), alleged victim(s), and any witnesses; the date(s) of the alleged harassment; the location(s) of the alleged harassment; and a description of the alleged harassment, if the employee is able to provide it. Lack of such information does not preclude an employee filing a complaint.
 9. Makes clear that the agency will take all reports seriously and investigate them in a prompt, thorough, and impartial manner.
 10. Makes clear that the agency will not tolerate retaliation and will ensure that applicants and employees who report sexual harassment, participate in investigations, or engage in other protected activity will not be retaliated against for doing so.
 11. Includes examples that are tailored to the specific workplace and workforce.
 12. Identifies and provides contact information for the individual(s) and/or office(s) responsible for addressing sexual harassment and sexual misconduct questions, concerns, and complaints.
 13. Provides a short video or prerecorded remarks from senior leadership. This shows demonstrated commitment from agency leadership and sets the tone for the training.
-

Source: GAO-identified practices for training content developed in [GAO-21-113](#). | GAO-24-106589

Selected DOD components and other federal agencies vary in the extent to which the training materials for the sexual harassment prevention training they require include the 13 GAO-identified practices for enhancing the effectiveness of training content. For example, we identified two practices that most of the selected DOD components and federal agencies have incorporated in their training materials. Specifically, 11 of the 13 components and agencies incorporated the practices of (1) encouraging employees to report harassing conduct, and (2) identifying and providing contact information for responsible individuals or offices.

However, incorporation of the remaining practices varied. Figure 1 shows the extent to which selected DOD components and federal agencies incorporated the 13 practices related to training content into its materials for required sexual harassment prevention training. See appendix III for a more detailed assessment of each DOD component's and federal agency's incorporation of these management practices into their training materials.

Figure 1: Number of Management Practices Selected DOD Components and Federal Agencies Incorporated to Enhance Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Content, as of October 2023



Source: GAO analysis of selected agencies' training materials. | GAO-24-106589

Note: These management practices refer to 13 leading practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content, developed and reported in our prior work. See GAO, *Sexual Harassment and Assault: Guidance Needed to Ensure Consistent Tracking, Response, and Training for DOD Civilians*, [GAO-21-113](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 9, 2021).

In our assessment of training materials for the seven DOD components, we found that they ranged in the number of the 13 practices that they at least partially incorporated, from a low of eight practices to a high of 12 practices.³³ Specifically, six of the seven DOD components' training materials incorporated the practice of clearly defining and describing prohibited sexual harassment, and five of the seven components incorporated examples that are tailored to the specific workforce. One component provided a short video or prerecorded remarks from senior leadership to demonstrate leadership commitment—a practice that has

³³We determined a practice was "incorporated" if all facets of the practice were demonstrated in the training materials, "partially incorporated" if some, but not all, facets were demonstrated, and "not incorporated" if none of the facets of the practice were demonstrated.

been shown to be key in achieving cultural change within an organization.³⁴

In our assessment of the training materials for the other six selected federal agencies that require their employees to complete sexual harassment prevention training, we similarly identified a range in the number of the 13 practices that they at least partially incorporated, from a low of eight practices to a high of 11 practices. For example, all six agencies' training materials described processes for reporting sexual harassment, including distinguishing between reporting pursuant to internal agency policy and initiating an EEO complaint. However, we found that only two of the six agencies' training materials incorporated examples that are tailored to the specific workforce and one of the six agencies' training materials included a short video or prerecorded remarks from senior leadership to demonstrate leadership commitment.

In February 2021, we reported that the content of sexual harassment prevention training for DOD civilian employees, including the extent to which such training incorporates the GAO-identified practices for training content, varied across DOD components. We recommended that the Secretary of Defense ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in collaboration with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy and the Director of ODEI, issues additional guidance to clearly specify minimum frequency and required content for required sexual harassment prevention training for DOD federal civilian employees in line with leading practices. DOD concurred with the recommendation. In February 2022, DOD stated that it had convened a working group as a step to update the guidance. In September 2023, ODEI officials estimated that the updated guidance would be issued by December 2023. We will continue to monitor DOD's efforts to implement this recommendation.

Incorporating management practices to enhance the effectiveness of training implementation. The EEOC has identified six management practices, such as the use of expert trainers and relevant social science research, that can enhance the effectiveness of the sexual harassment prevention training implementation. While these six practices are not required, the EEOC strongly encourages federal agencies to consider

³⁴GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: GPRA Has Established a Solid Foundation for Achieving Greater Results*, [GAO-04-38](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 10, 2004).

incorporating them into their training to help prevent workplace harassment and to promote effective compliance with law (see table 2).³⁵

Table 2: Management Practices for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Harassment Prevention Training Implementation

-
- | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Regularly revise and update training as needed. |
| 2. Follow training by solicitation of feedback and input from participants to improve its effectiveness. |
| 3. Provide training using trainers who are experts in the topic of harassment. |
| 4. Develop training using relevant social science research on harassment and retaliation. |
| 5. Routinely analyze training to measure its impact on reducing harassment and retaliation in the agency. |
| 6. Conduct training (virtually or in-person) in smaller groups that foster more employee engagement and participation. |
-

Source: Analysis of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) information. | GAO-24-106589

Note: The EEOC listed eight practices to enhance the effectiveness of anti-harassment training implementation, two of which overlapped with GAO-identified practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content. We omitted those two practices in our assessment of training implementation. EEOC officials stated that these practices are applicable to all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment.

The selected DOD components and other federal agencies vary in the extent to which they have incorporated six EEOC practices for enhancing the effectiveness of how sexual harassment prevention training is implemented.³⁶ We identified one practice that most of the selected DOD components and federal agencies have incorporated. Specifically, officials from most of these DOD components and federal agencies stated that they have incorporated the practice of soliciting feedback and input from participants following required training, such as through a survey, to improve its effectiveness (nine of 13 components and agencies).

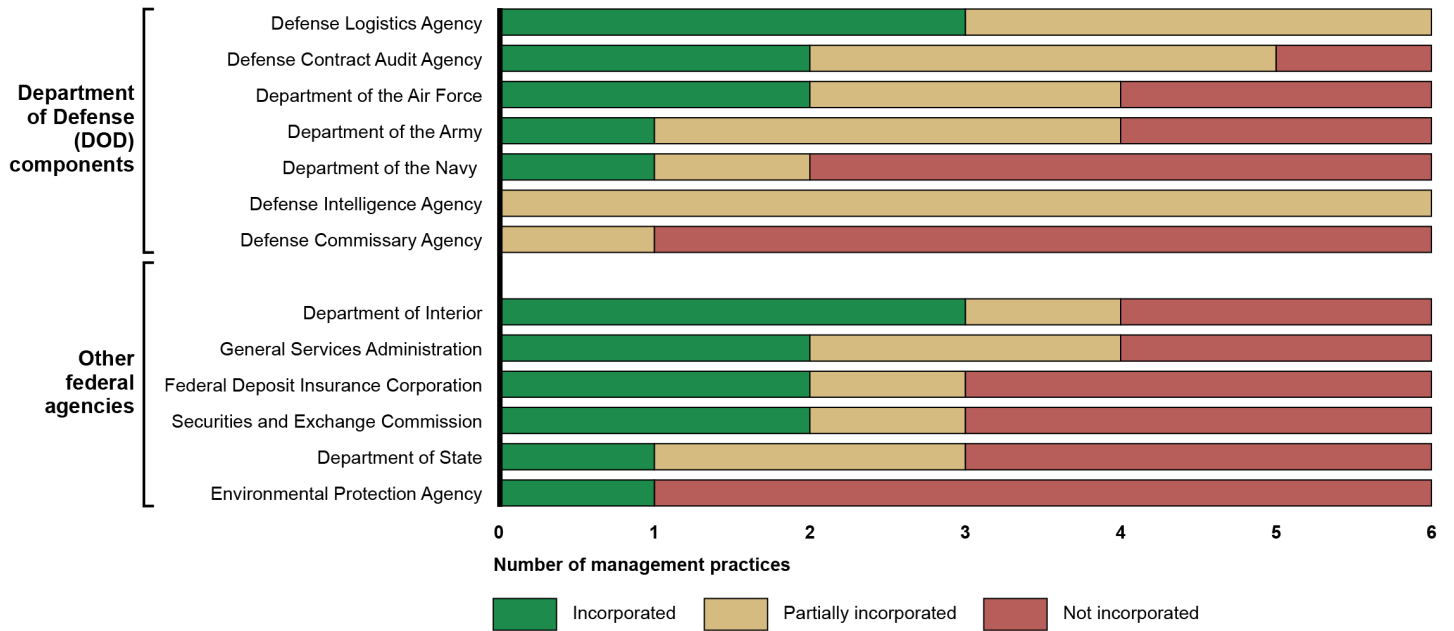
However, incorporation of the remaining practices varied. Figure 2 shows the extent to which each selected DOD component and federal agency has incorporated the EEOC’s six management practices for enhancing the effectiveness of training implementation. See appendix III for a more

³⁵EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector*.

³⁶EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector*. EEOC officials stated that they published the 2023 version to complement a 2017 publication of promising practices because they recognize that harassment continues to be an issue in federal workplaces. The EEOC listed eight practices to enhance the effectiveness of anti-harassment training implementation, two of which overlapped with GAO-identified practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content. We omitted those two practices from our assessment of training implementation. EEOC officials stated that while these practices are focused on anti-harassment training more broadly, they are applicable to all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment.

detailed assessment of each DOD component's and federal agency's incorporation of these EEOC practices.

Figure 2: Number of Management Practices Selected DOD Components and Federal Agencies Incorporated to Enhance Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Implementation, as of October 2023



Source: GAO analysis of selected agencies' training materials. | GAO-24-106589

Note: These management practices refer to six promising practices to enhance the effectiveness of training implementation identified in U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector (April 2023).

For example, in our assessment of the seven DOD components' training programs, we found that they ranged in the number of the six practices that they at least partially incorporated, from a low of one practice to a high of six practices. Specifically, all seven DOD components at least partially incorporated the practice of revising and updating training as needed, but officials from only one component stated that a portion of its training was developed using social science research on harassment and retaliation—a practice designed to help ensure relevant and effective content.

In our assessment of the six selected federal agencies' required sexual harassment prevention training, we found that there was also a range in the number of the six practices that they have at least partially incorporated, from a low of one practice to a high of four practices.

Specifically, similar to what we found with the DOD components, all six agencies at least partially incorporated the practice of revising and updating training as needed. However, none of the agencies incorporated the practice of conducting training in smaller groups to foster more employee engagement and participation.

While we assessed the sexual harassment prevention training that selected DOD components and federal agencies require their federal civilian employees to complete, many of them also offer supplemental optional related training to employees.³⁷ For example, officials described trainings on topics such as cyber harassment, gender equality, and bystander intervention that are available to employees.

Evaluating the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The selected DOD components and other federal agencies in our review do not know if their required sexual harassment prevention training needs improvements, such as incorporating relevant management practices, because they have not developed and implemented plans to evaluate the effectiveness of their training programs. Officials from 11 of the 13 components and agencies stated that they regularly update their required training materials to capture changes to law or policy, but that they have not done so for purposes such as incorporating management practices.

GAO guidance for assessing strategic training and development efforts in the federal government states that it is important for agencies to evaluate their training programs. Training evaluation can identify and highlight emerging and best practices, which in turn can help develop employees and improve agency performance. Furthermore, data collection and analysis plans can guide agencies in assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of training by outlining clear goals about what the training is expected to achieve and agreed-upon measures to ascertain progress toward those goals.³⁸

In its December 2022 report on Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board also highlighted the

³⁷These supplementary training materials and other agency policies and procedures were outside the scope of our management practices assessment.

³⁸GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, [GAO-04-546G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 1, 2004).

importance of evaluating training.³⁹ It states that federal agencies need to evaluate the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training—not only for the purpose of increasing employee knowledge, but also for improving organizational outcomes, such as reducing the prevalence of sexual harassment. Evaluation is essential for organizations to know how well training is working and consider how it might be improved.⁴⁰

Agency officials also told us they experience challenges with evaluating training effectiveness. For example, officials at two agencies stated that measuring the effectiveness of training on sexual harassment is hard to determine. Further, officials at two agencies stated that they do not have enough staffing resources to complete regular training evaluations or updates. However, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board notes that a leading practice in the learning and development community is to evaluate training to the highest level possible. The board's December 2022 report outlines four evaluation levels, which federal agencies could implement based on their unique resource considerations.⁴¹

Officials at one other agency stated that because sexual harassment is not pervasive at the agency, evaluating training has not been necessary. However, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's June 2023 report shows that the estimated prevalence of sexual harassment across federal agencies is higher than the number of reported incidents, underscoring

³⁹U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: Understanding and Addressing the Problem*.

⁴⁰In December 2021, we similarly found that the military services had not assessed the effectiveness of service member harassment prevention and response training. We recommended that the Secretary of Defense take actions to ensure that ODEI and the Diversity Management Operations Center provide the military services with training measures that exhibit the characteristics specified in best practices that GAO identified for developing training programs and the attributes specified in the EEOC's report on harassment in the workplace. DOD concurred with the recommendation. As of October 2023, it has not yet been implemented. GAO, *Military Hazing: DOD Should Address Data Reporting Deficiencies, Training Limitations, and Personnel Shortfalls*, [GAO-22-104066](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2021).

⁴¹U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: Understanding and Addressing the Problem*.

the importance of providing effective prevention training.⁴² The Department of State outlined objectives and milestones for evaluating its sexual harassment prevention training in an internal training strategy for 2022 through 2026. However, Department of State officials were unable to identify documentation to show that it had taken steps to implement them.

