

A Review of Hazing Prevention Efforts in the United States Military

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Abstract

This scoping review evaluates hazing prevention efforts within the United States (U.S.) military, outlining existing programs and providing recommendations for future initiatives. Relevant studies were sourced through electronic bibliographic database searches and reference reviews of pertinent literature. The search yielded 95 studies, of which 16 met the inclusion criteria. To understand the literature in reference to the current hazing prevention efforts in the civilian sector, these studies were categorized according to the Hazing Prevention Framework (HPF) – a comprehensive, evidence-based approach structure most commonly used for addressing the behavior– components, which include: (1) commitment, (2) capacity, (3) cultural competence, (4) assessment, (5) planning, (6) evaluation, (7) sustainability, and (8) implementation. Current Department of Defense efforts primarily focus on commitment, capacity, and assessment, while cultural competence, planning, evaluation, sustainability, and implementation require further development. Strengthening military hazing prevention initiatives by incorporating all HPF components is essential to effectively addressing and reducing hazing behaviors among service members.

Keywords: hazing, bullying, military, service members, prevention

1. Introduction

Physical and psychological harm, and even death are documented outcomes of hazing in the military. The United States (U.S.) Department of Defense (DOD) defines hazing as “a form of harassment...through which Service members ... physically or psychologically injure or

create a risk of physical or psychological injury to Service members for the purpose of: initiation into, admission into, affiliation with, change in status or position within, or a condition for continued membership in any military or DoD [Now DOD] civilian organization (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020a).” Hazing behavior has become increasingly denounced by military leadership who label it as cruel, unnecessary, and inconsistent with military values (Kröger et al., 2023; U.S. Department of the Army & Center for the Army Profession and Leadership, 2019; U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2015).

Estimating the prevalence of hazing in the military is challenging, largely due to underreporting (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020b). From 2017-2020, 183-299 complaints of hazing were officially reported across the services per year; conversely, survey data suggest thousands of incidents may occur each year (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). These numbers are likely underreported due to several factors: an unclear understanding of the definition of hazing, allowance of these behaviors, and a widespread perception of tolerance. (Metzger et al., 2022). A 2016 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report assessed hazing experiences among service members and found that between 3% and 12% of respondents indicated hazing behaviors occurred in their unit (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016). Similarly, a study conducted at an Army installation revealed that while 17% of participants admitted to experiencing hazing, a significant 70% acknowledged involvement in specific hazing behaviors (Berry-Cabán et al., 2024b). Thus, current reported data likely fail to capture the true incidence of hazing.

Given the negative outcomes of this behavior, its likely frequent occurrence, and its incongruence with military values, this article provides a review of current efforts to prevent hazing in the U.S. military, including a descriptive state of the literature, identification of gaps in research, and recommendations for future work.

Given the documented harm from hazing, the frequency with which it likely occurs in the military, and its incongruence with military values, this article provides a review of current efforts to prevent hazing in the U.S. military to describe the state of the literature, identify gaps in research, and inform future endeavors.

1.1 Characteristics and Consequences of Hazing in the Military

Initiation customs have been a longstanding part of U.S. military culture, serving as a way to introduce and orient new members to a unit or role and to mark rites of passage (Halvorson, 2010). However, some initiations — although originating in valid reasoning for preparation — cross the line into hazing, risking or causing physical and/or psychological harm to service members (Chu, 2012; Lamothe, 2016). Research indicates that service members frequently struggle to identify and categorize hazing activities, with a difficulty distinguishing between rites of passage and harmful hazing (Hernandez, 2015; Metzger et al., 2022). In one study at the U.S. Naval Academy, cadets were given information about hazing and then tested on their ability to recognize it; even though provided this information momentarily prior to testing, about one-third failed to identify hazing acts (Pershing, 2006). Other work further supports that service members often cannot differentiate hazing from bullying, other forms of harassment, or induction processes (Hernandez, 2015; U.S. Government Accountability

Office, 2022).

