



**Observation of Sexual Assault Response
Coordinator (SARC) and
Victim Advocate (VA) Sexual Assault
Prevention and Response Training**

Report to U.S. Marine Corps

**Prepared by the Department of Defense Sexual Assault
Prevention and Response Office**

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BACKGROUND

This report is in response to the requirement in DoDI 6495.02 for Services and the National Guard Bureau (NGB) to submit a copy of their SAPR training programs, or SAPR training elements, to the USD (P&R) through SAPRO, for evaluation of consistency and compliance with DoD SAPR training standards contained in DoDI 6495.02¹.

At the heart of the Department's sexual assault response program are the Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) and SAPR Victim Advocates (VAs), who support victims throughout the reporting and response process. In 2010, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) began working with the Military Services to make revisions to DoD Instruction (DoDI) 6495.02, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Procedures*, including revisions to SARC and SAPR VA training requirements. The version of DoDI 6495.02 currently being processed for reissuance includes a requirement that all DoD sexual assault responders—including SARCs and SAPR VAs—receive the same baseline training in order to standardize services throughout the Department.

With the passage of Public Law 112-81, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, Congress underscored the importance of SARC and SAPR VA training by codifying into federal law a mandate for the Secretary of Defense to establish a professional and uniform training and certification program for SARCs and SAPR VAs. In 2012, the Department established the DoD Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program (D-SAACP) to fulfill this requirement, standardize sexual assault victim advocacy across the Department, and professionalize the roles of the SARCs and VAs who perform victim advocacy duties. A key element of the D-SAACP is the evaluation and oversight of SARC and SAPR VA training that ensures the Department's victim advocacy core competencies are being realized and that the training complies with DoDI 6495.02 policy standards. The Services must have their training pre-approved by the D-SAACP Review Committee, and SARCs and SAPR VAs must complete training prior to applying for certification.

Another standardized document utilized is the DoD Standards for Victim Assistance Services, which were developed to establish a foundational level of victim assistance services while recognizing the distinct missions, skill sets, and responsibilities of the Department's various victim assistance-related programs. The Standards include both competency and ethical standards for DoD victim assistance personnel, including SARCs and SAPR VAs.

APPROACH

DoD SAPRO deployed a team of military personnel, training experts, and a Victim Assistance Subject Matter Expert (SME) to review United States Marine Corps (USMC) training for SARCs and SAPR VAs. The review focused on evaluating instructional practices and methods as well as course content against the DoDI 6495.02¹, the DoD Standards for Victim Assistance Services, and the D-SAACP

¹ Note: The DoD SAPRO team realizes that training requirements used to review this course include those outlined in the revised DoDI 6495.02, which has not yet been reissued as of the date of this report but is expected to be in the near term. However, the information provided in this report is intended to support the USMC in meeting the requirements set forth in the revised version of the DoDI.

SARC/VA competency framework. The DoD SAPRO team validated the observations and ratings among five observers and compiled findings on the strengths and recommendations of the USMC's SARC and VA course for the development of this report.

The DoD SAPRO team reviewed the following two USMC course offerings:

1. **'Victim Advocacy (VA) Training,' 9-11 July 2012 in Quantico, Virginia.** The instructor was an experienced SARC and the course consisted of presentation slides, videos, and practical exercises. Approximately forty students participated in the course and were each provided a participant guide binder. The 'VA Training' course was followed by the USMC's 'Take A Stand' NCO Training' course (train-the-trainer (TTT)) on 12-13 July 2012.
2. **'Installation SARC Training,' 22-24 January 2013 in Quantico, Virginia.** The instructor was an experienced Installation SARC. The course included practical exercises, detailed discussions, hands-on Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database (DSAID) training taught by a facilitator from USMC SAPR Program Management office, and student teach-back sessions. Students were provided a participant guide as well as a disc with resources to take back to their installation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USMC's VA training meets D-SAACP requirements, provides detailed information on roles and responsibilities for VAs and SARCs, and employs elements of adult learning theory. The structure of the USMC VA and SARC training courses demonstrates an effective model for teaching the skills required of VAs and SARCs. To improve the VA course, the USMC should expand VA training to address all VA responsibilities and allow time for each student to demonstrate their skills. Further improvements can be made to the VA course by expanding practical exercises, including more opportunities to practice victim interaction and response in role-play exercises, and adding checks-on-learning.

The USMC's Installation SARC training provides numerous reference documents and templates that serve as effective job aids for Installation SARCs back at their command. Practical exercises and teach-back sessions prepare SARCs for their new roles. To improve the USMC Installation SARC course, the USMC should create a comprehensive and formalized training support package (TSP) to provide to SARCs for their use and ensure standardized training for SARCs across USMC.

