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Sexual assault prevention conference provides latest training, information on Army goals

By Sgt. Daniel J. Nichols

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

GARMISCH, Germany –Victim advocates, sexual assault response coordinators, specialized criminal investigators and prosecutors from across U.S. Army Europe spent four days training with subject-matter experts in the military and civilian sexual assault prevention communities during the fifth annual USAREUR Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Advocate Training Conference here .

From presentations on victims' perspectives to the profiling of sexual predators, the conference, which concluded Sept. 18, was designed to provide the best information possible to those working in the field.

"It's very relevant," said Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Osinski, equal opportunity advisor and sexual assault response coordinator with the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. "Over the last few years a lot of the sexual assault training that I've seen has been kind of outdated, and they've really taken leaps and bounds in making sure this training is current and relevant," he said.

The conference also provided information on how the Army's strategy for improving its sexual assault prevention program is unfolding and outlined the goals the Army has set for sexual assault prevention in the future. The Army has mapped out a sexual assault prevention plan designed to evolve through several stages over the next five years.



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Participants at the 2009 U.S. Army Europe Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Advocate Training Conference participate in a briefing Sept. 15, the first day of the four-day conference in Garmisch, Germany.

“The Army is serious about this,” said Col. Joe Gill, USAREUR’s assistant deputy chief of staff for personnel. “USAREUR is fully behind this, our commanding general fully supports the program, and in the (personnel directorate) we are 100 percent behind this program. The goal is to change the culture in the Army to where Soldiers understand that sexual assault is a betrayal of Army values, and especially for loyalty, and our duty that we have to each Soldier. Just as we’ve worked hard to eradicate racial discrimination throughout the years with the (equal opportunity) program ... our goal is to create a climate and a culture in the Army where the bottom line is that Soldiers understand that there is no place for sexual assault in our ranks.”

Recent improvements to the Army’s sexual assault prevention efforts include the “I. A.M. Strong” campaign that launched this time last year. The acronym “I. A.M.” stands for “intervene, act and motivate.”



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Dr. David Lisak, a clinical psychologist and associate professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts speaks about common traits of sexual predators at the U.S. Army Europe Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Advocate Training Conference in Garmisch, Germany, Sept. 15.

“The campaign is focused on preventing the assault before it happens,” said Carolyn Collins, chief of the Army’s Sexual Harrassment/Assault, Response and Prevention program, a guest speaker at the conference. “So let’s say when you see a red flag go up, like something is happening that shouldn’t be happening, maybe someone is a little too intoxicated and someone is providing them with more alcohol, or someone is trying to take them out of the area -- it’s asking Soldiers to intervene at that point and make sure that Soldier safety is paramount, and that we’re taking care of Soldiers both on the battlefield and off the battlefield.”

Deluging Soldiers information on the issue and teaching them how they can play an active part in preventing sexual assault is something the program focuses heavily on.

“Every event that we go to has I. A.M. Strong banners,” said Sgt. Daniel Bullock, president of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program in Ansbach, Germany. “I actually have a street team that hits the streets in Ansbach wearing I. A.M. Strong T-shirts, we have I. A.M. Strong materials with us, and we are doing this thing called ‘I. A.M. Strong TV,’ where we go up and interview Soldiers on the street about I. A.M. Strong. If the Soldier doesn’t know what I. A.M. Strong is we educate them right there and give them the resources to go out and get more information.”

The Army is also focusing on attacking the issue by getting as many resources at every level involved, from the individual Soldier to senior leadership, and by including specially trained criminal investigators and prosecutors in its efforts as well.

“From my perspective, what is remarkable about this is that there really isn’t another institution that has demonstrated this level of commitment,” said Dr. David Lisak, a clinical psychologist and associate professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts who was a guest speaker at the conference. “Already what I can say is that it is something the Army should be

very proud of that they've stepped up this way, and launched this kind of really committed effort."

During the conference one subject that was mentioned multiple times was how sexual assault, in both the civilian and military communities, is one of the most under-reported crimes committed. Part of what the sexual assault prevention program emphasizes is its support of the victims, and continuing to build a program that empowers those who have been sexually assaulted to come forward.

"What we're trying to put together is a program where the victim feels confident that if they come forward they will not only receive the benefits that they need, and the support that they need to go from being a victim to a survivor of this attack and this crime, but also that they have confidence that someone will believe them," said Gill. "And if you listen to the experts what the victims want is someone to believe them."

"The fact that the reporting numbers are going up is a huge testament that this program is effective," said Veraunda Jackson, a senior attorney for the Florida Department of Children and Families who also spoke at the conference. Jackson, who was sexually assaulted when she was young, now works as a lawyer in child abuse cases, a motivational speaker and a sexual assault prevention advisor to the military community. "Because what that translates into is that 'I feel safe enough, with the people that you've put in place to help me, to come forward.' And it takes a tremendous amount of courage to tell," she said.



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