There are multiple negative psychological and physical outcomes for victims of hazing, and in severe circumstances, hazing can be lethal (Parks & Burgess, 2019; U.S. Department of the Army & Center for the Army Profession and Leadership, 2019). Hazing is associated with anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder, which in turn, can increase the risk for suicide (Johnson, 2011). Moreover, hazing tends to co-occur with other acts of violence. Specifically, for male soldiers, incidence of sexual assault often occurs in the context of hazing (Metzger et al., 2022; Wadham, 2017).

1.2 Hazing Prevention Efforts

The goal of hazing prevention in the U.S. military is to eliminate hazing behavior and create a respectful, productive, inclusive, and cohesive environment for service members (Keller et al., 2015). Despite these efforts, however, hazing prevention in the U.S. military remains scarce. Whereas military installations and civilian colleges and universities differ significantly in their missions and atmospheres, they share some similarities, such as offering training and education that prepare young individuals for specific workforces, shared living conditions, mandatory and voluntary group activities, generational traditions, and a sense of community. Due to these overlaps, examining hazing prevention efforts in colleges and universities can provide translational insight. Hazing prevention programs in higher education aim to raise awareness about the dangers and consequences of hazing, promote respect and inclusivity, and foster a culture of mutual support by replacing harmful initiation rituals with positive team-building activities (StopHazing, 2024). These efforts also focus on developing clear policies and procedures related to hazing, including effective reporting mechanisms, disciplinary actions for violations, and providing support and resources for individuals who have experienced hazing, while ensuring access to necessary assistance (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). Additionally, these programs encourage bystander intervention by empowering individuals to recognize and safely intervene in hazing situations, and ensure accountability by holding individuals and organizations responsible for hazing incidents through the enforcement of rules and regulations (Potter & Moynihan, 2011). Through these efforts, hazing prevention programs strive to protect the well-being of all service members and maintain the integrity and reputation of the organizations involved.

There are notable preventions efforts in the civilian sector. For example, Marchell et al. (2022) explored university hazing prevention using a comprehensive public health-based approach, finding a 21% decrease in self-reported hazing experiences after expanding prevention efforts over four years (Marchell et al., 2022). Another study conducted across eight urban, suburban, and rural universities over three years resulted in the development of the Hazing Prevention Framework (HPF), which builds on SAMSHA's Strategic Prevention Framework to include eight essential components for effective hazing prevention: commitment, capacity, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, cultural competence, and sustainability (Allan et al., 2018; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). The HPF is used as a tool providing the foundation to address this issue in the institution.

These multitude of studies examining the impacts of hazing prevention programs in the

civilian sector (Allan & Madden, 2008; Marchell et al., 2024; Nuwer, 2000), underline the need for a rigorous theory-driven prevention approach to hazing in the U.S. military. The first step in this process is a better understanding of the prevalence, presentation, and outcomes of hazing in the U.S. military, as well as potential prevention pathways in the military environment. The following review examines the state of hazing prevention in the U.S. military and identifies areas of future research.

2. Methods

A scoping review was conducted that examined U.S. military hazing prevention literature with the purpose of identifying and outlining the current knowledge body and gaps. Additionally, as prevention principles are needed to develop hazing prevention efforts, the results section is organized using the strategic HPF components, a robust and widely implemented prevention program (Table 1) (Allan et al., 2018; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). Studies were included – with search dates of 1 January 2010 to 30 June 2024 – if they 1) examined hazing in the military; 2) primarily targeted the military service member population; and 3) were available via print or electronic journals, interlibrary loan, or authors. Studies were excluded if they 1) predominantly addressed non-military populations (e.g., college and university students); 2) focused on foreign military; 3) did not focus on hazing prevention efforts in the military (e.g., focused on other prevention areas such as sexual violence); 4) were not available in English; or 5) was published prior to 2010.