Details of all strengths and recommendations can be found in the Findings section below.

FINDINGS

Strengths of USMC VA Training

Training Practices and Methods

1. **The VA course was taught by a knowledgeable and experienced instructor.** The instructor was an experienced SARC who provided examples and personal insights for working with victims that resonated with students. She was able to contribute personal stories, and her experience illustrated the varied emotional responses the VAs will face in their new role.
 - a. The instructor provided information on the practice of VAs preparing a ‘go bag’ with toiletries, clothes, forms, and a safety planning worksheet to prepare for receiving a call from a victim.
 - b. The instructor thoroughly explained the overlap between SARC and VA duties. She conveyed the seriousness of the role as a lifeline to those in traumatic stress and the significance of being on call 24/7.
 - c. Based on her experiences, the instructor identified areas of the ‘Take A Stand’ training that are the most difficult to understand and instruct and had the students expand on the model responses found in the TSP.
2. **The VA course employed effective practical exercises.** Many exercises involved students, allowed them to work in small groups, and provided opportunity for student input. These applied-learning opportunities hold great promise for reinforcing understanding and recall of VA responsibilities and SAPR program elements.
 - a. Students participated in an activity to create their own ‘elevator’ speech to discuss DD Form 2910, the Victim Reporting Preference Statement, which requires an explanation of the advantages and limits of their reporting options. As students developed and presented their elevator speech, they internalized and verbalized the details of the reporting options. By articulating their understanding of a new topic, students become engaged in the learning process, strengthened their understanding of reporting options, and built confidence for their role as a VA.
 - b. A rapport-building activity prepared students to work with victims. Students documented supportive phrases and discussed statements to avoid while advocating for victims. This activity produced a list of communication best practices and helped students identify statements that are not helpful to the victim. Documenting these statements allowed students to commit the best-practice information to memory and create a list of phrases that could also be used for future reference on the job.
 - c. The instructor conducted an activity for students to identify consent. The instructor outlined a scenario based around a couple on a date, and the class had to determine consent in the situation presented. This activity highlighted the fact that in all working situations, personal values, beliefs, and attitudes about sexual relationships can affect how a VA might treat victims. This process enhances the importance of separating personal beliefs from professional victim assistance. The activity brought out personal biases held

by individual VAs and it became obvious that individual definitions of consent differed greatly from the DoD definition. This activity sparked heated dialogue, including the discussion on how to keep personal values, biases, and principles out of advocacy work.

- d. The VA/victim role-play activity built victim advocacy skills. In the role-play, students reviewed a scenario, acted out the roles of victims and VAs in small groups, and used an observer checklist to evaluate each other. The checklist provided a guide for VA activities and best practices when meeting with victims and could be used informally on the job as well. The instructor rotated through the groups, offering insight and feedback.
 - e. Train-the-trainer teach-back activity built skills for VAs. To obtain the skill set to facilitate the bystander intervention course 'Take A Stand', the last day of the VA training course included teach-back sessions where each VA had the opportunity to instruct a section of the course using the provided script and instructor guidance. In groups of three, each VA had an opportunity to present the entire course, obtain feedback, and learn from their peers. The NCO Training TTT also provided new VAs with talking points, information on encouraging interaction, and 'Dos and Don'ts' for facilitating the 'Take A Stand' course at their command.
3. **The Participant Guide incorporated slides and references.** The Participant guide included course slides to enable students to follow along with the instructor and take notes during the course. The slides and references contained in the Participant Guide will also be a good reference for students when they start their role as a VA.

Training Content

4. **The VA course addressed challenges.** VAs face numerous challenges in their role, and the instructor outlined and identified many of them during the course. Upfront knowledge of upcoming challenges, as well as suggested methods to address them, helped students build a level of confidence for situations they will face in their new role. Discussion during the course helped VAs to prepare their actions and responses to tough situations, and provided a safe place for questions and discussion of difficult topics.
- a. The activity for students to outline their list of concerns and benefits for taking on the VA role developed understanding of the full scope of their responsibilities. The activity also allowed students to address the concerns and challenges they may face as a full-time VA.
 - b. The discussion about commander's responsibilities addressed challenges and behaviors VAs may face at their command.
 - c. A discussion focused on the effects of trauma on victims and the challenges VA's may face when they do not receive all the information about the event in sequence. The instructor shared instances of complex stories involving multiple victims from previous experiences.
5. **References assist VAs in their role.** The Marine Corps created an excellent set of job-aids and resources for VAs, all of which are also available through their USMC online SharePoint site for use by VAs. The instructor outlined numerous resources available to assist VAs in the role, including the following:

