



Sexual Assault Prevention & Response

Shipmates

Help Victims Become Survivors

By Beth Hundley

When Louella Cazimero-Bactad's phone rings, she expects the worst and hopes she's wrong. More often than not, however, the voice on the other end of the line is someone in need of the kind of help few people are willing and able to provide.

Cazimero-Bactad is Navy Region Hawaii's SARC – short for sexual assault response coordinator. It's a job she wishes wasn't needed, but is one that keeps her and the more than 150 trained volunteer victim advocates she oversees very busy. Some of these victim advocates serve a specific command during deployment, but most are available for the entire region, including tenant commands.

While prevention is the ideal and everyone's responsibility, the reality is that sexual assault victims need to have a safe place to turn for help. "All afloat and deploying commands are required to have a trained victim advocate [VA] on board," explained Cazimero-Bactad.

VA training is conducted by the SARC at the Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC), which handles the Navy's Sexual Assault, Prevention and Response (SAPR) program, formerly known by the acronym SAVI for Sexual Assault Victim Intervention.

"It is inspiring to witness shipmates volunteering their time to receive this extensive training and to see their 'can-do' willingness to support fellow shipmates in times of real crisis," said Margaret Scurfield, FFSC director.

In addition to the initial training, ongoing refresher training also is made available to all VAs, as well as command liaisons, points of contact and data collection coordinators.

The goal of the SAPR program is "to provide a comprehensive, standardized, victim-sensitive system to prevent and respond to sexual assault Navy-wide, through sexual assault awareness and prevention education, victim advocacy, and data collection," according to the SAPR program Web site at www.sapr.mil.

The Department of Defense (DoD) SAPR Office has found that fewer than 10 percent of sexual assaults in the DoD nationwide are reported so it has stepped up its efforts to educate service members and civilian personnel about this crime and how to report it. In fact, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus recently ordered an overhaul of the program with an increased emphasis on prevention, holding perpetrators accountable and removing the stigma of reporting sexual assault crimes.

Prevention, including bystander intervention, is key to preventing sexual assault before it occurs. Active duty personnel have two reporting options: restricted and unrestricted.

RESTRICTED

This is a confidential reporting option. The victim can notify the SARC, a victim advocate, chaplain or health care personnel (usually at Tripler Army Medical Center, though any military health care clinic will assist.) The victim is then provided with medical care, including the option of a forensic examination, counseling, information and support. Restricted reports do not involve the military command or law enforcement. It is common for victims to initially make a restricted report and later decide they want to prosecute their assailant. If that choice is made, the initial "restricted" report becomes unrestricted. (If a report is made to anyone other than the persons listed above, the report is automatically unrestricted.)

UNRESTRICTED

This reporting option involves both the chain of command and Navy Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS). The victim can notify any



SAPR volunteers include civilians and active duty members of all rates and ranks. They stand ready to provide a helping hand.

victim advocate, the SARC, medical personnel, the command ombudsman, law enforcement or any individual in the chain of command. In addition to medical care, including a forensic examination, counseling, information and support, the victim also will receive ongoing advocacy services, such as helping make sure temporary restraining orders are filed, plus

who works with reservists at Navy Operational Support Center, cites when she talks to someone about whether they should attend the training if they aren't sure they want to be a victim advocate. That's when she reminds them "we all can be victim advocates," whether we choose to or not.

If you or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault, call the SAPR Emergency Phone at 808-722-6192.

support and assistance with any legal actions. "SAPR is not a male-bashing program," emphasized Cazimero-Bactad. "It is about the victim and the victim's needs." Victims can be men, and assailants can be women, she noted.

Statistics show that one in five people will either be a victim of sexual assault or know someone who is a victim. That's a sobering number that Cazimero-Bactad shares with each class of potential victim advocates she trains. It's also the statistic that Hospital Corpsman Second Class Toni Wilson, a victim advocate

Her take on it is simple – if it happens to someone you care about, you will end up being their advocate. That's what happened to her, and she wishes she'd had some kind of training to know what to do.

It was 2004 and Wilson was stationed in Louisiana. "We had an incident take place at the command. I knew the victim. I was her shoulder to lean on while she was going through it," she explained. That's when she learned about what was then known as SAVI, and she eventually went through the training and volunteered to

serve as a victim advocate.

Sonar Technician Second Class Michael J. de Leon was a young sailor in Virginia when a good friend of his was raped. That experience of being with her throughout the investigation motivated him to volunteer. After going through what he calls "really, really intense" training, he is now one of two victim advocates attached to the USS Paul Hamilton.

The training covered everything from the administrative process to critical thinking and reality-based scenarios. His class included sailors who had been victims themselves who wanted to help others become survivors.

While victim advocates who are attached to specific commands create their own watch bill when deployed, the other victim advocates serve on the region's watch bill, which offers victims an option of a male VA, a female VA plus an alternate VA. These VAs are on call day or night, weekends or holidays. During business hours, the SARC is the first point of contact. "SAPR victim advocates sign up to stand the 24/7 watch bill for one week at a time," explained Cazimero-Bactad.



When someone reports a sexual assault, the SAPR 24/7 emergency phone (808-722-6192) rings. Sometimes it is the victim at the other end; sometimes it is a medical professional; sometimes it is a third party. Active duty personnel have an obligation to report a sexual assault if they learn of one. Contacting the command victim advocate or calling the SAPR emergency phone fulfills that obligation.

Wilson said her calls frequently come from a third party, sometimes days after the fact, and there are many reasons a victim doesn't come forward on their own. "Most of the time it's because they're so traumatized and they have to tell someone, so they tell a friend. That friend is the one who usually gets them to me," she explained.