Table 1. Hazing Prevention Framework

Commitment	▪ Refers to investment of resources, including infrastructure, personnel, and public support for anti-hazing efforts, creating a clear message that hazing is intolerable ▪ Reviews prevention efforts that encompass a systemwide approach, such as leadership endorsement and prevention practices that emphasize communication and tracking ▪ Includes legally binding public policies
Capacity	▪ Examines the development of human and structural resources needed to effectively implement comprehensive, hazing prevention in a military setting
Cultural Competence	▪ Highlights the importance of understanding the sociopolitical and identity-based characteristics of service members, organizations, and the services they are part of
Assessment	▪ Involves utilizing various methods and sources to measure and characterize the assessment of hazing among service members, using the collected data to inform hazing prevention strategies
Planning	▪ Uses assessment data to develop data-driven, intentional, and measurable prevention goals, including the development of prevention strategies tailored to specific populations in each context
Evaluation	▪ Offers formal documentation of the process and impact of prevention strategies, using evidence of their efficacy to measure and promote them
Sustainability	▪ Incorporates maintaining commitment and momentum through persistent cultivation of programs, relationships, resources, and communication

Implementation ▪ Requires the use of specific strategies and approaches considered particularly promising for hazing prevention

Studies were identified using electronic bibliographic databases (PubMed, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text, CINAHL, ERIC). Table 2 provides a list of search terms. Our search strategy was modified to accommodate the search parameters of each database. Database searches were conducted twice and finalized in July 2024.

All references were imported into an EndNote file (version 21). Figure 1 provides a PRISMA flowchart. Most references were excluded based on inclusion criterion. For example, “coast guard” with the ERIC database returned unrelated articles regarding various coasts and military actions (e.g., results on Ukrainian border guards and South Africa). A total of 95 records were retrieved, and study abstracts were screened for possible inclusion. When a reference potentially meeting the inclusion criteria appeared, the full text of that reference was also retrieved. Eighty full text articles were excluded. The final sample included 16 documents.

Table 2. Search terms used to identify relevant studies

Key Concept	Search Strings
Hazing	Bullying OR Hazing AND
Military	Air Force OR Armed Forces OR Army OR Coast Guard OR Marine Corps OR Military OR Navy OR Uniformed Code of Military Justice AND
Prevention	Bystander Intervention OR Preventative Action OR Prevention Program

The research team comprised of three senior researchers and two research assistants, who collectively screened, abstracted, and examined articles for hazing prevention programming in the U.S. military. Data extracted included author and year, HPF concept, target population, design specifics, prevention strategy, and strengths and limitations of each article (Table 3). To ensure reliability in the abstraction process, the research assistants independently extracted data from the final articles and met regularly with senior researchers to discuss emerging findings and results.

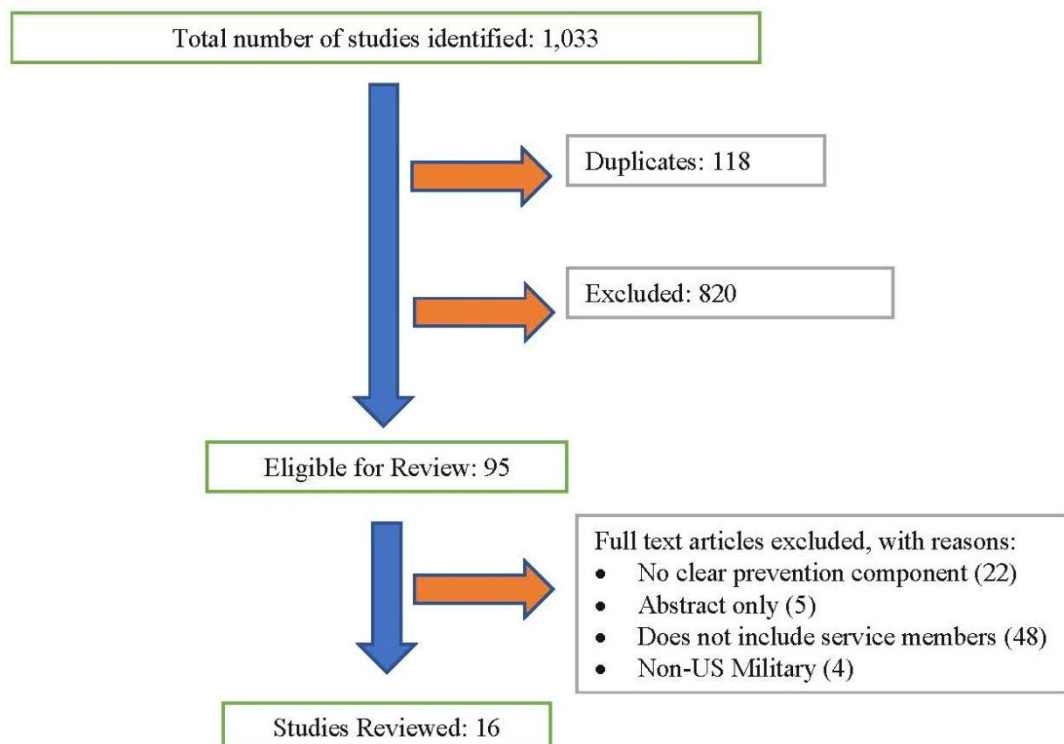
Table 3. Characteristics of Included Studies