- a. The instructor referenced the www.sapr.mil website and the USMC SAPR SharePoint site that includes the most up to date information on Directive Type Memorandums (DTMs), USMC procedures, and the USMC SAPR Campaign Plan for 2012.
- b. The instructor reviewed the VA Code of Professional Ethics and led discussion about VA and SARC ethics, including actions that would violate them.
- c. The 'Take A Stand' NCO Training included a Frequently Asked Questions Appendix to address questions with appropriate policy background information. This resource ensures VAs delivering the course address questions appropriately and consistently across USMC.

Recommendations for USMC VA Training

To improve the USMC VA training, the USMC should extend activity times to allow each student the opportunity to practice interacting with victims, add knowledge checks, and include guest instructors (e.g. Staff Judge Advocates, law enforcement, Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Nurses, chaplains) to provide their subject-matter expertise during presentations.

Training Practices and Methods

1. **Adjust the timing of topics and distribution of activities to improve the USMC VA Training course.**
 - a. As designed, the course includes three days of VA training, with an additional two days of bystander intervention training and TTT for the 'Take A Stand' course. The time allotted to activities where students practice VA skills should be expanded and lecture and additional anecdotal information reduced. While it is important for VAs to facilitate the 'Take A Stand' course, a more valuable use of their time in the VA course would be to practice their victim response procedures and communication skills with victims.
 - b. Expand activities to spread interaction over the 40-hour course instead of front-loading presentation slides for the first day or more, with scenarios and role-plays later in the week. Implementing the principles of adult learning theory, students should be given the opportunity to further apply concepts and new information. Activities applied to the full scope of the materials allow students to apply knowledge, ask questions, understand the information in the proper context, and discuss with peers and instructors to deepen their knowledge.
2. **Expand practical exercises and role-play.** As designed, only two hours of the course were available for students to perform role-plays. More time should be built into the course to allow students to practice their advocacy and response skills and obtain feedback from an experienced VA or SARC. During the few role-plays that time allowed, students acted in both the victim and VA role. But when students acted as victims, the actions were not realistic. The instructor should set aside time for all students to perform the role-play in front of the class, allowing for peer and instructor feedback to contribute to group learning. By expanding time for role-plays, each student would have the opportunity to play the VA role, and the instructor could take the role of the victim during role-play, engaging students and acting in a way they have seen victims respond, based on their experience to provide a realistic learning environment.

3. **Add checks-on-learning.** The USMC should create a final check-on-learning for the VA course to ensure students are prepared to perform the responsibilities of their role. Also, evaluation of the role-play, TTT, and other classroom activities could serve as the knowledge check if qualified VAs and/or SARCs are available to help review and evaluate each student.
4. **Ensure VAs and their commanders are aware of the VA responsibilities before they attend the VA training.** During the course, the instructor discussed DD Form 2909 and the importance of the VA and commander reviewing and signing the form. Many students had not reviewed the form, and some expressed concern that neither they nor their commander understood the full scope of responsibilities for the VA role. This form should be reviewed between the VA and commander before the student attends the VA training, to ensure both parties are aware of the commitment the VA role requires.
5. **Expand the use of Subject Matter Expert (SME) guest instructors.** Using guest instructors ensures students receive the most accurate information. SME presentations build credibility with new VAs by demonstrating they are experts in their field and trusted partners. If possible, include presentations by Navy Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS), a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), a Staff Judge Advocate (SJA), and a Chaplain. Consider including key topics in the presentations by SMEs, for example, the NCIS guest instructor could discuss military and civilian protective orders and the SJA could provide details about Victim Advocate Privilege under MRE-514. Also, if possible, invite other experienced VAs and/or SARCs to join the class, provide their expertise, and support the main instructor during role-plays and teach-backs.

Training Content

6. **Focus training on describing the relevancy of the topic to the VA role.**
 - a. The first module on the history of sexual assault and prevalence in the United States is not effective or as relevant as it should be to Marines. To improve relevancy to USMC, the VA course should reduce time and coverage of this topic and provide more specific and relevant information about sexual assault that would be more useful to the VA audience. This could be achieved by reducing content in Module 1, and placing focus on the specific and updated USMC statistics and policies contained in Module 2.
 - b. Provide less anecdotal information and personal stories. At times, the instructor went into great depth on a topic and added personal stories. While her expertise is helpful, diversion from the instructor guide resulted in less time for practical exercises on day three of the VA course. Many topics discussed were not part of the curriculum, and because of the time spent earlier in the week, the last day of instruction was rushed.
7. **Explain the importance of Reserves and National Guard Bureau duty status when providing services to victims.** The VA course should include information on handling cases where the victim is a Reservist or a member of the National Guard Bureau (NGB) to ensure victims are referred to the appropriate resources in their geographic location and to discuss any other differences in their eligibility for SAPR services based on their duty status. This instruction should also include information on Line of Duty (LOD) determinations.