Without developing and implementing plans to evaluate their required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements, agencies may be missing opportunities to enhance training effectiveness and reinforce their commitment to fostering a climate free from harassment. Assessing required training to determine whether revisions are required to better align with management practices—both in terms of training content and implementation—could improve its effectiveness and help facilitate the cultural change needed to achieve meaningful progress in reducing the incidence of sexual harassment.

DOD Conducts Limited Oversight of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training

DOD's Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) is responsible for overseeing DOD components' EEO programs, but it does not routinely review required federal civilian sexual harassment prevention training to identify and respond to any deficiencies. DOD guidance states that the Director of ODEI is to conduct compliance reviews of DOD component policies and procedures to prevent and respond to harassment and to assess training, among other things. The Director is also to ensure that these policies and procedures incorporate compliance standards.⁴³

ODEI has taken some steps to conduct oversight of DOD components' EEO programs. Specifically, ODEI compiled an internal report in 2021—required by DOD policy—that provided a baseline assessment of the

⁴²EEOC officials said that there is a disconnect between the number of sexual harassment complaints filed and the survey data on experiences with sexual harassment in federal workplaces. They pointed to the 2016 and 2021 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board surveys, which found the prevalence of sexual harassment to be 14.3 and 12.6 percent, respectively. U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: 2021 Update* (June 2023). However, EEOC officials said that they receive about 600 (0.02 percent) sexual harassment complaints for nearly 3 million federal employees annually. We received and analyzed EEOC complaint data for the DOD components and federal agencies in our review. Our analysis showed that the combined total number of complaints filed from fiscal years 2018 through 2021 for the seven DOD components was 449 and for the six other selected agencies was 67. See appendix IV for additional details on our analysis.

⁴³DOD Instruction 1020.04.

state of harassment in the department.⁴⁴ For the report, ODEI asked DOD components to self-assess their compliance with anti-harassment requirements, including 19 training requirements. In response, DOD components indicated whether their compliance was completed, in progress, or not yet started for each training requirement.

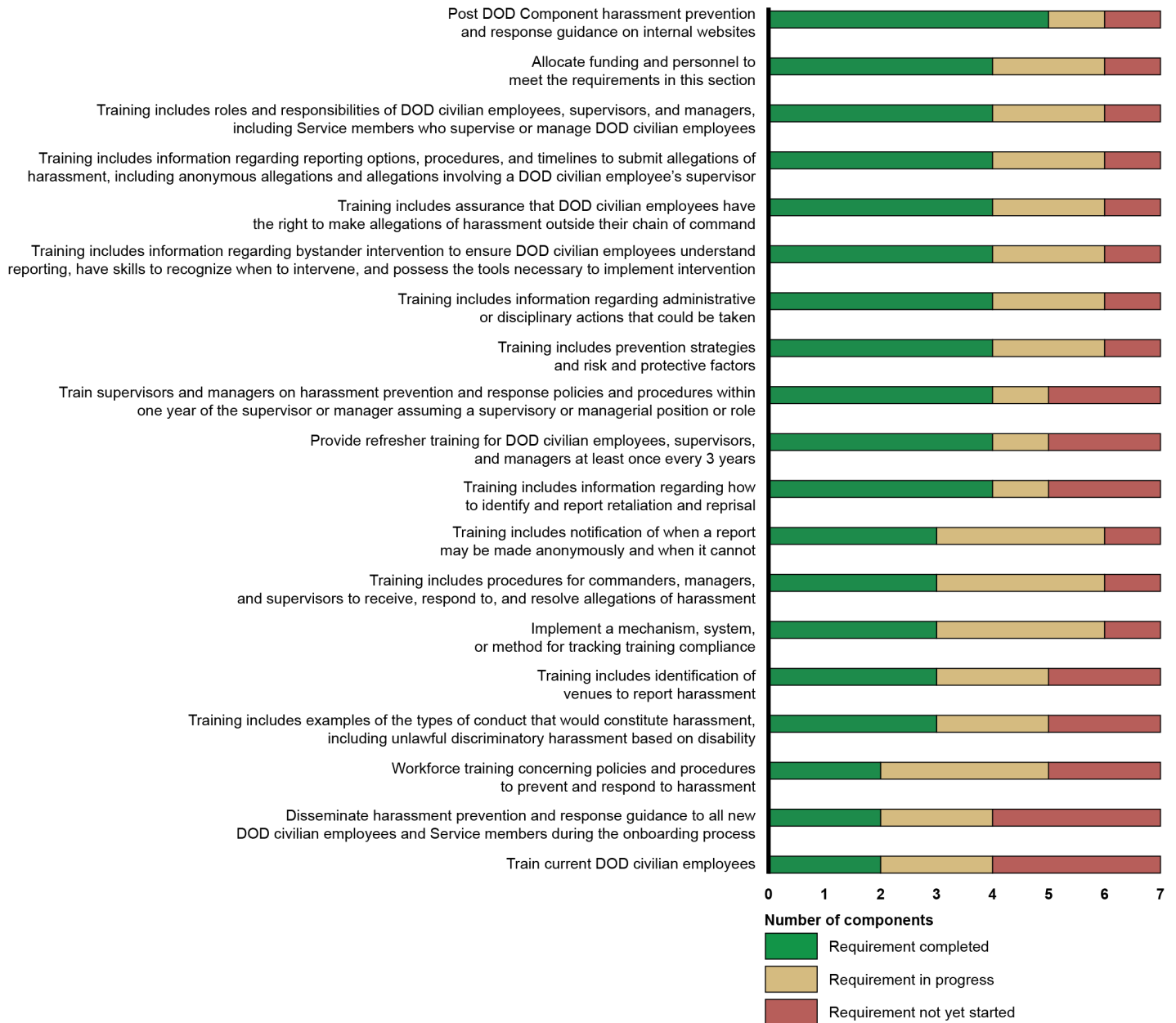
The self-assessments for the seven selected DOD components included in our review showed that the implementation status for half of these requirements was in progress or not yet started.⁴⁵ For example, five of the seven components reported that the status of the requirement to disseminate harassment prevention and response guidance to new DOD civilian employees and service members during the onboarding process was in progress (two components) or not yet started (three components). A senior ODEI official stated that ODEI did not follow up to ensure that any of the training requirements self-identified as in progress or not yet started were resolved nor are there plans to do so. Figure 4 shows the number of training requirements DOD components self-assessed as completed, in progress, or not yet started in fiscal year 2021.⁴⁶

⁴⁴DOD Instruction 1020.04.

⁴⁵Specifically, of 19 training requirements across the seven selected DOD components (133 total requirements), 66 (49.6 percent) had the implementation status completed, 38 (28.6 percent) in-progress, and 29 (21.8 percent) not yet started.

⁴⁶ODEI officials told us they would publish this report every 2 years; however, as of May 2023 they had not yet begun collecting anti-harassment training data from DOD components for the fiscal year 2023 report.

Figure 3: Number of Selected DOD Components with Anti-Harassment Training Requirements Self-Identified as Completed, In-Progress, and Not Yet Started, Fiscal Year 2021



Source: Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-24-106589

Note: The Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) published the DOD components' self-assessments in a fiscal year 2021 report. ODEI officials told us they would collect this information every 2 years; however, as of May 2023, they had not yet begun collecting anti-harassment training data from DOD components for the fiscal year 2023 report.

Our prior work has demonstrated that substantive planning is necessary to establish clear goals and objectives, and to collect performance data needed for gauging program progress and identifying weaknesses.⁴⁷ A senior ODEI official stated that while the office would like to conduct oversight activities to proactively identify issues in components' EEO programs, such as reviewing sexual harassment prevention training, it has not developed or implemented a plan to do so.

A senior ODEI official said that limited staffing resources is a significant factor that affects the office's ability to conduct oversight of DOD components' sexual harassment prevention and response efforts, given competing responsibilities. Standard practices for program management state that resource management planning is used to identify existing resources and the need for additional resources. When resources are scarce, the program manager should work to ensure resources are shared among different components within a program to avoid delays in program implementation. In particular, when resources are unavailable within the program, the program manager should call upon the larger organization for assistance.⁴⁸

In lieu of conducting their own review of components' sexual harassment prevention training and related programs, a senior ODEI official stated that they rely on the EEOC's regular reviews of federal agencies' compliance with EEO program requirements to stay abreast of potential issues with DOD's sexual harassment prevention efforts, to include

⁴⁷GAO, *A Call For Stewardship: Enhancing the Federal Government's Ability to Address Key Fiscal and Other 21st Century Challenges*, [GAO-08-93SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 2007).

⁴⁸Project Management Institute, Inc., *The Standard for Program Management – Fourth Edition* (2017). The Project Management Institute is a not-for-profit association that, among other things, provides standards for managing various aspects of projects, programs, and portfolios.

training.⁴⁹ However, EEOC officials told us that these reviews do not include a review of sexual harassment prevention training.⁵⁰

Without developing and implementing a plan with clear goals, objectives, performance measures, and required resources to oversee DOD components' sexual harassment prevention training, ODEI will continue to be unable to perform its oversight responsibilities. Such a plan could help the department to identify what resources are needed to conduct oversight and adjust them as needed. Enhanced oversight by ODEI could help to ensure that DOD components are providing sexual harassment prevention training that is consistent with the department's requirements. Developing and implementing such a plan could also help ODEI to gauge program progress, identify and address weaknesses to its oversight, and take appropriate action.

Conclusions

Sexual harassment and other harmful behaviors are underreported incidents that affect the overall effectiveness, retention, and morale of the federal workforce. A 2021 survey found that 12.6 percent of federal employees surveyed reported that they had been sexually harassed on the job in the prior 2 years. Selected DOD and other federal agencies have taken steps to prevent sexual harassment and other harmful behaviors, such as by requiring their federal civilian employees to receive training on the topic. However, we identified opportunities to improve this training as well as related oversight. Specifically, the selected DOD components and federal agencies have not fully incorporated management practices to enhance the effectiveness of their training content or its implementation. Without evaluating this training to identify needed improvements, such as better alignment with management practices, they may be missing opportunities to enhance training effectiveness and make meaningful progress in reducing the incidence of sexual harassment in the federal workforce.

Further, DOD has not fulfilled its responsibilities for overseeing sexual harassment prevention policies and procedures. The department has not

⁴⁹The EEOC conducts annual EEO program reviews of all federal agencies per Management Directive 715.

⁵⁰Officials said that the EEOC would review a federal agency's training to prevent sexual harassment if there is an indication of an issue. For example, an issue with sexual harassment became public at the Department of the Interior in 2019 and the EEOC had initiated a program evaluation in 2018 that included a review of anti-harassment training. As a result, the EEOC recommended that the Department of the Interior revise its training content and develop tools to measure the effectiveness of the training.

reviewed sexual harassment prevention training to identify and respond to any deficiencies, nor has it developed a plan to conduct such oversight. Developing and implementing such a plan could help the department identify the resources needed to conduct oversight and better ensure that DOD components are providing training that is consistent with the department's requirements and help to gauge program progress.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making a total of 14 recommendations, with one each to the Department of the Interior, Department of State, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, General Services Administration, Securities and Exchange Commission, and eight to DOD.

The Secretary of the Interior should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of State should implement the department's plan to evaluate its required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation should also include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 2)

The Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 3)

The Chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 4)

The Administrator of the General Services Administration should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 5)

The Chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 6)

The Secretary of the Army should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 7)

The Secretary of the Navy should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 8)

The Secretary of the Air Force should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 9)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Commissary Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal

civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 10)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Contract Audit Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 11)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 12)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Logistics Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 13)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in collaboration with the Director of the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, develops and implements a plan for the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to perform its responsibilities for overseeing DOD component sexual harassment prevention training. The plan should include clear goals, objectives, performance measures, and required resources for gauging its progress, identifying weaknesses, and taking appropriate action. (Recommendation 14)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to each of the Department of the Interior, Department of State, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, General Services Administration, and Securities and Exchange Commission for review and comments—all of which concurred with the recommendation directed to their respective agency (recommendations 1 through 6) and noted actions they plan to take to address them. We also provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. DOD concurred with seven recommendations (recommendations 7 through 13) and partially concurred with one recommendation (recommendation 14). We also received technical comments from the Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and DOD that we incorporated, as appropriate. All agency comments are reprinted in their entirety in appendices VI-XII.

In its written comments, the Environmental Protection Agency stated that it generally agreed with our findings, conclusions, and recommendation. However, the agency also noted that three parts of our assessment did not appear to properly reflect its ongoing management practices related to its implementation of sexual harassment training. Specifically, the agency stated that it solicits feedback after live training sessions (management practice 2), delivers workplace harassment training using experts (management practice 3), and conducts training in small groups (management practice 6). Our assessment—and subsequent findings that EPA did not incorporate these three practices—was based on documentary and testimonial evidence that the Environmental Protection Agency provided us on the sexual harassment prevention training they require their federal civilian employees to complete. While none of the required training material demonstrated these management practices, the agency may offer voluntary, supplemental trainings that do incorporate these practices. As noted in our report, we did not review voluntary, supplemental training materials in our assessment.