De Leon said it sometimes goes further and it's "a fourth or fifth party, someone who doesn't even know the victim, who finally comes forward." The victim or other bystanders frequently are reluctant to say anything, perhaps because underage drinking was involved or because people are scared or embarrassed. "They don't want to get in trouble, and they don't want anyone else to get in trouble."

Yet because sailors see SAPR posters with both the 24/7 emergency phone number and names of command victim advocates when applicable, people can get help. "There is somebody to tell other than the captain, the XO or the master chief," de Leon explained.

"We're at their level, at their rank." He also thinks awareness of the program helps with prevention.

Once the call is made, a victim advocate will find out where the person is so they can meet with them face-to-face. Typically, this takes place at a medical facility because even if it is not immediately after an assault, it is important for the victim to be examined by a physician. While the medical examination may involve evidence gathering, its primary purpose is to make sure the victim has no health threats as a result of the trauma.

"Personally, when I meet my victims, I don't ask them what happened. I don't want

to revictimize them. I let them take the lead at their pace," explained Wilson.

Regardless of whether the report is restricted or unrestricted, the victim is given the opportunity to meet with a social worker for an initial consult and with a counselor for ongoing care in dealing with the assault. The professional caregivers "take care of them medically and try to help with mental stability," Wilson noted. The caregivers follow a full checklist of protocols, including blood work, medications and preventative treatments. "We document the report date," she added. "Beyond that, in a restricted case, that's all we can do."

In an unrestricted case, however, the accused's command is notified and NCIS gets involved. While the investigation is underway, a military protective order can be put in place, which helps in those instances when an assailant and victim live in the same barracks, or work for the same command or department. The victim advocate continues to provide support

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a SAPR victim advocate, call the Fleet & Family Support Center at 808-474-1999.

throughout what can sometimes be a long investigation and possible Article 32 hearing that might lead to a court martial.

The VA who initially receives the report or responds to the case is not always the advocate for the entire case. If the victim is not comfortable with the VA assigned to them for any reason, the initial VA does what Cazimero-Bactad calls a "warm hand over" to another VA. "I look at the victim and the victim's needs – who are they comfortable with," she explained. "We don't take it personally," added Wilson, who said she actually prefers working with people she does not know. "I know nothing of their job; I don't know who they work with. All

I am doing is serving the victim. I'm not there to protect the command; I am there to protect the victim.”

Having both men and women available as victim advocates helps. While the stereotype might be that a victim would want to talk to a woman, it's not always true. “Some females don't trust other females,” de Leon said.

Often victims who initially reported using the restricted method decide later to go unrestricted and pursue charges against their assailant. While the Navy prefers cases be unrestricted so the perpetrators can be removed from the service where they might take action against another victim, they recognize getting help for the victim is even more important than “catching” the perpetrator. If the restricted reporting option weren't available, many people would not report the incident or get help in a timely fashion.

“It gives them the opportunity to get a grip on things for a certain timeframe. It gives them a greater sense of getting back in control after all of this being taken from them,” Wilson noted. When the time comes that the victim wants to go unrestricted, they simply need to say the word. “We're here to help them empower themselves again.”

The SAPR program also is available to anyone who is sexually assaulted on a Navy installation. SAPR VAs also respond to retirees and dependent family members over the age of 18. Juveniles are cared for through the Family Advocacy Program professionals who are trained to work with young people. These reports, however, are automatically unrestricted.

Cazimero-Bactad has received too many reports of military spouses who are assaulted while their spouses are deployed, yet fear coming forward because they are embarrassed or worried about what people will think. Unfortunately, that's what predators and opportunists hope to find. “They look for a person who won't say anything,” she said.

There is no reason for any victim to suffer in silence because there are people ready, trained and available to help, without judgment. That is especially important in a place like Hawaii where many dependents are not surrounded by their network of family and friends.

“If it's one of your best friends, you're going to be there with them; you're going to help,” said Wilson. “Not everyone has that friend they can go to.”

That's why there are SAPR victim advocates. ■

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION TIPS



Be Assertive

- State clearly what you want (and don't want).
- Remember “no” means “no” – when you say it and when someone says it to you.
- Make sure your words match your body language. (Don't laugh or smile when saying no.)
- Do not allow others to violate your personal space.
- Don't be afraid of not being liked or not fitting in.



Be Prepared

- Travel in groups. (Use the buddy system.)
- Stay sober – and don't leave any drink unattended.
- Lock your doors (barracks, home, car). Don't prop exterior doors open.
- Don't go anywhere alone with someone unless you know them well and trust them.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you intend to be home.



Be Alert

- Trust your instincts.
- If you sense trouble, quickly get to a safe place.
- If you feel you're in danger, get help in any way.
- Report any suspicious/unauthorized persons in the barracks.
- Be aware of your surroundings, even as they change throughout the course of an evening.



Intervention Techniques

- Peer pressure can be powerful, so don't hesitate to apply positive peer pressure by refusing to condone behavior that harasses or demeans others.
- Being drunk is no excuse. If something is wrong when a person is sober, it is wrong when they are impaired. (Most sexual assaults involve alcohol use by the victim, the assailant or both.)
- If you see a person in a vulnerable position or a friend sexually coercing someone, say something. That action might save someone from the trauma of a sexual assault or the ordeal of criminal prosecution.
- Sexual assault is a crime. Don't ignore it; call 911.

These tips were assembled from several resources, including the Navy Fleet and Family Support Center (www.nffsp.org), the U.S. Army SHARP Program (www.sexualassault.army.mil/), the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (www.rainn.org), and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (www.uww.edu/uwcs/brochures/AcqSexualAssault.pdf).