	Author and Year	HPF Framework Concept	Target Population	Design	Prevention Strategy	Strengths & Limitations
1	Acosta (Acosta et al., 2022)	Evaluation	Leadership	Technical report	RAND developed a standardized method to conduct on-site installation evaluations of harm prevention capabilities that can be paired with the improved command climate assessments	<i>Strengths</i> - Prioritizes prevention for leadership; prepares leaders and personnel for prevention; provides blueprint for the implementation of effective prevention <i>Limitations</i> - Over reliance on metrics developed using a structured maturity scoring system
2	Hernandez (Hernandez, 2015)	Assessment	Service members	Analysis of secondary data	Proposes bullying and hazing definition based on research, that replicates existing laws and policies	<i>Strengths</i> - Provides examples of laws and policies that can be adapted by the DoD <i>Limitations</i> - Does not propose prevention programs or strategies to reduce hazing incidents
3	Kamarck (Kamarck, 2019)	Assessment	U.S. Congress	Technical report	Presents general timelines for reporting & discusses punishment for perpetrators	<i>Strengths</i> - Excellent overview of hazing in the military and legislative actions <i>Limitations</i> - Overreliance on database development and reporting as opposed to public health prevention strategies
4	Keller et al (Keller et al., 2017)	Commitment / Implementation	Military leadership	Training module	Discusses characteristics and consequences of hazing; addresses attitudes and misperceptions; provides options for reporting and hazing punishments	<i>Strengths</i> - Targeted training toward leadership <i>Limitations</i> - Overreliance on disciplinary actions and reporting
5	Keller et al (Keller et al., 2015)	Assessment	Service members	Policy document	Recommends instructor-led training for both leadership and enlisted personnel	<i>Strengths</i> - Addresses ways to improve DODs definition of hazing, the effects of and motivations for hazing, how the military can prevent and respond to hazing, and how the military can improve the tracking of hazing incidents <i>Limitations</i> - Overreliance on disciplinary actions
6	Matthews (Matthews et al., 2015)	Commitment / Implementation	Military leadership	Training module	Discusses leadership approach including ensuring that units understand hazing characteristics and consequences and addresses attitudes and misperceptions; provides options for reporting and hazing punishments	<i>Strengths</i> - Targeted training toward leadership <i>Limitations</i> - Overreliance on disciplinary actions
7	Stiller & Harris (Stiller & Harris, 2016)	Assessment	Military leadership/ Service members	Technical report	Leadership should foster a culture that treats hazing as a crime, ensuring strict enforcement and accountability in prevention efforts. Policies and punishments should be rigorously applied, and effective training programs must be implemented	<i>Strengths</i> - Distinguishes between hazing and bullying; recommends future studies and hazing related training <i>Limitations</i> - Data were collected using self-report measures
8	Svec (Svec, 2015)	Assessment	Service members	Technical report	Hazing must be understood by service members; hazing trainings must be tailored and required;	<i>Strengths</i> - Recommends further studies and trainings on hazing including education on distinguishing between hazing and