The Environmental Protection Agency also stated that incidents of sexual harassment within their agency are rare, which it said supports the efficacy of its current training program. As noted in our report, data show that sexual harassment persists in federal agencies and is significantly underreported. Specifically, we noted that the Environmental Protection Agency received 5 or fewer formal complaints of sexual harassment annually from fiscal years 2018 to 2021. However, we contrasted these data with the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's June 2023 report that showed the estimated prevalence of sexual harassment across federal agencies is higher than the number of reported incidents. As such, reported sexual harassment incidents alone may not be a reliable

indicator of prevalence, thus reinforcing the importance of providing effective prevention training.

In DOD's written comments on recommendation 9, the Department of the Air Force noted that the management practices for enhancing the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training implementation we compared to their training in our report are not specific to sexual harassment and may not be directly applicable to the department's broader sexual harassment prevention efforts. However, as stated in our report, the EEOC intends for these management practices to apply to all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment.

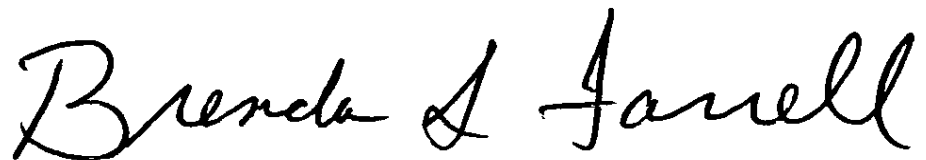
DOD also noted that it partially concurred with recommendation 14 because the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness' oversight responsibilities pertain to DOD sexual harassment prevention policy, not implementation of workforce training, which is a responsibility of the DOD components. To ensure that relevant policies are developed and implemented, DOD added that the Director of ODEI will develop a plan that includes actions such as (1) reviewing and revising, as necessary, DOD policies concerning sexual harassment prevention training for civilian employees using pertinent data and (2) providing technical assistance as needed to DOD components to ensure training content meets recommended standards. As noted in our report, our recommendation is specifically focused on the development and implementation of a plan to facilitate ODEI's execution of its oversight responsibilities relative to the components' sexual harassment prevention training. The recommendation does not address the implementation of this training. Therefore, we continue to believe a plan that clearly identifies goals, objectives, performance measures, and required resources will help to ensure ODEI fully performs its oversight responsibilities.

Finally, in the draft report we sent to the agencies for review and comment, we found that the Securities and Exchange Commission did not require its employees to complete sexual harassment prevention training. Accordingly, the draft included a recommendation that the commission take steps to develop and implement sexual harassment prevention training that all employees must complete and assess the training's planned content and implementation to consider aligning with management practices. Our finding and recommendation was based on an assessment of the information the Securities and Exchange Commission provided as of December 2023. In January 2024, the Securities and Exchange Commission officials provided updated

information about the training it requires employees to complete to prevent sexual harassment. As a result, we updated our assessment and revised the related finding and recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretaries of Defense, Education, the Interior, State, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the Administrators of the Environmental Protection Agency and General Services Administration; the Chairs of the EEOC, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and Securities and Exchange Commission; and Directors of the Defense Commissary Agency, the Defense Contract Audit Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Defense Logistics Agency. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VI.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda S. Farrell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

List of Committees

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chair
The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chair
The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chair
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chair
The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Summary of Literature Review on Data Collected on Harmful Behaviors

To better understand the data that colleges, universities, and workplaces have collected on the occurrence of harmful behaviors, we conducted a literature search and review of studies published from calendar years 2018 to 2023.¹ We also interviewed five researchers identified through the literature search about their knowledge of data collected on harmful behaviors by colleges, universities, and workplaces (such as hospitals and fire departments) and any associated challenges. Further, we interviewed Department of Education officials about data collected on harmful behaviors at colleges and universities because of its statutory responsibilities related to such data. See appendix II for a detailed description of our methodology.

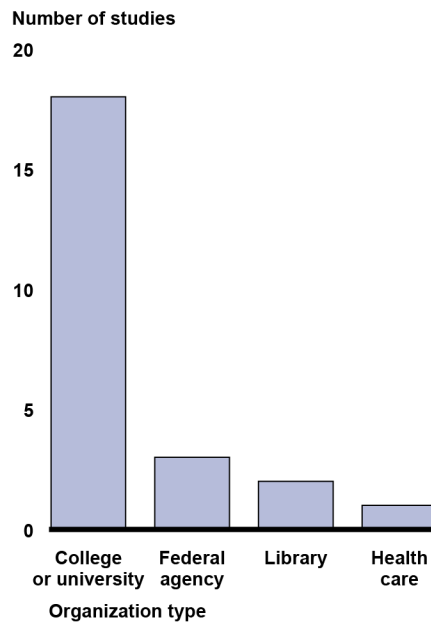
In reviewing selected studies that used data collected on harmful behaviors, we found that most of the studies focused on (1) colleges and universities, (2) the harmful behaviors of sexual harassment or sexual assault, and (3) data obtained through surveys. We identified 24 relevant studies published from calendar years 2018 to 2023. Some of the studies discussed challenges associated with collecting data on harmful behaviors, such as low survey response rates.

Studies Predominately Focused on Data Collected about the Occurrence of Harmful Behaviors at Colleges and Universities

Of the 24 studies selected through our literature review, 18 focused on the occurrence of harmful behaviors at colleges and universities (see fig. 5).

¹Specifically, our literature review focused on studies that included information about data that organizations and researchers have collected on the harmful behaviors of hazing, bullying, and interpersonal and self-directed harm, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and suicide that were identified in the statutory provision governing our review. As previously stated, for purposes of this report, we use the term “harmful behaviors” as an umbrella term that collectively refers to hazing, bullying, and other types of interpersonal and self-directed harm, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and suicide. See appendix II for more information about the behaviors we included in the literature search.

Figure 4: Number of Studies Included in Literature Review by Organization Type



Source: GAO analysis of published literature. | GAO-24-106589

To identify studies to include in our review, we conducted searches of various databases and identified 75 abstracts of studies published from calendar years 2018 to 2023 that were relevant to data collection efforts on the following harmful behaviors: hazing, bullying, and interpersonal and self-directed harm. We then screened the abstracts using six criteria, such as inclusion of information on how data were collected and a focus on adult (18 years of age or older), civilian victims. This resulted in 24 eligible studies included in our review. Additional details on our methodology are included in appendix II.

Among the studies that focused on colleges and universities, the specific populations of interest varied. Some of the populations studied included the entire student population at one or multiple colleges and universities along with specific subsets of students, such as all female students or medical students. For example, for a 2020 study, authors analyzed data from the Association of American Universities campus climate survey on sexual harassment and sexual assault that was administered to a broad mix of students at 33 campuses. They reported findings both for the entire

population surveyed as well as for specific categories of students.² Specifically, among all students surveyed, the study found that 42 percent reported that they had experienced sexual harassment since enrolling at their college or university, and that graduate students were the most likely subset of students to experience such behavior from a faculty member or instructor. The study also found that 13 percent of all students surveyed had experienced a sexual assault and that the rate was higher for women and undergraduate students compared to men and graduate students.

Our review did not identify why most of the studies we reviewed used data collected at colleges and universities. Two factors we identified through interviews with researchers and Department of Education officials may help explain the higher percentage of studies on the occurrence of harmful behaviors at colleges and universities in our literature review: (1) federal reporting requirements, and (2) a federal focus on campus sexual harassment and sexual assault issues and the administration of campus climate surveys since 2011. Specifically, in April 2011, the Department of Education issued guidance (later rescinded) to colleges and universities that emphasized their responsibilities for addressing the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual assault and preventing discrimination.

According to one researcher we spoke with, this guidance led some colleges and universities to begin administering campus climate surveys to better understand the extent to which sexual harassment and sexual assault were occurring on their respective campuses. In January 2014, the Obama administration established the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, which recognized campus climate surveys as a first step in understanding the extent of the problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault on campuses.³

Additionally, the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act), as amended by the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, requires colleges and universities that participate in student financial assistance programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, to collect

²David Cantor, et al. *Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct* (Westat for the Association of American Universities, revised 2020).

³*Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault* (April 2014). In April 2014, the task force published a publicly available campus climate survey instrument in addition to a student action packet and best practices.

and report certain campus safety and security incidents.⁴ The required reporting incidents include harmful behaviors such as aggravated assault, murder, sexual assault, and domestic violence.⁵ According to Department of Education officials, colleges and universities are responsible for compiling and annually reporting data on such incidents in the online Campus Safety and Security survey and in their annual security report.

The remaining six of the 24 studies we selected for our literature review used data collected on harmful behaviors in other organizations. Specifically, three studies focused on federal agencies, two on libraries, and one on a health care organization. Two of the federal agency studies and one of the library studies found that organizational-level factors, such as actions taken or not taken to address harmful behaviors may have contributed to their occurrence in the workplace. Specifically, one study found that federal employees who experienced workplace aggression were less likely to face retaliation if their organization had an aggression or harassment policy.⁶ Another found that federal employees who perceived that their organization was committed to preventing harassment, had a fair discrimination complaint process, and treated minorities fairly were significantly less likely to experience sexual harassment.⁷ In a study of librarians about their workplaces, some respondents commented in the survey that they viewed inadequate staffing and the failure of their human resources department to recognize

⁴The Clery Act is embedded within the Higher Education Act of 1965. (Pub. L. No. 89-329, as amended).

⁵These data are publicly available on the department's website and in college and university annual security reports. Clery Act implementing regulations require that colleges and universities report a crime in the calendar year a student reports it, not the year it allegedly occurred. For example, if a student reports a sexual assault in July 2023 that occurred in December 2022, their college would include the incident in 2023 data reporting.

⁶James Gerard Caillier. "Does the Rank of the Perpetrator and Reporter Affect How Agencies Handle Workplace Aggression? A Test of Resource Dependence Theory." *Review of Public Personnel Administration* vol. 41, no. 3 (2021): 520-545.

⁷Justine E. Tinkler and Jun Zhao. "The Sexual Harassment of Federal Employees: Gender, Leadership Status, and Organizational Tolerance for Abuses of Power." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* vol. 30, no. 3 (2020): 349-364.

or resolve problems as potential causes of harmful behaviors in the workplace.⁸

Most Studies Used Data Collected about Sexual Harassment or Sexual Assault

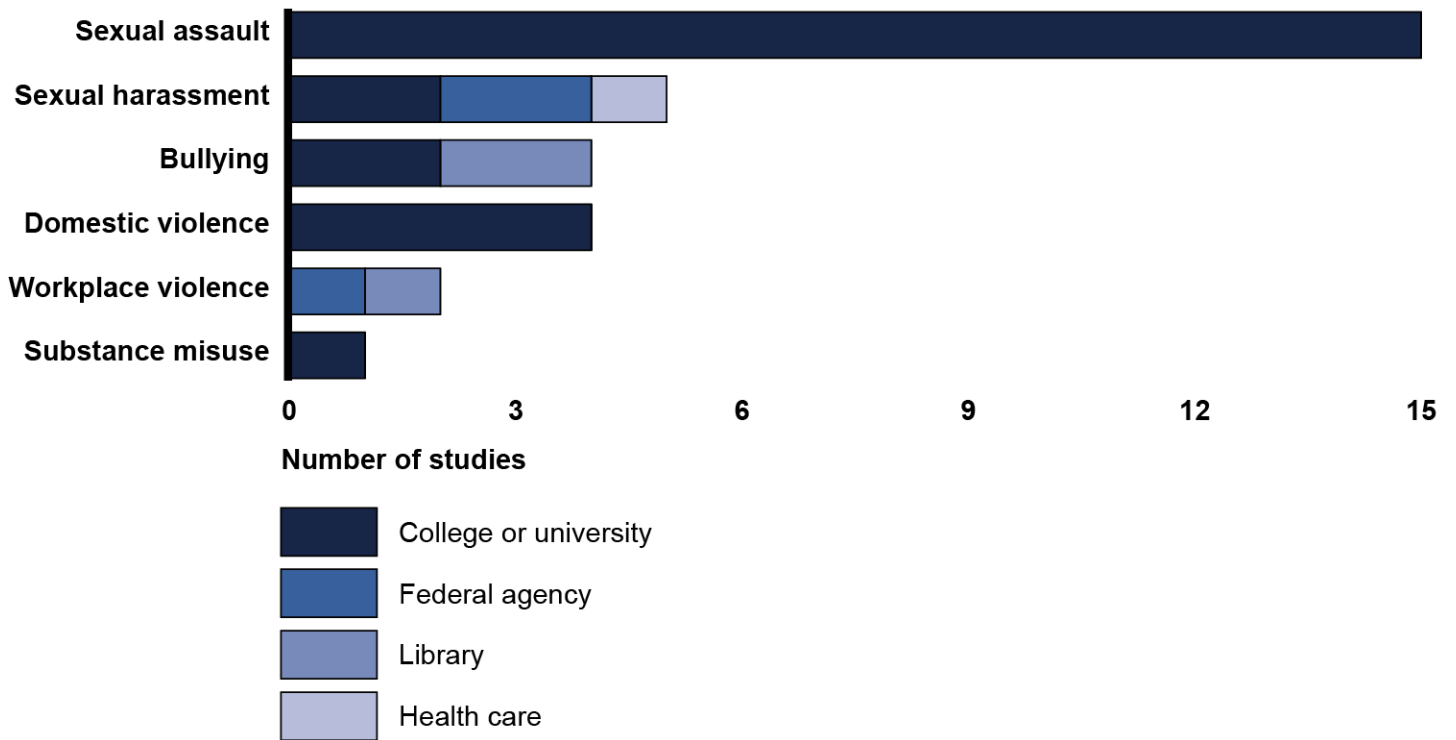
Of the 24 studies included in our literature review, five included data on sexual harassment and 15 included data on sexual assault.⁹ Harmful behaviors discussed in a smaller number of studies included bullying (four studies), domestic violence (four studies), workplace violence (two studies), and substance misuse (one study). None of the studies that met our criteria for inclusion in our review addressed the harmful behaviors of hazing and suicide, which were also included within the scope of our literature search (see appendix II for additional information about our literature review methodology).