Strengths of USMC Installation SARC Training

The USMC Installation SARC training provided Installation SARCs with relevant information for their role, employed practical exercises, and provided effective job aids. Activities engaged students and provided a safe environment for them to practice elements of training delivery.

Training Practices and Methods

1. **The structure of SARC training is effective.** There is a clear outline for SAPR SARC/VA training within USMC including the VA course, Installation SARC course, and Command SARC course. The VA course is a pre-requisite for the Installation and Command SARC courses, ensuring all students have the baseline VA skill set before continuing in their role as a SARC. The additional SARC-specific training for both Installation SARCs and Command SARCs allows for a focus on the SAPR program management, case transfer, outreach, and training responsibilities required of the SARC. The Installation SARC course began with a refresher activity “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” to gauge initial student comprehension of topics discussed during VA training and close any gaps in knowledge before moving into the specific SARC objectives and responsibilities. An overview of USMC SAPR training initiatives was also provided to students, and this reference clearly outlined the audience, instructor, and frequency of each course in the structured SAPR program.
2. **The Installation SARC course included student teach-backs.** Students were asked to review materials on particular topics covered during the first day of the Installation SARC course and then each student was required to teach a topic to the class. An entire day during the Installation SARC course provided DSAID training and included teach-back sections in preparation for training Command SARCs on the DSAID system. During the final day of the course, each student also presented a block of the ‘Take A Stand’ training. These activities served an important role in both evaluating how well the student understood the material, as well as the extent of their skills at presenting a module to a class. Teach-backs can be effective activities to evaluate facilitation, comprehension, and instruction skills required of the Installation SARC as they train Command SARCs and other Marines.
3. **USMC places a strong focus on consistency across SAPR training.** During the teach-back sessions, the instructor emphasized the importance of following the exact script provided in the TSP for the ‘Take A Stand’ bystander intervention training. Installation SARCs in the course were directed to stick to the standardized course when providing annual, bystander intervention, and VA training. The standardized training and use of TSPs can ensure consistency across all USMC SAPR training when instructors follow the script and use the provided suggested responses.

Training Content

4. **The course focuses on SARC duties and the differentiation between Installation and Command SARC roles.** The Installation SARC course clearly outlined the difference between SARC roles and included a job aid for all SAPR training initiatives. The clear delineation of roles creates a supportive and collaborative environment for SARCs and a strong framework to support victims within USMC.

5. **Effective resources and job-aids are provided for Installation SARCs.** The Installation SARC course provided numerous effective job aids for use by Installation and Command SARCs. All of the documents are also accessible through the USMC SAPR SharePoint site. Resources provided include:
 - a. The Victim Advocacy Services Provided Log can be used to track which services a VA has offered to a victim, including follow up dates, and referral information. It contains no PII and provides an effective record for VAs and SARCs to track their work with victims.
 - b. Numerous Case Management Group (CMG) job aids provided to students included a sample CMG Meeting Calendar to ensure meetings are scheduled each month, a year out if possible, and a sample CMG Meeting Agenda. A sample CMG Review Narrative was also provided. The review narrative is a best practice to ensure no PII is included during CMG discussions and to keep track of the progress of a SAPR case. The instructor also spoke about best practices for the CMG meeting, including methods to obtain buy-in from all parties required to participate.
 - c. The USMC Installation SARC provided a “Guidance for SARCS when Reviewing Victim Advocate D-SAACP Applications” job-aid which can be used by SARCs when reviewing VA applications for certification. The document clearly outlines documentation requirements for the D-SAACP application, and provides SARCs a checklist for reviewing applications.
 - d. The Safety Planning Tips and Safety Planning Worksheet provides a three-step process for VAs and SARCs to provide effective safety planning before the victim leaves the first meeting. The safety planning worksheet addresses items the VA and/or SARC should speak with the victim about, and acts as a resource for the victim to remind them of the safety options and processes available to them.
6. **The Installation SARC course included a SAPR Services Determination Matrix and practical exercise.** The SAPR Services Determination Matrix describes different combinations of victims, assailants, and the victim’s corresponding eligibility for SAPR services. This serves as an effective job aid to determine which services are appropriate for victims. A practical exercise provided students the opportunity to use the reference by reading scenarios and determine whether the victim would be eligible for SAPR services or should be referred to other services. This type of activity is a best practice for both determining applicable services, as well as solidifying the usefulness of the job aid with students. This activity would be useful in both the VA course as well as the Command SARC training course.
7. **The course provided important information to new Installation SARCs.**
 - a. The instructor covered a module on relationship building with VAs and other key players in the SAPR program to include the Installation Commanding Officer, SJA, Installation Chaplain, Command SARCs, members of law enforcement, members of the local medical treatment facility, and other Installation SARCs. A job aid was also provided to help new Installation SARCs create their network, and the instructor shared personal stories of how she overcame challenges in building her network in the past.