					participants reported that hazing has hurt their team or mission as well as helped it.	bullying <i>Limitations-</i> Fails to discuss other relevant prevention efforts
9	The Uniform Code of Military Justice ("The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ, 64 Stat. 109, 10 U.S.C. §§ 801–946)," 2019)	Commitment	Service members	Legal document	Recommends adjudication and punishments for perpetrators	<i>Strengths-</i> Major prevention effort employed by DoD; hazing-related offenses are statutorily defined <i>Limitation-</i> Does not directly address hazing
10	U.S. Dept Army (U.S. Department of the Army, 2020)	Commitment	Military leadership	Policy document	Stipulates that Commanders will investigate hazing incident; Commanders will annually conduct harassment training in combination with their annual EO training requirement	<i>Strengths-</i> Reliance on punitive actions; violators can be punished under the UCMJ or subject to administrative action <i>Limitations-</i> Training is broad and conducted in conjunction with other training
11	U.S. DoD (U.S. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020)	Commitment/ Assessment/ Capacity	US Congress	Policy document	DoD established the Prevention Collaboration Forum to address issues of diversity and inclusion within a violence prevention framework; DoD issued an integrated violence prevention policy addressing all forms of violence, including hazing and bullying; DoD will monitor compliance	<i>Strengths-</i> Each Service conducts a hazing related self-assessment; Services have implemented prevention messaging <i>Limitations-</i> Overreliance on official data, reporting procedures and hazing prevention training
12	U.S. DoD (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024b)	Commitment / Capacity	Service members	Policy document	Updates military harassment prevention and response policies and programs for service members; specifies harassment prevention and response procedures for service members—procedures and requirements for responding to, processing, resolving, tracking, and reporting harassment complaints; and training and education requirements and standards	<i>Strengths-</i> Collects data from all Services; provides examples of prohibited hazing behaviors; outlines accountability role of leaders in prevention <i>Limitations-</i> Overreliance on formal data reporting
13	U.S. Department of Defense (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024b)	Evaluation	Military leadership	Policy document	Focus on how Army brigade commanders can use Command Climate Survey to identify and respond to harassment within their respective units	<i>Strengths-</i> Focused on how leadership can use command climate surveys to identify and respond to harassment within units <i>Limitations-</i> Overreliance on command climate surveys that are self reported
14	U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense (U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2015)	Commitment / Assessment/ Capacity	Service members/ Military leadership	Policy document	Recommends leveraging future survey data to gauge prevalence of hazing; hazing prevention and response programs will be reviewed and evaluated for compliance, improvements, and best practices	<i>Strengths-</i> Collects data from all Services; provides examples of prohibited hazing behaviors; outlines leadership accountability <i>Limitations-</i> Each Service used a different data collection tool creating variances in data.; does not provide how survey data will be used to gauge hazing prevalence; does not specify which programs

						are in place or explain how programs are evaluated
15	U.S. GAO (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016)	Commitment / Assessment / Capacity	U.S. Congress	Policy document	DoD has issued policies to address hazing; these policies uniformly define hazing and include training requirements; policy also contains guidance, such as responsibilities for policy implementation and direction on avoiding hazing in service customs and traditions	<i>Strengths-</i> Recommends DoD integrates data reporting system and specific data collection and tracking requirements; recommends determining hazing prevalence <i>Limitations-</i> Results on the success of policy implementation is unknown
16	U.S. GAO (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021)	Commitment / Assessment / Capacity	U.S. Congress	Policy document	Reliance on training; DoD has not been systematically reviewed or assessed impact of hazing prevention training	<i>Strengths-</i> Underscores the need for an effective prevention and response program; reporting issues continue to be a problem <i>Limitations-</i> DoD lacks visibility into hazing prevalence
17	U.S. GAO (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022)	Assessment	U.S. Congress	Policy document		<i>Strengths-</i> The service academies have taken actions to improve organizational climate by incorporating leading practices for managing workforce diversity; document notes underreporting for hazing incidents <i>Limitations-</i> Over reliance on training

Figure 1. Studies Identified via Databases and Registers



3. Results

Sixteen articles met the inclusion criteria and were subsequently categorized according to the HPF framework. The articles encompass the following areas: 1) Commitment, 2) Capacity, 3) Assessment, and 4) Implementation and 5) Evaluation. Details regarding characteristics of

the included studies are provided in Table 3. Of note, articles were often multifaceted and complex, resulting in a myriad of information therein, resulting in articles with components categorized under different parts of the HPF (i.e., an article could address both commitment and capacity).