We also found that of the organization types identified in these studies, colleges and universities, were the only entities assessed relative to the harmful behaviors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and substance misuse. However, studies that examined sexual harassment also assessed federal agencies and health care organizations. Figure 6 provides additional details about the type and quantity of harmful behavior studies we reviewed for each organization type identified.

⁸Jo Henry, Rebecca Croxton, and Richard Moniz. "Incivility and Dysfunction in the Library Workplace: A Five-Year Comparison." *Journal of Library Administration* vol. 63, no. 1 (2023): 42-68.

⁹Seven of the studies used data on more than one harmful behavior.

Figure 5: Number of Studies in GAO Review That Included Certain Harmful Behaviors by Organization Type



Source: GAO analysis of published literature. | GAO-24-106589

Note: For purposes of this report, we use the term “harmful behaviors” as an umbrella term that collectively refers to hazing, bullying, and other types of interpersonal and self-directed harm, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and suicide. We searched for published studies that used data collected on each of these harmful behaviors, although we did not ultimately include any about hazing or suicide in the literature review based on our inclusion criteria. See appendix II for additional information about the literature review methodology.

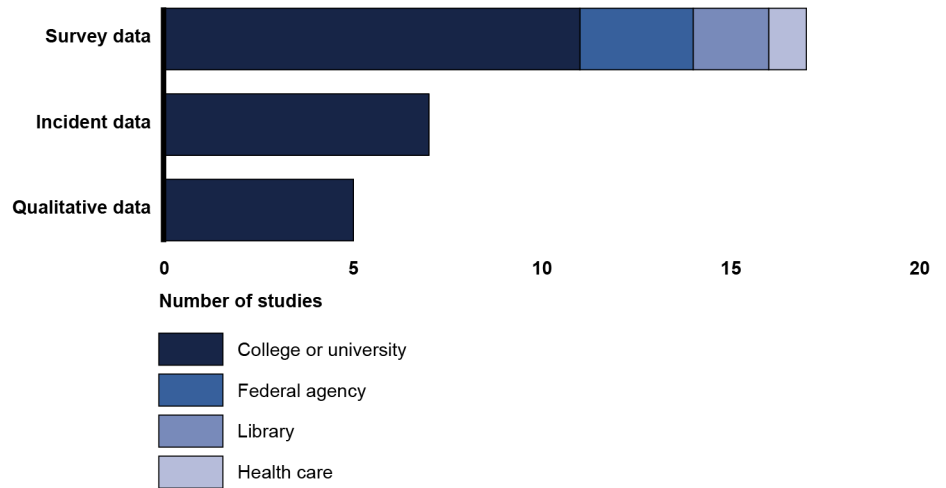
While GAO cannot determine why sexual harassment and sexual assault are the two harmful behaviors most frequently addressed by the studies, federal data collection requirements and a federal government emphasis on addressing sexual harassment and sexual assault on college and university campuses may be contributing factors to their prevalence in the studies.

Most Studies Used Survey Data to Report on Harmful Behaviors

Of the 24 studies included in our review, 16 used data obtained through surveys to understand experiences with harmful behavior(s), seven used incident reporting data, and five used qualitative data obtained, for

example, by conducting focus groups and interviews.¹⁰ As shown in figure 7, we found that all organization types represented in the studies used survey data to assess experiences with harmful behaviors, whereas qualitative and incident data were used solely in studies focused on colleges and universities.

Figure 6: Number of Studies That Included Certain Data Types by Organization Type



Source: GAO analysis of select published literature. | GAO-24-106589

Note: We considered data to be survey data if the study indicated the data were collected using a survey instrument, for example, campus climate surveys. We considered data to be incident reporting data if collected using some type of reporting system, such as the campus crime and safety incident reporting that colleges and universities administer per statute. We considered all other data collected via qualitative methods, such as phone interviews and focus groups, to be qualitative data. Some studies included more than one type of data.

While surveys were the most common method used in the studies selected from our literature review, the focus of each study and the types and quantities of data collected on the occurrence of harmful behaviors varied. For example, two studies on colleges and universities that used surveys—the Association of American Universities Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct and the Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative survey—did so to collect incident data, such as school and victim demographics (e.g., school size, victim gender, undergraduate), details about the incident (e.g., location,

¹⁰Five studies used multiple sources of data.

characteristics of perpetrator), and any resulting consequences (e.g., behavioral, academic, professional).

We reviewed another study that was based on a 2022 survey designed to assess the incidence of incivility and dysfunction within libraries by collecting information on workplace characteristics and experiences of bullying and workplace conflict.¹¹ We also reviewed a health care focused study that used data from the 2021 C-Change Resident Survey. This survey solicited information from medical residents on their experiences of sexual harassment during residency training, as well as their perspectives on institutional culture and support, among other things.¹²

All seven of the studies that used data on reported incidents on harmful behaviors used data that the Clery Act requires colleges and universities to collect and submit to the Department of Education on an annual basis. For example, a 2020 study used Clery Act data to examine differences in reports of violent crimes against women at 4-year public and private colleges and universities.¹³ The study used the following Clery Act crime data: campus-reported rape, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and fondling. Another study, published in 2022, compared the number of reported rapes in Clery Act data to the number of rapes self-reported by survey on nine campuses.¹⁴

The five studies that used qualitative data collected it via methods such as focus groups and interviews. For example, a 2018 study by the National Council on Disability examined how the needs of sexual assault victims with disabilities are included in college policies and procedures by conducting phone interviews in addition to distributing a survey

¹¹Henry, Croxton, and Moniz, "Incivility and Dysfunction". in the Library Workplace: A Five-Year Comparison."

¹²Madrigal et al., "Sexual and Gender Minority Identity in Undergraduate Medical Education: Impact on Experience and Career Trajectory." *PLoS ONE*, vol. 16, no. 11 (2021): e0260387.

¹³Jacquelyn D. Wiersma-Mosley et al., "Do Party Schools Report Higher Rates of Violence against Women in Their Clery Data? A Latent Class Analysis." *Violence against Women*, vol. 26, no. 6-7 (2020): 636-658.

¹⁴Christopher Krebs et al., "The Value and Validity of Self-Reported Survey Data on the Rape Experiences of College Students." *Violence against Women*, vol. 28, no. 9 (2022): 1911-1924.

instrument.¹⁵ Specifically, the researchers interviewed 34 individuals, including subject matter experts, college professionals and staff, Title IX Coordinators, and sexual assault services administrators across 14 states and the District of Columbia.¹⁶

Based on our review, we cannot conclude why most of the studies used survey data on harmful behaviors. However, as discussed previously, a federal government emphasis on addressing sexual harassment and sexual assault on college and university campuses via climate survey may be a contributing factor in their prevalence in the studies. Further, colleges and universities that receive Federal financial assistance will be required to use a campus climate survey that the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2022 directed the Department of Education to develop. Department of Education officials told us that per the statute, it will be an online survey tool asking students about experiences with harmful behaviors like sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence.¹⁷ One of these officials told us they are working in conjunction with the Bureau of Justice Statistics at the U.S. Department of Justice to develop the survey in fiscal year 2024 and pilot it in fiscal year 2025 for implementation during school year 2027-2028.¹⁸

Studies Identified Challenges with Collecting Data

While the studies in our review include information about the occurrence of harmful behaviors and the types of organizations where they have occurred, we identified two data collection challenges, which affect the extent to which the harmful behaviors can be understood. Specifically, authors for eight of the 24 studies attributed the challenges to survey response rates, while one cited the need for more robust data sources. Additionally, authors for nine of the 24 studies in our review identified challenges in collecting publicly available data on harmful behaviors.

¹⁵National Council on Disability. *Not on the Radar: Sexual Assault of College Students with Disabilities*. National Council on Disability (2018).

¹⁶Title IX Coordinators work to ensure that colleges and universities are in compliance with the law; additionally, they supervise Title IX investigations and associated disciplinary processes.

¹⁷Pub. L. No. 117-103, div. W. The law also mandates the Department of Education do this work in consultation with other federal agencies including the Department of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

¹⁸According to a Department of Education official, the Department of Justice awarded the contract in September 2023 for development of the survey. These officials said that additional development and testing will be required before all applicable colleges and universities could use the climate survey as intended.

Survey response rates. Among the studies that used survey data, we found that the response rates varied. For example, authors for the 2018 study that we reviewed on the occurrence of incivility—like bullying—in libraries invited over 85,000 library staff to take a survey by email asking about their experiences with such behavior in the workplace. However, only about 4,000 library staff, or 5 percent of the population, completed the survey. We also reviewed a 2022 study that examined the prevalence of physical violence among college students by surveying a sample of over 181,000 individuals over a 5-year period at participating colleges and universities. The survey response rates, per survey year, were 23 percent (2014—2015), 27 percent (2015—2016), 23 percent (2017—2018), and 16 percent (2018—2019).

While there is no minimum response rate necessary to use survey data for analysis, guidance to federal agencies recommends an analysis of nonresponse bias for studies with response rates lower than 80 percent to assess the extent to which conclusions may be drawn about the population being studied as a whole.¹⁹ Specifically, differentiating factors between those who do and do not complete a survey can affect the reliability of results. For example, sexual assault victims may be less inclined to complete a survey collecting information on such incidents than those who have not been victimized. As a result, respondents are more likely to be made up of nonvictims, thus making the results less likely to reflect the true rate that such incidents occur.

In the studies we reviewed, the authors identified confidentiality concerns, survey length, and incentive to participate as three factors that influence survey response rates. When discussing strategies to increase response rates, one study's authors noted the importance of considering how to design and test surveys. Specifically, they referenced surveys that ask about sensitive, distressing, and potentially traumatic experiences, such as sexual harassment or sexual assault, when there is a risk that the organization conducting a survey could identify respondents.²⁰ The study's authors stated that they addressed confidentiality concerns by using survey protocols to ensure confidentiality, such as using an outside

¹⁹The Office of Management and Budget recommends federal agencies to conduct nonresponse bias analysis when survey response rates are less than 80 percent. Office of Management and Budget, *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (September 2006).

²⁰Hannah A. Valentine et al., "Ending Sexual Harassment in Science: Designing and Administering a Survey That Can Lead to an Improved Organizational Climate." *Academic Medicine*, vol. 97, no. 3 (2022): 364-369.

organization to conduct the survey and analyze results. Another strategy to ensure confidentiality of participants that studies used was to make surveys anonymous by not collecting identifying information.²¹ Another study on the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual assault on college and university campuses cited longer and more time-consuming surveys as another possible reason potential respondents do not complete a survey.²²

Lack of incentive to participate was another challenge researchers highlighted in the studies we reviewed. To encourage participation, three studies described incentives such as cash, prize drawings, and course credit that researchers used to encourage participation in a survey.²³ Three of the five researchers we spoke with told us that these kinds of participation incentives can help overcome survey fatigue. For example, one researcher told us that her university pays study participants \$20 to complete the survey, which she said has been particularly useful in increasing the participation rate of men.

Lack of publicly available data. One of the nine studies that discussed data collection challenges found differences in publicly reported data versus data used for internal purposes.²⁴ For example, when the study's authors compared publicly available annual security reports by colleges and universities to internally-reported incidents, they found that the public data contained only about half of the incidents of sexual assault compared to the internal data.²⁵ This finding, according to the study,

²¹Leila Wood, Rachel Voth Schrag, and Noël Busch-Armendariz, "Mental health and Academic Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence among IHE-Attending Women." *Journal of American College Health*, vol. 68, no. 3 (2020): 286-293; Madrigal, Josef, et. al. "Sexual and Gender Minority Identity in Undergraduate Medical Education."

²²Kevin M. Swartout et al., "Measuring Campus Sexual Misconduct and Its Context: The Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Consortium (ARC3) Survey." *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, vol. 11, no. 5 (2019): 495-504.

²³Kyle T. Ganson, Julia O'Connor, and Jason M. Nagata. "Physical Violence Perpetration among College Students: Prevalence and Associations 40th Substance Use and Mental Health Symptoms." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 37, no. 13-14 (2022); Wood et. al., "Mental Health and Academic Impacts."; Swartout et. al., "Measuring Campus Sexual Misconduct."

²⁴Tara N. Richards, "No Evidence of 'Weaponized Title IX' Here: An Empirical Assessment of Sexual Misconduct Reporting, Case Processing, and Outcomes." *Law and Human Behavior*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2019): 180-192.

²⁵Colleges and universities must submit annual security reports to the Department of Education per the Clery Act.

**Appendix I: Summary of Literature Review on
Data Collected on Harmful Behaviors**

highlights that incidents of sexual assault on college and university campuses are undercounted in public data. Additionally, the study noted that about one third of the incidents of sexual harassment present in the internal data were not included in the public data because they occurred off campus, and therefore were not required to be included in the public data.

Appendix II: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report assesses:

1. the extent to which selected Department of Defense (DOD) components and federal agencies have incorporated management practices to enhance the effectiveness of their required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees, and
2. the extent to which DOD conducted oversight of required federal civilian sexual harassment prevention training.