- b. The instructor reviewed the need for an installation standard operating procedure (SOP) for handling reports of sexual assault. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with local services were also discussed in detail, and the instructor provided best practices from her experience.
- c. A module on the importance of setting up workspace for an Installation SARC provided information on tactics to maintain confidentiality even when the workspace is not ideal, strategies for phone conversations, and requirements for file storage under double lock-and-key.
- d. Details for the transfer of cases between commands, installations, and when a victim leaves the Marine Corps were covered in detail. This discussion provided an overview of the process, communication lines, and follow-up necessary to ensure support services are seamless for a victim.
- e. The instructor provided a detailed inspection checklist Installation SARCs can use to ensure their SAPR program meets all USMC requirements. The checklist references USMC policy and can help the Installation SARC manage the program at their facility.
- f. Student materials include the USMC instruction on submitting and processing expedited transfers. The discussion of the policy and the sample request from both the victim and the commander provide useful resources for an Installation SARC guiding a victim through the expedited transfer process.

Recommendations for USMC Installation SARC Training

To improve, the Installation SARC training should provide further guidance and instruction on facilitation and training skills, provide a Command SARC TSP, and include a formal check-on-knowledge to ensure they are prepared and qualified to act as the Installation SARC.

Training Practices and Methods

1. **Add guidance and instruction to teach-back practical exercises.** While the teach-back activities are important for the Installation SARC course, more information should be provided to students in preparation for each of the exercises. At times, students seemed to be confused about the expectations and intended outcome of the activity. Creating structure and outlining expectations around these teach-back activities would ensure Installation SARCs use their time in class to practice facilitation and instruction skills and gather feedback from their peers. These teach-back sessions could serve as knowledge checks for the facilitator to evaluate new Installation SARCs and provide coaching to close observed gaps in their facilitation skills.
2. **Add checks-on-learning.** The USMC should create a final check on learning for the Installation SARC course to ensure students are prepared to perform their role. The instructor could also evaluate student performance during teach-back sessions to ensure their skills are adequate to fulfill the Installation SARC role.
3. **Create a Command SARC course TSP.** Students were directed to provide training to Command SARCs as listed in the SAPR training initiatives. Creation of a TSP for the Command SARC

course will help maintain consistency of the training each Command SARC receives from their Installation SARC.

4. **Improve the participant guide for on-the-job use.** The participant guide provided to each student was comprehensive and should be useful as a job-aid. It would serve as an even more effective reference and job aid if a table of contents outlined each document and referenced the appropriate page number in the participant guide.

Training Content

5. **Explain the importance of Reserves and National Guard Bureau duty status when providing services to victims.** The Installation SARC course should include information on handling cases where the victim is a Reservist or a member of the National Guard Bureau (NGB) to ensure victims are referred to the appropriate resources in their geographic location and to discuss any other differences in their eligibility for services based on their duty status. This instruction should also include information on Line of Duty (LOD) determinations.
6. **Review the forthcoming DoDI 6495.02 when signed and add instruction on missing topics, as required.** Review the forthcoming DoDI 6495.02, the DoD Standards for Victim Assistance Services, and D-SAACP SARC/VA competency framework to ensure all training topics are included in the Installation SARC and Command SARC courses.
 - a. Expand upon the requirement for SARCs to assist command in identifying and mitigating risk factors on their installation.
 - b. Expand upon the information Installation SARCs need to provide SAPR policy training to civilian law enforcement and criminal investigative personnel.
 - c. Clarify information during DSAID training for input of the Restricted Report Control Number (RRCN). During the course, the instructor stated there is no place to record the RRCN in DSAID. The field is available in DSAID, but titled 'evidence identifier.'