Commitment

Commitment refers to the dedication of resources and support structures needed to foster an organizational environment conducive to hazing prevention. Examples of commitment include visible messaging about behavioral expectations relative to hazing (ie, hazing is not acceptable by senior leaders), reinforcement of that messaging at all levels, allocation of funding to support hazing prevention capacity and to incentivize prosocial behavior in place of hazing, and support for hazing prevention that is purpose-driven rather than a perfunctory strategy, clear processes for reporting hazing violations, and transparency for accountability of hazing violations (Allan et al., 2018). Accordingly, about half of identified articles (9/17) were classified under the commitment category. Of those nine, three DOD directives that addressed hazing were identified and the Uniform Code of Military Justice was examined. Directives are policy documents that guide the services and can be provided by legislation, the President, or the Secretary of Defense (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021). Within the DOD there is a distinct relationship between directives, instructions, manuals, and memorandums, which result in policy and procedures that affect the daily life of service members, including indication of acts that are allowable.

In December 2015, the DOD issued the *Hazing and Bullying Prevention and Response in the Armed Forces* policy memorandum that comprehensively defines hazing and asserts it is unacceptable and banned in all circumstances and environments, including official and unofficial settings, such as electronic communications and ceremonies. This memorandum further recognized that hazing decreases mission readiness and provides guidance on hazing prevention training and education; requirements for tracking and reporting hazing incidents; and regulations detailing the prohibition of hazing and appropriate response in hazing incidents (U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2015).

DoD Instruction 1020.03 states that the “DoD does not tolerate or condone harassment” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020a). Harassment is defined as “offensive jokes, epithets, ridicule or mockery, insults, or put-downs, displays of offensive objects or imagery, stereotyping, intimidating acts, veiled threats of violence, threatening or provoking remarks, racial or other slurs, derogatory remarks about a person’s accent, or displays of racially offensive symbols” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020a). DOD instructions establish policy and provide guidance on how to implement it. The instruction also provides service members with procedures for reporting hazing acts and indication on how to handle such incidents.

Army Regulation 600-20 serves as the official guidance for commanders, emphasizing that “hazing is fundamentally in opposition to our [Army] values and is prohibited” (U.S. Department of the Army, 2020). Commanders at all levels are responsible for enforcing this policy. This regulation defines hazing, bullying, discriminatory harassment (unwelcome conduct based on race, color, religion, sex, including gender identity, national origin, or sexual orientation), and other acts of misconduct that may violate the dignity and respect of others. Prevention efforts include the collection, assessment, and analysis of information and

data regarding harassment complaints, the compilation and submission of quarterly reports, and, if necessary, reporting allegations of criminal behavior to law enforcement authorities.

The *Uniform Code of Military Justice* (UCMJ) does not specifically define or prohibit hazing; ("The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ, 64 Stat. 109, 10 U.S.C. §§ 801–946)," 2019) however, since 1950, hazing has been prosecuted under various punitive articles such as "Article 93, Cruelty and Maltreatment" and "Article 128, Assault." Unit commanders have the ultimate authority to adjudicate hazing incidents, including nonjudicial punishment (e.g., reduction in grade, extra duty). Four other UCMJ articles are relevant to the legal aspects of hazing prevention. These include:

- 1) "Article 92, Failure to Obey an Order" addresses situations where a service member fails to obey an order, encompassing dereliction of duty. A service member may be convicted of hazing under this article if they cause another to suffer or be exposed to an act that is cruel, abusive, oppressive, or harmful, while disregarding the risk of the act.
- 2) "Article 93" prohibits cruelty, oppression, or maltreatment of subordinates resulting from an order of the accused.
- 3) "Article 117" addresses service members who display provoking or reproachful speech or gestures. Several soldiers involved in the death by suicide of Army Private Danny Chen were charged under this article (Schuman et al., 2021; Twedell, 2012).
- 4) "Article 120" broadly covers cases of rape and sexual assault. The investigation into the death of Army Staff Sergeant Logan Melgar revealed that his death resulted from what was initially a plan by perpetrators to haze and sexually assault him (Wikipedia contributors, 2021).
- 5) "Article 133, Conduct Unbecoming an Officer and Gentleman" addresses actions that are inconsistent with the expected behavior and standing of officers.