Our review focused on DOD's sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees because DOD has different guidance for service members and thus a review of service member training may not be comparable to the training provided to civilian employees at the other federal agencies included in our review. Training provided to federal contractors was not included in the scope of our review because, according to DOD officials, the response to sexual harassment incidents involving federal contractors depends, in part, on the contracting company and the terms of the federal contractor's employment.

For purposes of this report, we use the term "harmful behaviors" as an umbrella term that collectively refers to hazing, bullying, and other types of interpersonal and self-directed harm, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and suicide.

Methods Used to Assess Required Sexual Harassment Prevention Training

For objective one, we selected DOD components and other federal agencies for comparison, identified management practices for sexual harassment prevention training, and compared the selected DOD components' and federal agencies' training materials to the identified management practices. We reviewed sexual harassment prevention training and anti-harassment training, which includes sexual harassment, that the selected DOD components and federal agencies included in our review require all their employees to complete. The required training we

reviewed includes statutorily-required training, in some instances.¹ We also reviewed related documentation and interviewed relevant officials.

Selecting agencies for comparison. We selected DOD components and other federal agencies for comparison based on prior GAO work and other considerations. The DOD components selected for this review are the Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, Department of the Air Force, Defense Commissary Agency, Defense Contract Audit Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and Defense Logistics Agency. To select these DOD components, we used the same sample of DOD components we used in prior work evaluating DOD sexual harassment prevention training.² Our prior work selected four military services and four DOD agencies based on workforce size, number of formal Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) sexual harassment complaints filed in fiscal year 2018, and agency mission.³

The federal agencies selected for this review are the Department of the Interior, Department of State, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, General Services Administration, and Securities and Exchange Commission. We selected these federal agencies for comparison based on workforce size, geographic spread,

¹We asked the selected DOD components and federal agencies to identify and provide the training they require all their federal civilian employees to complete related to the prevention of sexual harassment. In response to our request, components and agencies submitted a variety of material, ranging from required training that specifically addressed sexual harassment to statutorily-required No FEAR Act training that addressed harassing conduct more generally. Anti-harassment training is applicable to a range of harassing behavior on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, protected activity, age, or disability. This ranged from one to three distinct trainings per component or agency. Unless otherwise specified, we refer to these agency-identified trainings as required sexual harassment prevention training for the purposes of this report.

²For more information on selection methodology, see GAO, *Sexual Harassment and Assault: Guidance Needed to Ensure Consistent Tracking, Response, and Training for DOD Civilians*, [GAO-21-113](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 9 2021). DOD defines its components as the Office of the Secretary of Defense, military departments, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, combatant commands, DOD Inspector General, defense agencies, DOD field activities, and all other organizational entities within DOD.

³We did not separately review the Marine Corps sexual harassment prevention training materials for this report because Department of the Navy and Marine Corps officials stated that the Marine Corps uses the Department of the Navy's required sexual harassment prevention training. As such, training provided to Marine Corps federal civilian employees is presented in the results for the Department of the Navy's training. The Marine Corps provided separate Marine Corps-specific training that was assessed in our February 2021 report. See [GAO-21-113](#).

and inclusion in recent surveys on sexual harassment prevalence in federal workplaces. Specifically, we selected agencies that had large workforces and offices at multiple locations, similar to the selected DOD components' workforce size and geographical dispersion.⁴ We also selected agencies that had available survey data on sexual harassment prevalence.⁵

We did not select agencies using a statistically representative sampling method; thus the sample of agencies is nongeneralizable. Therefore, the results of our review on sexual harassment prevention training that federal civilian employees at these agencies must complete cannot be projected across the federal workforce. While the information obtained was not generalizable, it provides examples of the extent to which required civilian sexual harassment prevention training efforts may vary across the federal workforce and the extent to which they incorporate the identified management practices.

Identifying management practices. We used two sets of management practices to assess required sexual harassment prevention training: GAO-identified practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training content reported in our prior work and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training implementation.⁶ We collectively refer to these as management practices for the purposes of this report. See tables 1 and 2 for lists of all the management practices.

We used 13 leading practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training content that GAO identified and reported in prior work. To develop the 13 GAO-identified practices reported in our prior work, we identified and reviewed relevant reports and studies, and

⁴We defined large workforces as those in the Office of Personnel Management's list of cabinet-level and large independent agencies of 1,000 or more employees.

⁵For survey data, we used the following U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board report: U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: 2021 Update* (June 2023).

⁶See [GAO-21-113](#) and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector* (April 2023). According to EEOC officials, these promising practices are focused on training implementation versus training content. EEOC officials stated that they published the 2023 version to update a 2017 publication of promising practices because they recognize that harassment continues to be an issue in federal workplaces.

consulted with internal and external subject-matter experts—including sexual violence experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network—and sexual harassment experts from the EEOC. We further reviewed additional resources provided by these subject matter experts and conducted an analysis to identify areas of overlap across the leading practices. We then validated the identified leading practices with internal and external subject-matter experts. Specifically, we shared the identified leading practices with the subject-matter experts, including DOD’s Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) and the EEOC, and incorporated their comments as appropriate.

In addition to the 13 GAO-identified leading practices, we used six promising practices the EEOC identified that can enhance the usefulness of the sexual harassment prevention training being implemented. These include practices such as the use of expert trainers and relevant social science research. EEOC officials stated that these practices are application to all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment. While the EEOC listed eight practices to enhance the effectiveness of anti-harassment training, two overlapped with GAO-identified practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content. Therefore, we omitted those two practices from our assessment of training implementation.

Assessing training content. To compare the content of required federal civilian employee sexual harassment prevention training and anti-harassment training, which includes sexual harassment, at the selected DOD components and federal agencies, two analysts independently assessed the components’ and agencies’ training materials and compared them to management practices for enhancing training content. For each assessment, both analysts separately recorded their determination as to whether each component’s and agency’s training (a) incorporated, (b) partially incorporated, or (c) did not incorporate each practice. For practices where the two analysts did not initially agree on a determination, they met and discussed the training materials and reached a final determination. We determined a practice was “incorporated” if all facets of the practice were demonstrated in the training materials, “partially incorporated” if some, but not all, facets were demonstrated, and “not incorporated” if none of the facets of the practice were demonstrated. We then compared the number of management practices that were incorporated, partially incorporated, and not incorporated for each DOD component and federal agency.

While we assessed the sexual harassment prevention training that selected DOD components and federal agencies require their federal civilian employees to complete, many of them also offer supplemental optional related training to employees. For example, officials described trainings on topics such as cyber harassment, gender equality, and bystander intervention that are available to employees. We did not review these supplementary training materials or other agency policies and procedures as part of our management practices assessment.

Assessing training implementation. To compare the implementation of federal civilian employee sexual harassment prevention training and anti-harassment training, which includes sexual harassment, that the selected DOD components and federal agencies identified they require, we interviewed officials from the selected DOD components and federal agencies. Two analysts independently compared that testimonial evidence and related documentation to the EEOC practices for enhancing training implementation to determine the extent to which they had incorporated each of the six practices. In doing so, both analysts separately recorded their determination as to whether each component's and agency's training (a) incorporated, (b) partially incorporated, or (c) did not incorporate each practice. For practices where the two analysts did not initially agree on a determination, they met and discussed the training implementation and reached a final determination. We determined a practice was "incorporated" if all facets of the practice were demonstrated in the training materials, "partially incorporated" if some, but not all, facets were demonstrated, and "not incorporated" if none of the facets of the practice were demonstrated. We then compared the number of management practices that were incorporated, partially incorporated, and not incorporated for each DOD component and federal agency.

We reviewed relevant DOD training instruction and interviewed officials from each of the selected components and agencies to obtain an overview of training policies and guidance for civilian employees.⁷ We discussed any updates or changes to their sexual harassment prevention training within the past 5 years and their plans, measures, and analyses used to assess or evaluate the training and its effectiveness. We

⁷DOD Instruction 1400.25, *Civilian Personnel Management System*, Vol. 410: *Training, Education and Professional Development*. (Sept. 25, 2013) (incorporating Change 1, Aug. 2, 2021).

compared this information to GAO guidance for assessing strategic training.⁸

Methods Used to Assess Oversight of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training

For objective two, we reviewed relevant DOD policies and guidance on EEO and anti-harassment programs and interviewed DOD officials on their oversight responsibilities and efforts.⁹

To assess DOD oversight, we reviewed the most recent internal report that ODEI published in 2021 about civilian employee harassment. We used this report to assess the extent to which ODEI had reviewed DOD components' harassment prevention efforts, specifically their compliance with 19 anti-harassment training requirements.¹⁰ Further, we interviewed ODEI officials about the extent to which they have conducted compliance reviews of DOD component policies and procedures to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, including training compliance. We also interviewed officials at each of the selected DOD components regarding their level of interaction with ODEI officials to determine the degree to which ODEI has provided oversight and review since relevant guidance was last updated in June 2020 until the time of our interviews in May and July 2023.

We compared information from our review of sexual harassment prevention training oversight to GAO guidance on federal stewardship, which indicates that substantive planning is necessary to establish clear goals and objectives and agencies should collect performance data needed for gauging program progress and identifying weaknesses.¹¹

⁸GAO-04-546G, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 1, 2004).

⁹DOD Instruction 1020.04, *Harassment Prevention and Responses for DOD Civilian Employees* (June 30, 2020); DOD Directive 1440.1, *The DOD Civilian Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program* (May 21, 1987) (certified current as of Nov. 21, 2003); DOD Directive 1020.02E, *Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity in the DOD* (June 8, 2015) (incorporating change 2, June 1, 2018).

¹⁰ODEI officials told us they would publish this report every 2 years. However, as of May 2023 they had not begun collecting anti-harassment training data from DOD components for the 2023 report.

¹¹GAO, *A Call For Stewardship: Enhancing the Federal Government's Ability to Address Key Fiscal and Other 21st Century Challenges*, GAO-08-93SP (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 2007).

Methods Used to Assess Data That Organizations and Researchers Collect on Harmful Behaviors

We conducted a literature review on studies that used data collected about select harmful behaviors, interviewed researchers from selected literature review sources, analyzed campus crime and security data from the Department of Education, and interviewed relevant officials. To identify existing studies, we conducted searches of various databases, such as ProQuest, EBSCO, and Dialog database platforms and individual databases ERIC and Scopus. From these sources, we identified and screened 75 abstracts of studies published between 2018 to 2023 that were relevant to data collection efforts on the following harmful behaviors: hazing, bullying, and interpersonal and self-directed harm. This screening resulted in 24 eligible studies included in our review. To determine whether a study was eligible for our review, we considered the following six criteria:

1. includes information on data collection efforts regarding one or more of the following behaviors that has been collected and publicly reported: hazing, bullying, and interpersonal and self-directed harm (sexual assault, sexual harassment, workplace violence, domestic violence, substance misuse, and suicide) within a workplace or college or university settings;
2. includes information on how the organization or researcher collected data on any of the harmful behaviors for workplaces or colleges and universities;
3. includes multisite data collected from workplace, college, or university populations in the U.S.;
4. was published between calendar year 2018 and 2023;
5. focuses on the adult civilian victims (18 years of older); and
6. uses data collected no earlier than calendar year 2014.

For the 24 studies in our review, we collected information about data collection efforts such as the study's objectives, findings, how and when the data were collected, the population from which data were collected, and the harmful behaviors examined. We also reviewed the studies for methodological soundness for the conclusions made about data collection efforts. For a complete list of the studies we reviewed, see appendix V.

In addition to reviewing literature, we selected a number of researchers to interview who had published studies found in our literature search. Specifically, two analysts independently screened each study's abstract to identify researchers who had used data from an entity with multiple locations and who varied by research focus (for example, health care,

protective services, or other), and publication date. We contacted nine researchers and interviewed the five responding researchers about their knowledge of data collection efforts regarding our selected harmful behaviors by colleges, universities, and workplaces (such as hospitals and fire departments) that gathered such data and any associated challenges. To understand what is known about harmful behaviors occurring on college and university campuses, we also interviewed officials at the Department of Education with knowledge about campus crime and security data colleges and universities collect per the Clery Act.

To provide background and context throughout the report on the issue of sexual harassment in selected agencies, we obtained and analyzed complaint data from the EEOC. Specifically, we analyzed data from Annual Federal EEO Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints that agencies submit through the Federal Sector EEO Portal for the following agencies for fiscal years 2018 through 2021: the Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, Department of the Air Force, Defense Commissary Agency, Defense Contract Audit Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Defense Logistics Agency, Department of State, Department of the Interior, General Services Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and Securities and Exchange Commission.¹² For each agency, we analyzed the number of sexual harassment complaints received.

We conducted a data reliability assessment on the datasets we received from the EEOC. We also sent a list of written questions to database managers about how the data are collected and their appropriate uses. We also discussed with database managers the accuracy and completeness of the data in their databases. We found the data were sufficiently reliable to report on information about the number of sexual harassment complaints selected agencies reported to the EEOC.¹³

¹²EEOC regulations require agencies to report to the commission information about the status, processing, and disposition of EEO complaints on an annual basis, known as the Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints (EEOC Form 462 Report). 29 C.F.R. § 1614.602(a). Agencies' subcomponents that have at least 1,000 employees must complete their own form 462.

¹³Tables with results of our data analysis include a table note that describes any caveats or limitations associated with a particular analysis.

Appendix II: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We met with a variety of officials from the federal agencies included in our review. Table 3 lists the agencies we contacted during our review to address our three objectives.

