

Why We Shouldn't Be Surprised About Sexual Assault in Military

The recent revelations about sexual assault in the military have left many Americans disconcerted and angry.

Well, they should. Rape is evil, predation is wrong, molestation is immoral. For such things to be occurring in an institution as vital and as respected as our Armed Forces is unacceptable.

Yet should we be wholly surprised?

We live in a culture of fatherlessness. As my colleagues in Family Research Council's Marriage and Religion Research Institute have demonstrated from Census Bureau data, only "45 percent of U.S. children on the cusp of adulthood have grown up in an intact married family. The mother and father of the remaining 55 percent of 17-year-olds have at some time rejected each other as husband and wife."

Fathers teach boys how to act as responsible men. Remove the father from the home, and the boy's moral and emotional compass has difficulty finding the true north of honor and self-restraint. Dads keep their children, especially boys, in line and teach them both what it means to be honorable and how to stay that way. Remove the father, and the son has a greater tendency to engage in self-destructive behavior.

Additionally, our culture champions the sexualization of all facets of human life and relationship, and at an increasingly younger age. Writing in *Psychology Today*, Dr. Fred Kaiser notes, "The average child in the United States today has countless opportunities for exposure to sexualized messages every day. Television, music, billboards, print

media, Internet, cellphones and communication devices, cable, movies, and of course interaction with peers and adults, offer children numerous possibilities where they can encounter sexual messages of all sorts.”

Fatherlessness is augmented by cultural decay. For example, military society is awash in pornography. Young men, in the fullness of their sexual maturity and with inadequate moral and social training, are placed in close proximity to young women.

An *Army Times* article says, “Civilian pornography use is high: The most recent studies suggest as many as one in 10 people in the general population suffer from pornography and other sexual addictions fueled by the Web. But military use, given the largely young and male population, is believed to be much higher. ‘Twenty percent would not shock me. That would be a conservative estimate,’ says Navy Lt. Michael Howard, a licensed therapist and chaplain who specializes in treating sexual addiction.”

Is there a link between pornography and sexual violence? Yes; it’s well-documented (for example, see); but it’s also plain common sense. Viewing women as objects whose essential function is to gratify an urge reduces them to commodities to be used, not persons to be valued. The result: Some young men, especially those in stressful conditions of military service, will act out the sexually aggressive conduct they view for pleasure.

We cannot expect universally honorable conduct from young men raised without fathers and who are inundated with sexual imagery and messages from prepubescent boyhood. Many young men raised in such contexts will turn out adequately, if not well. Some won’t—and there are more in the latter category by the year.

Should the military do all it can to protect women from sexual

abuse? Of course. But no laws, rules or protections will safeguard anyone if inner moral restraint is not present. And that's why boys need respectable, involved dads who love them and model before them what it means to be a man.

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