Table 3: DOD Components and Other Federal Agencies Contacted by GAO

Organization	Offices Contacted
Department of Defense (DOD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defense Human Resources Activity, Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute • Defense Commissary Agency • Defense Contract Audit Agency • Defense Intelligence Agency • Defense Logistics Agency • Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Department of the Army	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention • Equal Employment Opportunity
Department of the Navy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal Opportunity Office
United States Marine Corps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal Employment Opportunity
Department of the Air Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserve Affairs and Airman Readiness • Integrated Resilience • Department of Air Force Equal Opportunity Program • Air Force Personnel Center
Department of the Interior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights • Office of Financial Management • Office of Human Capital
Department of State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comptroller, Global Financial Services • Diplomatic Security • Foreign Service Institute • Global Talent Management • Office of Civil Rights
Environmental Protection Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Administrator, Office of Administrative and Executive Services • Office of the Administrator, Office of Civil Rights • Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Office of the Comptroller • Office of Mission Support, Office of Human Resources • Office of Mission Support, Office of Resources and Business Operations • Office of Mission Support, Office of Administration and Resources Management
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate University, Course Design and Development • Division of Administration, Human Resources Branch • Legal Division • Office of Minority and Women Inclusion, Affirmative Employment, Diversity, and Inclusion Branch • Office of Minority and Women Inclusion, Equal Opportunity Compliance and Training Branch • Office of Risk Management and Internal Controls

Appendix II: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Organization	Offices Contacted
General Services Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Office of Audit Management and Accountability • Office of Civil Rights • Office of Human Resources Management, Center for Talent Engagement
Securities and Exchange Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Chairman • Office of the Chief Operating Officer • Office of Equal Employment Opportunity • Office of General Counsel • Officer of Human Resources • Office of the Inspector General • Office of Support Operations
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Chair • Office of Communications and Legislative Affairs • Office of Federal Operations • Office of Legal Counsel
Department of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Secretary • Office of the Secretary, Institute of Education Sciences • Office of the Secretary, Office for Civil Rights • Office of the Secretary, Office of Communications and Outreach • Office of the Secretary, Office of General Counsel • Office of the Secretary, Office of the Inspector General • Office of the Secretary, Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs • Office of the Secretary, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development • Office of the Deputy Secretary • Office of the Deputy Secretary, Office of Finance and Operations • Office of the Under Secretary, Federal Student Aid • Office of the Under Secretary, Office of Postsecondary Education

Source: GAO. | GAO-24-106589

We conducted this performance audit from January 2023 to February 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix III: Assessment of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Management Practices

We used two sets of management practices to compare the required sexual harassment prevention training programs at selected Department of Defense (DOD) components and other federal agencies: (1) GAO-identified practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training content and (2) U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training implementation.¹

Management Practices to Enhance the Effectiveness of Training Content

We used 13 GAO-identified practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training content to assess the content of required sexual harassment prevention training at the seven DOD components and six federal agencies. We assessed the required sexual harassment prevention training materials of each selected DOD component and federal agency to determine the extent to which they had incorporated each of the 13 practices. Tables 4 and 5 below show the extent to which each selected DOD component and federal agency that requires its employees to complete sexual harassment prevention training incorporated, partially incorporated, or did not incorporate each practice. We determined a practice was “incorporated” if all facets of the practice were demonstrated in the training materials, “partially incorporated” if some, but not all, facets were demonstrated, and “not incorporated” if none of the facets of the practice were demonstrated.

¹We identified two sets of management practices focused on enhancing the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training: (1) 13 leading practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content that were developed and reported in our prior work and (2) six promising practices to enhance the effectiveness of training implementation that were identified by the EEOC. See GAO, *Sexual Harassment and Assault: Guidance Needed to Ensure Consistent Tracking, Response, and Training for DOD Civilians*, [GAO-21-113](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 9, 2021) and EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector* (April 2023). We collectively refer to these as management practices for the purposes of this report. See tables 1 and 2 for lists of these practices. We developed the 13 GAO-identified practices by reviewing related reports and studies and consulting with internal and external subject-matter experts (see appendix II for more detail).

Appendix III: Assessment of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Management Practices

Table 4: GAO assessment of Selected DOD Components’ Required Federal Civilian Employee Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Materials Compared to Management Practices for Training Content

	Department of the Army	Department of the Navy	Department of the Air Force	Defense Commissary Agency	Defense Contract Audit Agency	Defense Intelligence Agency	Defense Logistics Agency
Management Practices							
1. Clearly defines and describes prohibited sexual harassment.	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
2. Clarifies conduct that is not sexual harassment.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3. Explains possible consequences for sexual harassment.	●	◐	○	◐	◐	●	●
4. Describes employees’ rights and responsibilities.	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●
5. Encourages employees to report harassing conduct.	●	●	●	●	◐	○	●
6. Explains the agency’s Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) process and alternative complaint process.	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐
7. Describes the reporting process and distinguishes between internal agency and EEO complaints.	●	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐
8. Describes how internal complaints will be investigated.	○	◐	○	◐	◐	○	◐
9. Clearly states that reports will be taken seriously and investigated.	○	◐	○	◐	●	◐	◐
10. Clearly states that retaliation will not be tolerated.	◐	○	◐	○	●	○	◐
11. Includes examples that are tailored to the specific workplace and workforce.	●	●	●	●	○	○	●
12. Identifies and provides contact information for addressing sexual harassment questions, concerns, and complaints.	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●
13. Provides a short video or prerecorded remarks from senior leadership.	○	●	○	○	○	○	○

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-24-106589

Note: Incorporated practices are indicated by a full circle (●), partially incorporated practices are indicated by a half circle (◐), and practices that were not incorporated are indicated by an open circle (○). Management practices are paraphrased. For a full list of practices, see table 1. Our assessment of the DOD components’ required sexual harassment prevention training was based on written training materials identified and provided by the components as of October 2023.

Appendix III: Assessment of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Management Practices

Table 5: GAO assessment of Selected Federal Agencies' Required Federal Civilian Employee Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Compared to Management Practices for Training Content

	Department of State	Department of the Interior	General Services Administration	Environmental Protection Agency	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	Securities and Exchange Commission
Management Practices						
1. Clearly defines and describes prohibited sexual harassment.	●	●	◐	●	●	○
2. Clarifies conduct that is not sexual harassment.	●	○	○	◐	●	○
3. Explains possible consequences for sexual harassment.	◐	○	○	○	○	○
4. Describes employees' rights and responsibilities.	●	●	◐	●	●	●
5. Encourages employees to report harassing conduct.	●	●	●	●	●	●
6. Explains the agency's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) process and alternative complaint process.	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐
7. Describes the reporting process and distinguishes between internal agency and EEO complaints.	●	●	●	●	●	●
8. Describes how internal complaints will be investigated.	◐	◐	○	○	◐	○
9. Clearly states that reports will be taken seriously and investigated.	○	◐	◐	◐	●	●
10. Clearly states that retaliation will not be tolerated.	○	●	◐	◐	●	●
11. Includes examples that are tailored to the specific workplace and workforce.	●	●	○	○	○	○
12. Identifies and provides contact information for addressing sexual harassment questions, concerns, and complaints.	●	●	●	◐	●	●
13. Provides a short video or prerecorded remarks from senior leadership.	○	○	○	○	●	○

Source: GAO analysis of selected federal agencies' information. | GAO-24-106589

Note: Incorporated practices are indicated by a full circle (●), partially incorporated practices are indicated by a half circle (◐), and practices that were not incorporated are indicated by an open circle (○). Management practices are paraphrased. For a full list of practices, see table 1. Our assessment of the selected federal agencies' required sexual harassment prevention training was based on written training materials identified and provided by the agencies as of October 2023.

Management Practices to Enhance the Effectiveness of Training Implementation

We used EEOC management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training implementation to assess the required sexual harassment prevention training programs at the seven

Appendix III: Assessment of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Management Practices

DOD components and six federal agencies.² We interviewed officials from the selected DOD components and federal agencies and reviewed related documentation to determine the extent to which they had incorporated each of the six practices. Tables 6 and 7 below show the extent to which each selected DOD component and federal agency that requires its employees to complete sexual harassment prevention training incorporated, partially incorporated, or did not incorporate each practice. We determined a practice was “incorporated” if the agency noted that it demonstrated all facets of the practice in its training program, “partially incorporated” if some, but not all, facets were demonstrated, and “not incorporated” if no facets of the practice were demonstrated.

Table 6: GAO Assessment of Selected DOD Components’ Required Federal Civilian Employee Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Compared to Management Practices for Training Implementation

Management Practices	Department of the Army	Department of the Navy	Department of the Air Force	Defense Commissary Agency	Defense Contract Audit Agency	Defense Intelligence Agency	Defense Logistics Agency
1. Regularly revise and update training as needed.	◐	●	◐	◐	●	◐	●
2. Followed training by solicitation of feedback and input from participants to improve its effectiveness.	●	○	●	○	●	◐	●
3. Training provided by trainers who are experts in the topic of harassment.	◐	○	●	○	◐	◐	◐
4. Training developed using relevant social science research on harassment and retaliation.	○	◐	○	○	○	◐	●
5. Routinely analyze training to measure its impact on reducing harassment and retaliation in the agency.	○	○	○	○	◐	◐	◐
6. Conduct training (virtually or in-person) in smaller groups that foster more employee engagement and participation.	◐	○	◐	○	◐	◐	◐

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-24-106589

Note: Incorporated practices are indicated by a full circle (●), partially incorporated practices are indicated by a half circle (◐), and practices that were not incorporated are indicated by an open circle (○).

²EEOC, *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector* (April 2023). According to EEOC officials, these practices are focused on implementation of the training program. They also said that EEOC anti-harassment guidance is applicable to all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment. The EEOC listed eight practices to enhance the effectiveness of anti-harassment training, two of which overlapped with GAO-identified practices to enhance the effectiveness of training content. We omitted those two practices in our assessment of training implementation.

Appendix III: Assessment of Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Management Practices

Table 7: GAO Assessment of Selected Federal Agencies' Required Federal Civilian Employee Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Compared to Management Practices for Training Implementation

	Department of State	Department of the Interior	General Services Administration	Environmental Protection Agency	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	Securities and Exchange Commission
Management Practices						
1. Regularly revise and update training as needed.	◐	●	●	●	●	◐
2. Followed training by solicitation of feedback and input from participants to improve its effectiveness.	●	●	●	○	●	●
3. Training provided by trainers who are experts in the topic of harassment.	○	○	◐	○	○	○
4. Training developed using relevant social science research on harassment and retaliation.	◐	●	○	○	○	●
5. Routinely analyze training to measure its impact on reducing harassment and retaliation in the agency.	○	◐	◐	○	◐	○
6. Conduct training (virtually or in-person) in smaller groups that foster more employee engagement and participation.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and selected federal agencies' information. | GAO-24-106589

Note: Incorporated practices are indicated by a full circle (●), partially incorporated practices are indicated by a half circle (◐), and practices that were not incorporated are indicated by an open circle (○).

Appendix IV: Number of Sexual Harassment Complaints Submitted to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Fiscal Years 2018-2021

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides guidance on all aspects of the federal government's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs as the primary federal agency responsible for enforcing federal employment antidiscrimination laws.¹ The EEOC Office of Federal Operations produces an Annual Report on the Federal Workforce that includes, among other data, information on federal EEO complaints. Each federal agency submits these data annually via the Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints, known as EEOC Form 462.

We obtained and analyzed data on formal EEO complaints from the EEOC that listed sexual harassment as an issue (sexual harassment complaints).² The Department of Defense (DOD) components and other federal agencies included in our review submitted these data to the EEOC for fiscal years 2018 to 2021.³ The DOD components and other federal departments and agencies included in our review are Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, Department of the Air Force, Defense Commissary Agency, Defense Contract Audit Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Defense Logistics Agency, Department of the Interior, Department of State, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, General Services Administration, and Securities and Exchange Commission.

¹For more information about the EEOC's roles and responsibilities, see the background of this report.

²The EEOC does not have access to federal agencies' complaint tracking systems; each agency must track and populate the form based on the data it tracks. The EEOC performs automated and manual data checks that make it difficult for agencies to submit inaccurate data, however, the EEOC relies on federal agencies to accurately report complaint data.

³A federal employee or job applicant who believes that a federal agency has discriminated against them has the right to file a complaint. The first step is to contact an EEO counselor at the agency, and this counselor, in most cases, will offer a choice of participating either in EEO counseling or in an alternative dispute resolution program, such as a mediation program. This initial stage is known as the pre-complaint stage. If the dispute is not settled as a result of participating in counseling or through an alternative dispute resolution program, the person can file a formal discrimination complaint against the agency. The EEOC collects and tracks information on pre-complaints in the Form 462, but it does not track pre-complaints by issue, such as sexual harassment, unless a settlement was involved, according to EEOC officials. The most current data available at the time of our review were from fiscal year 2021.

Appendix IV: Number of Sexual Harassment Complaints Submitted to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Fiscal Years 2018-2021

Tables 8 shows the number of sexual harassment complaints that selected DOD components reported to the EEOC from fiscal years 2018 through 2021.⁴

Table 8: Number of Sexual Harassment Complaints Filed for Selected Department of Defense Components, Fiscal Years 2018-2021

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Department of the Army	61	39	42	34
Department of the Navy	49	38	30	37
Department of the Air Force	17	19	6	18
Defense Commissary Agency	11	5	10	10
Defense Contract Audit Agency	*	*	*	*
Defense Intelligence Agency	*	*	*	*
Defense Logistics Agency	5	*	*	*

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint data. | GAO-24-106589

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes that there were fewer than five complaints in a given fiscal year. The most current data available at the time of our review were from fiscal year 2021.

⁴In June 2016, an EEOC report noted that workplace harassment often goes unreported. For example, one study cited in the report found that 90 percent of individuals who say they have experienced harassment never take formal action against the harassment, such as filing a charge or a complaint. EEOC, *EEOC Data Highlight*, no. 2 (April 2022). The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board noted in their research on sexual harassment prevalence in federal agencies that numerous factors can drive the direction of changes in the prevalence of sexual harassment behaviors within organizations. Therefore, agencies should be cautious when interpreting year-to-year comparisons regarding the prevalence of sexual harassment and consider whether there might be contextual influences beyond the strategies that they have implemented. U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Sexual Harassment in Federal Workplaces: 2021 Update* (June 2023).

**Appendix IV: Number of Sexual Harassment
Complaints Submitted to the U.S. Equal
Employment Opportunity Commission, Fiscal
Years 2018-2021**

Table 9 shows the number of sexual harassment complaints that selected federal agencies reported to the EEOC from fiscal years 2018 through 2021.

Table 9: Number of Sexual Harassment Complaints Filed for Selected Federal Agencies, Fiscal Years 2018-2021

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Department of the Interior	12	6	8	*
Department of State	6	*	*	*
Environmental Protection Agency	5	*	*	*
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	*	*	*	*
General Services Administration	*	*	*	*
Securities and Exchange Commission	*	*	*	*

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint data. | GAO-24-106589

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes that there were fewer than five complaints in a given fiscal year. The most current data available at the time of our review were from fiscal year 2021.

Appendix V: Reviewed Literature on Collecting Harmful Behaviors Data

To identify data collection efforts related to harmful behaviors, we reviewed the following literature published within the last 5 calendar years (2018 through 2023). See appendix II for more details about our literature review.

- Berzofsky, Marcus E. "Sexual Assault Climate Survey Sample Design Methods: A Review and Recommendations to Improve Response and Reduce Bias." *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2022): 521-536.
- Berzofsky, Marcus E., Lynn Langton, Christopher Krebs, Christine Lindquist, and Michael Planty. "Methods for Improving Representativeness in a Web Survey on Sexual Assault among College Students." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 34, no. 23-24 (2019): 4838-4859.
- Caillier, James Gerard. "Does the Rank of the Perpetrator and Reporter Affect How Agencies Handle Workplace Aggression? A Test of Resource Dependence Theory." *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2021): 520-545.
- Cantor, David, Bonnie Fisher, Susan Chibnall, Shauna Harps, Reanne Townsend, Gail Thomas, Hyunshik Lee, Vanessa Kranz, Randy Herbison, and Kristin Madden. *Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct*. Westat for the Association of American Universities (revised 2020).
- Chronicle Staff. "Colleges That Reported the Most Liquor and Drug Violations." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 2018. Accessed September 14, 2023. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/colleges-that-reported-the-most-liquor-and-drug-violations/>
- Fergus, Meredith. "Sexual Assault Data Report." *Minnesota Office of Higher Education* (2022).
- Ganson, Kyle T., Julia O'Connor, and Jason M. Nagata. "Physical Violence Perpetration among College Students: Prevalence and Associations with Substance Use and Mental Health Symptoms." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 37, no. 13-14 (2022): NP11110-NP11134.
- Gonzalez-Pons, Kwynn M., Irene D. Gallegos, Shelby L. Graves, and Caren J. Frost. "Employing the Right Annual Data Collection Efforts to Combat IPV on College Campuses." *Journal of American College Health*, vol. 69, no. 8 (2021): 982-984.

- Henry, Jo, Rebecca Croxton, and Richard Moniz. "Incivility and Dysfunction in the Library Workplace: A Five-Year Comparison." *Journal of Library Administration*, vol. 63, no. 1 (2023): 42-68.
- Henry, Jo, Joe Eshleman, Rebecca Croxton, and Richard Moniz. "Incivility and Dysfunction in the Library Workplace: Perceptions and Feedback from the Field." *Journal of Library Administration*, vol. 58, (2018): 128-152.
- Krebs, Christopher, Christine H. Lindquist, Lynn Langton, Marcus Berzofsky, Michael Planty, Nakisa S. Asefnia, Bonnie E. Shook-Sa, Kimberly Peterson, and Jessica Stroop. "The Value and Validity of Self-Reported Survey Data on the Rape Experiences of College Students." *Violence against Women*, vol. 28, no. 9 (2022): 1911-1924.
- Madrigal, Josef, Sarah Rudasill, Zachary Tran, Jonathan Bergman, and Peyman Benharash. "Sexual and Gender Minority Identity in Undergraduate Medical Education: Impact on Experience and Career Trajectory." *PloS one*, vol. 16, no. 11 (2021): e0260387.
- McMahon, Sarah, Julia Cusano, Catherine Buttner, Simone Snyder, Roxanna S. Ast, and Kerry Camerer. "Evaluating Efforts to Address Campus Sexual Violence: Developing a Data Ecosystem." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 37, no. 23-24 (2022): NP23563-NP23586.
- National Council on Disability. *Not on the Radar: Sexual Assault of College Students with Disabilities*. National Council on Disability (2018).
- Pololi, Linda H., Robert T. Brennan, Janet T. Civian, Sandra Shea, Emma Brennan-Wydra, and Arthur T. Evans. "Us, Too. Sexual Harassment within Academic Medicine in the United States." *The American Journal of Medicine*, vol. 133, no. 2 (2020): 245-248.
- Richards, Tara N. "No Evidence of 'Weaponized Title IX' Here: An Empirical Assessment of Sexual Misconduct Reporting, Case Processing, and Outcomes." *Law and Human Behavior*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2019): 180.
- Richards, Tara N., Lane Kirkland Gillespie, and Taylor Claxton. "Examining Incidents of Sexual Misconduct Reported to Title IX Coordinators: Results from New York's Institutions of Higher Education." *Journal of School Violence*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2021): 374-387.
- Schulze, Corina, and Lindsey Budd. "Institutional Commitment to Combating Sexual Violence: The Practices and Policies of U.S.

Universities.” *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 48, (2020): 2692-2701.

- Swartout, Kevin M., William F. Flack Jr., Sarah L. Cook, Loreen N. Olson, Paige Hall Smith, and Jacquelyn W. White. “Measuring Campus Sexual Misconduct and Its Context: The Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Consortium (ARC3) Survey.” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, vol. 11, no. 5 (2019): 495-504.
- Tinkler, Justine E., and Jun Zhao. “The Sexual Harassment of Federal Employees: Gender, Leadership Status, and Organizational Tolerance for Abuses of Power.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2020): 349-364.
- Valantine, Hannah A., Charlene E. Le Fauve, Kathryn A. Morris, and William T. Riley. “Ending Sexual Harassment in Science: Designing and Administering a Survey That Can Lead to an Improved Organizational Climate.” *Academic Medicine*, vol. 97, no. 3 (2022): 364-369.
- Wiersma-Mosley, Jacquelyn D., and Kristen N. Jozkowski. “A Brief Report of Sexual Violence among Universities with NCAA Division I Athletic Programs.” *Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 9, (2019): 17.
- Wiersma-Mosley, Jacquelyn D., Malachi Willis, Kristen N. Jozkowski, and Michael J. Cleveland. “Do Party Schools Report Higher Rates of Violence against Women in Their Clery Data? A Latent Class Analysis.” *Violence against Women*, vol. 26, no. 6-7 (2020): 636-658.
- Wood, Leila, Rachel Voth Schrag, and Noël Busch-Armendariz. “Mental Health and Academic Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence among IHE-Attending Women.” *Journal of American College Health*, vol. 68, no. 3 (2020): 286-293.

Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Defense



FORCE RESILIENCY

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

Ms. Brenda Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

Enclosed is the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD(P&R)) response to Recommendations 7, 9–12, and 14 of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report GAO-24-106589, "SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees," dated December 18, 2023. OUSD(P&R) partially concurs with Recommendation 14. A response from the Department of the Army concerning Recommendation 6 and the Department of the Air Force concerning Recommendation 8 are also included.

My point of contact for this matter is Dr. Lisa L. Arfaa, Director, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Dr. Arfaa can be reached at lisa.l.arfaa.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy V. Hoyt".

Digitally signed by
HOYT.TIMOTHY.VON.136385528
4
Date: 2024.02.13 13:38:29 -05'00'

Timothy V. Hoyt, Ph.D.
Deputy Director, Force Resiliency

Enclosure:
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED DECMEBER 18, 2023
GAO-24-106589 (GAO CODE 106589)

“SEXUAL HARASSMENT: ACTIONS NEEDED TO IMPROVE PREVENTION
TRAINING FOR FEDERAL CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Secretary of the Army should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department’s required sexual harassment prevention training for Federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department of Defense (DoD) concurs with this recommendation. The Army has begun updating its mandatory equal employment opportunity (EEO), anti-harassment, and Notification and Federal Employee Anti-Discrimination and Retaliation Act training. Army will incorporate the final six management practices into this training starting in Fiscal Year 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Secretary of the Navy should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department’s required sexual harassment prevention training for Federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs with this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Secretary of the Air Force should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department’s required sexual harassment prevention training for Federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs with this recommendation. The Air Force notes that the six management practices identified in the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s (EEOC) Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector are not specific to sexual harassment and may not be directly applicable to the Department’s broader sexual harassment prevention efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Commissary Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency’s required sexual harassment prevention training for Federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to

determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs with this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Contract Audit Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training for federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs with this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 11: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training for Federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs with this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 12: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of the Defense Logistics Agency develops and implements a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training for Federal civilian employees to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs with this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in collaboration with the Director of the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, develops and implements a plan for the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to perform its responsibilities for overseeing DoD component sexual harassment prevention training. The plan should include clear goals, objectives, performance measures, and required resources for gauging its progress, identifying weaknesses, and taking appropriate action.

DoD RESPONSE: The DoD partially concurs with this recommendation because its oversight responsibilities pertain to DoD sexual harassment prevention policy, not implementation of workforce training, which is a responsibility of the DoD Components. To ensure that policies concerning prevention of sexual harassment of civilian employees are developed and implemented, the Director of the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will develop a plan that addresses the following actions:

**Appendix VI: Comments from the Department
of Defense**

3

1. Review and, as necessary, revise DoD policies concerning sexual harassment prevention training for civilian employees.
2. Collect data concerning DoD Component sexual harassment prevention training for civilian employees and use the data to assess the need for changes to policies or procedures.
3. Provide technical assistance as needed concerning DoD Components' training curriculum to ensure training content and curriculum meet recommended standards.
4. Assess whether and how the Department's sexual harassment prevention program for civilian employees may gain efficiencies through collaboration and resource sharing among the Department's Equal Employment Opportunity Program, the Department's anti-harassment program, and the Department's sexual assault prevention program.

Appendix VII: Comments from the United States Environmental Protection Agency



OFFICE OF MISSION SUPPORT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

Ms. Brenda S. Farrell
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on GAO's draft report titled Sexual Harassment: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees (GAO-24-106589).

The purpose of this letter is to provide the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's response to your recommendation. The EPA generally agrees with GAO's findings, conclusions and recommendation with some caveats. As noted throughout our engagement with GAO, EPA seeks to be a model employer by addressing and preventing workplace harassment, promoting equal employment opportunity and creating and maintaining a safe and inclusive workplace.

Summary

GAO found seven selected U.S. Department of Defense components and six other federal agencies vary in incorporating management practices of sexual harassment prevention training. The report also showed some agencies require employees to complete some sexual harassment prevention training. Further, some agencies did not fully incorporate management practices to enhance training effectiveness. Many agencies also did not have a way to measure the effectiveness of their training. The findings showed an opportunity to evaluate plans and identify ways to improve prevention training.

Of note, EPA reviewed the data shared in Table 7 and it does not appear to properly reflect our ongoing management practices related to sexual harassment training. Specifically, the Agency does solicit feedback following live training sessions (Management Practice 2) and the Agency's training on addressing workplace harassment is delivered by Labor and Employee Relations specialists (Management Practice 3). Further, EPA has conducted training (virtually or in-person) in smaller groups, encouraging greater employee engagement and participation. EPA's workplace anti-harassment training includes sexual harassment prevention training. Incidents of sexual harassment at EPA are rare, supporting the efficacy of our current training program.

Appendix VII: Comments from the United States Environmental Protection Agency

EPA reiterates our commitment to a zero-tolerance anti-harassment policy, which guides our review of GAO's recommendation. EPA agrees there are opportunities to evaluate and potentially improve our existing sexual harassment prevention training as outlined below. EPA also believes our ongoing collective efforts to minimize sexual harassment are highly effective as evidenced by our very low number of incidents across the Agency.

GAO Recommendation

The Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 3)

EPA's Response

In response to GAO's recommendation, EPA will take the following actions as part of our evaluation plan:

- The EPA's Learning Officer will offer advice and consulting to content owners to address the GAO change requests for Sexual Harassment Prevention training. (FY24)
- The Learning Officer will continue to advise content owners on how to evaluate training to identify continuous improvements in accordance with "determining whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training." (FY24)
- Training content owners will review and incorporate as appropriate the management practices offered in Tables 6 and 7 of GAO's draft report. (FY24)

Thank you for the opportunity to review the GAO draft report. If there is a need for further clarification, please contact EPA's RAIO, Afreeka Wilson, wilson.afreeka@epa.gov, (202) 564-0867.

Sincerely,

**KIMBERLY
PATRICK** Digitally signed by
KIMBERLY PATRICK
Date: 2024.01.22
12:25:56 -05'00'
Kimberly Y. Patrick
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator

**Appendix VII: Comments from the United
States Environmental Protection Agency**

cc: Kimberly Mayo, GAO
Ashley Gavin, GAO
Rebecca Beale, GAO
Vincent M. Buquicchio, GAO
Molly Callaghan, GAO
Nicole Collier, GAO
Sadaf Dastan, GAO
Elisebet Lalisán, GAO
Amie Lesser, GAO
Patricia Powell, GAO
Sarah Scott, GAO
Yinghua Shi, GAO
Pamela Snedden, GAO
Ben Theuma, GAO
Nicole Willis, GAO
Emily Wilson, GAO
Helena Wooden-Aguilar
Mara Kamen
Debra Hart
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EPA GAO Liaison Team
Susan Perkins
Brittany Wilson

Appendix VIII: Comments from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation



550 17th Street NW, Washington, DC 20429

Office of the Chairman

January 25, 2024

Ms. Brenda Farrell
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report entitled *Sexual Harassment: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees* (Draft Report). The GAO assessed the extent to which seven Department of Defense components and six federal agencies have incorporated management practices to enhance the effectiveness of required sexual harassment prevention training. The GAO assessed the FDIC's No FEAR Act Training, Anti-Harassment Program Briefing, and EEO Diversity Training for Supervisors which all include sexual harassment prevention. The Draft Report contains one recommendation for the FDIC to develop and implement a plan to evaluate the Agency's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The Draft Report further recommends that the evaluation plan include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. We agree with this recommendation.

The FDIC has no higher priority than ensuring every person at the Agency feels safe, valued, and respected. In early December 2023, the Agency issued an [Action Plan for a Safe, Fair, and Inclusive Work Environment](#) (Action Plan). The Action Plan addresses eight action areas and includes a number of initiatives to strengthen our work environment. We have identified some of the FDIC's most senior executives to lead this important work along with accountability measures. Provided below is a sample of initiatives relevant to the recommendation in the Draft Report.

- **Sexual Harassment Training.** The FDIC will conduct mandatory "live" training on preventing and addressing sexual harassment for all employees, managers, and executives. The Agency will implement a process to regularly assess the effectiveness of trainings and revise as needed.
- **New Employee Orientation.** The FDIC will require training on preventing and addressing sexual harassment at new employee orientation.
- **Anti-Harassment Directive.** The FDIC will issue a revised draft directive on anti-harassment to include a more detailed definition of sexual harassment and provide a plain language explanation of existing anti-retaliation protections for individuals who report cases of sexual harassment or otherwise expose discriminatory practices.

We acknowledge that we can do more to align with GAO and EEOC management practices. By August 31, 2024, the FDIC will develop and implement a plan to evaluate the Agency's sexual harassment prevention training for any needed improvements. In addition to the management practices the FDIC already incorporates, future trainings will incorporate the following management practices:

**Appendix VIII: Comments from the Federal
Deposit Insurance Corporation**

- Explaining possible consequences for sexual harassment.
- Including examples of sexual harassment that are tailored to the FDIC's workplace and workforce.
- Explaining the agency's EEO process and alternative complaint process.
- Describing how internal complaints will be investigated.

The plan will also ensure that the FDIC's sexual harassment prevention training addresses the following management practices for training implementation efforts:

- Ensuring training is delivered by trainers who are experts in the topic of harassment.
- Developing content that uses relevant social science research on harassment and retaliation.
- Including a process or mechanism to routinely analyze training to measure its impact on reducing harassment and retaliation in the Agency.

Additionally, FDIC will consider delivering training to smaller groups of employees and document the factors assessed when making that determination.

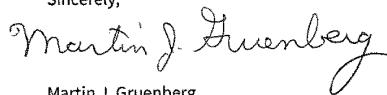
The plan may also include indicators such as:

- participants' reactions to training and whether they found it satisfactory and engaging,
- learning and confidence in applying what they learned,
- the application and observations of learning in the workplace, and
- organizational outcomes, such as reporting rates and climate survey results.

The FDIC is committed to providing a work environment that is free of harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment, where employees feel safe raising workplace concerns without fear of retaliation. The Agency recognizes that preventing and addressing sexual harassment and other harmful behaviors is critical to ensuring employee safety, effectiveness, retention, and morale.

We appreciate GAO's constructive recommendation and agree that addressing the recommendation will improve our sexual harassment prevention training efforts. If you have any questions or need additional follow-up information, please do not hesitate to contact Elroy Holden, Manager, Corporate Management Control Section, Office of Risk Management and Internal Controls, at (571) 242-7315 or eholden@fdic.gov.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Gruenberg
Chairman

Appendix IX: Comments from the General Services Administration

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The Administrator

January 23, 2024

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General:

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) Draft Report - *Sexual Harassment: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees* (GAO-24-106589).

GAO made the following recommendation to GSA:

005: GAO recommends that the Administrator of the General Services Administration should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the agency's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

GSA agrees with the above recommendation and is developing a plan to assess the effectiveness of its sexual harassment prevention training. The assessment will include an evaluation of how the training can be improved to better support existing management practices and align with relevant EEOC guidance. This effort is part of an ongoing initiative to comprehensively evaluate the agency's approach to harassment prevention and foster a safer federal workplace, in accordance with Executive Order 14035, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce.

Please contact me or Gianelle Rivera, Associate Administrator, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 501-0563, with any questions concerning this response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robin Carnahan".

Robin Carnahan
Administrator

cc: Brenda S. Farrell, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, GAO

U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F Street NW
Washington DC 20405-0002
www.gsa.gov

Appendix X: Comments from the Securities and Exchange Commission



UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20549

January 26, 2024

Brenda S. Farrell
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

Thank you for your draft report, *Sexual Harassment: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees* (GAO-24-106589). Harassment on any basis, including sexual harassment, is not permissible at the SEC. The SEC is committed to developing and maintaining policies, programs, and practices to prevent and address sexual harassment.

We are pleased to see the draft report's acknowledgement of harassment training currently required for all SEC employees. We concur with GAO's recommendation to the SEC that it develop and implement a plan to evaluate how the agency's required anti-harassment training could be improved and better aligned with management practices to enhance its effectiveness.

Thank you for the consideration you and your staff have shown our agency during this engagement. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 551-4306.

Sincerely,

**KENNETH
JOHNSON**

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KENNETH JOHNSON
Date: 2024.01.26
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Kenneth A. Johnson
Chief Operating Officer

Appendix XI: Comments from the United State Department of the Interior



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

Thank you for providing the Department of the Interior (Interior) the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Government Accountability Office (GAO) report titled, *Sexual Harassment: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees* (GAO-24-106589). We appreciate GAO's review of sexual harassment prevention training at the Interior and GAO's recommendations for improvement in this important area.

GAO made a total of 14 recommendations, with one each to the Interior, the Department of State, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the General Services Administration, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and eight to Department of Defense.

GAO issued one recommendation to the Interior. The recommendation states:

The Secretary of the Interior should develop and implement a plan to evaluate the department's required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation plan should include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training. (Recommendation 1).

The Interior concurs with the recommendation and the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights will work with internal partners and stakeholders to undertake a comprehensive review of its required sexual harassment prevention training to identify opportunities for improvement and will embark on a plan to remedy identified opportunities. The Interior currently has mandatory anti-harassment training in place that includes sexual harassment among other related topics, which will be reviewed as outlined above.

**Appendix XI: Comments from the United State
Department of the Interior**

If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Koduru, Acting Director, Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights, at Jennifer_koduru@ios.doi.gov.

Sincerely,

**JOAN
MOONEY**

Digitally signed by
JOAN MOONEY
Date: 2024.01.12
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Joan M. Mooney
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Exercising the Delegated Authority of the
Assistant Secretary- Policy, Management
and Budget

Appendix XII: Comments from the Department of State



United States Department of State
Comptroller
Washington, DC 20520

January 19, 2024

Jason Bair
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Mr. Bair:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees." GAO Job Code 106589.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James A. Walsh".

James A. Walsh

Enclosure:
As stated

cc: GAO – Kimberly Mayo
OIG - Norman Brown

Department of State Response to GAO Draft Report

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training
for Federal Civilian Employees**
(GAO-24-106589, GAO Code 106589)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your draft report, *“Sexual Harassment: Actions Needed to Improve Prevention Training for Federal Civilian Employees.”*

Recommendation 2: The Secretary of State should implement its plan to evaluate the department’s required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation should also include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with management practices to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR) will implement the plan to evaluate the Department’s required sexual harassment prevention training to identify needed improvements. The evaluation will include an assessment of training content and implementation to determine whether revisions are needed to better align with the management practices identified in GAO-24-106589 to enhance the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention training.

Appendix XIII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brenda S. Farrell, (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kimberly Mayo (Assistant Director), Ashley Gavin (Analyst in Charge), Rebecca Beale, Vincent M. Buquicchio, Molly Callaghan, Nicole Collier, Sadaf Dastan, Elisebet Lalian, Amie Lesser, Patricia Powell, Sarah Scott, Yinghua Shi, Pamela Snedden, Ben Theuma, Nicole Willis, and Emily Wilson made key contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, and Workplace Violence

Unwanted Sexual Behavior: Improved Guidance, Access to Care, and Training Needed to Better Address Victims' Behavioral Health Needs. [GAO-23-105381](#). Washington, D.C.: Aug. 2, 2023.

Women in Special Operations: Improvements to Policy, Data, and Assessments Needed to Better Understand and Address Career Barriers. [GAO-23-105168](#). Washington, D.C.: December 15, 2022.

FEMA Workforce: Additional Actions Needed to Help Prevent and Respond to Discrimination and Harassment. [GAO-23-105243](#). Washington, D.C.: October 20, 2022.

Sexual Harassment and Assault: The Army Should Take Steps to Enhance Program Oversight, Evaluate Effectiveness, and Identify Reporting Barriers. [GAO-22-104673](#). Washington, D.C.: May 27, 2022.

Sexual Assault: DOD and Coast Guard Should Ensure Laws Are Implemented to Improve Oversight of Key Prevention and Response Efforts. [GAO-22-103973](#). Washington, D.C.: March 28, 2022.

Sexual Assault and Harassment: NOAA Has Made Substantial Progress in Prevention and Response but Could Further Improve Its Processes. [GAO-21-560](#). Washington, D.C.: August 27, 2021.

Sexual Harassment: NNSA Could Improve Prevention and Response Efforts in Its Nuclear Security Forces. [GAO-21-307](#). Washington, D.C.: April 19, 2021.

Sexual Assault in the Military: Continued Congressional Oversight and Additional DOD Focus on Prevention Could Aid DOD's Efforts. [GAO-21-463T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 24, 2021.

Sexual Harassment and Assault: Guidance Needed to Ensure Consistent Tracking, Response, and Training for DOD Civilians. [GAO-21-113](#). Washington, D.C.: February 9, 2021.

Workplace Sexual Harassment: Experts Suggest Expanding Data Collection to Improve Understanding of Prevalence and Costs. [GAO-20-564](#). Washington, D.C.: September 30, 2020.

Sexual Harassment: Inconsistent and Incomplete Policies and Information Hinder VA's Efforts to Protect Employees. [GAO-20-387](#). Washington, D.C.: June 15, 2020.

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Sexual Harassment in STEM Research: Agencies Have Taken Actions, but Need Complaint Procedures, Overall Plans, and Better Collaboration. [GAO-20-187](#). Washington, D.C.: March 19, 2020.

Aviation Security: Federal Air Marshal Service Has Taken Steps to Address Workforce Issues, but Additional Actions Needed. [GAO-20-125](#). Washington, D.C.: February 12, 2020.

Sexual Harassment in STEM Research: Preliminary Observations on Policies for University Grantees and Information Sharing among Selected Agencies. [GAO-19-583T](#). Washington, D.C.: June 12, 2019.

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Sexual Violence Data: Actions Needed to Improve Clarity and Address Differences Across Federal Data Collection Efforts. [GAO-16-546](#). Washington, D.C.: July 19, 2016.

Sexual Assault: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Prevention Strategy and to Help Ensure It Is Effectively Implemented. [GAO-16-61](#). Washington, D.C.: November 4, 2015.

Military Personnel: Actions Needed to Address Sexual Assaults of Male Servicemembers. [GAO-15-284](#). Washington, D.C.: March 19, 2015.

Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Take Further Actions to Prevent Sexual Assault during Initial Military Training. [GAO-14-806](#). Washington, D.C.: September 9, 2014.

Preventing Sexual Harassment: DOD Needs Greater Leadership Commitment and an Oversight Framework. [GAO-11-809](#). Washington, D.C.: September 21, 2011.

Hazing, Domestic Abuse,
Substance Use Disorder,
Drug Misuse, Suicide,
Domestic Violence

Military Hazing: DOD Should Address Data Reporting Deficiencies, Training Limitations, and Personnel Shortfalls. [GAO-22-104066](#). Washington, D.C.: December 15, 2021.

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Substance Use Disorder: Reliable Data Needed for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program. [GAO-21-58](#). Washington, D.C.: December 14, 2020.

Drug Misuse: Agencies Have Not Fully Identified How Grants That Can Support Drug Prevention Education Contribute to National Goals. [GAO-21-96](#). Washington, D.C.: November 18, 2020.

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Smartphone Data: Information and Issues Regarding Surreptitious Tracking Apps That Can Facilitate Stalking. [GAO-16-317](#). Washington, D.C.: April 21, 2016.

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