Commitment to preventing hazing and bullying is also reflected through military leadership training, which was identified in two articles (Holland et al., 2014; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). Implementing prevention measures is a critical component of military training at all levels, from initial accession to senior leadership roles. The RAND Corporation developed the *Hazing Prevention and Response* training to help military leaders understand hazing and incorporate this knowledge into their own unit training (Keller et al., 2017). This education broadly defines hazing and associated behaviors, outlines appropriate administrative corrective measures, addresses common misconceptions, provides information on formally reporting and prosecuting hazing, and includes limited activities for practical learning. This training also illustrates how hazing and bullying negatively impact unit cohesion and mission effectiveness, and supplies guidance on how to report incidents, as well as information on victim rights and resources. *The Commander's Guide to Hazing Prevention*, also provided by the RAND Corporation, offers information and education specifically for commanders, preparing them to effectively educate their units (Matthews et al., 2015).

Two articles were categorized as commitment as indicated by trainee education. The US Military academies provide students with educational opportunities related to organizational climate challenges through various mandatory courses, as well as through general character and leadership instruction (Gain Service Academy Admission, 2024). For example: The Naval

Academy includes mandatory training on harassment, sexual harassment, and discriminatory harassment and hazing, bullying, and stalking (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022). Students at the Air Force Academy take required courses covering multiple types of violence prevention, including hazing and bullying (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022).

Finally, thorough DOD internal assessments conducted by the GAO, demonstrate a strong commitment to understanding and addressing hazing (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016, 2022).

Capacity

Capacity is defined as the development of human and structural resources and systems needed to effectively implement comprehensive hazing prevention. The enforcement of hazing policy, involvement in hazing prevention in job descriptions, and availability of education and training to promote knowledge about hazing, identification of hazing, and skills to intervene as a bystander, are all examples of capacity for hazing prevention (Allan et al., 2018). Five articles addressed capacity. The DOD emphasizes the continued need to reiterate the definition of hazing, enhance reporting mechanisms, ensure effective policies are in place, and provide leadership training to bolster hazing prevention efforts. One article highlighted a significant initiative in this regard is the Prevention Collaboration Forum, a policy-level working group aimed at developing prevention policies and practices across the services (U.S. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020). Through the Prevention Collaboration Forum, the DOD introduced its first integrated violence prevention policy, which includes measures that address hazing and bullying.

Another article focused on the current capacity within the US military to address hazing. Between 2017 to 2019 the services updated their hazing definition, policies and programs primarily focusing on organizational improvements and collecting hazing incident data; the Air Force is the only branch that had a direct prevention program that uses bystander intervention to address hazing and other problematic behaviors (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022).

Additional articles included information on the several agencies within the DOD that collect hazing data – an important component of the capacity to understand a problem. The DOD requires unit commanders to implement a command climate assessment within 120 days of assuming command and annually thereafter (Ananthan & Inderjit, 2014; U.S. Department of the Army, 2020; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). The Defense Organizational Climate Survey provides leadership with a tool for gathering service members' perspectives on unit leadership, cohesion, and elements of the human relations environment such as discrimination and sexual harassment/assault (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024a). This assessment measures the effectiveness of hazing prevention policies and provides an opportunity for service members to anonymously express their views on allegations of problematic behaviors. Currently, hazing behavior questions are not included in this survey.

Assessment

In the context of hazing prevention, assessment refers to the use of multiple methods and sources to measure and characterize hazing within a given context (Allan et al., 2018) The vast majority of articles identified focus on the assessment of hazing in the military (10/16).

Collectively, the articles that examined assessment yield a call for better tracking of hazing incidents to develop and evaluate more comprehensive prevention efforts. Assessing the incidence and prevalence of hazing is limited by the lack of a uniform DOD tracking system; each service has its own system (Kamarck, 2019).

Several articles discussed the confusion surrounding the definitions of hazing and bullying in the military. This lack of clarity, they note, often prevents service members from accurately distinguishing between the two, thereby hindering the effective collection of prevalence data (Hernandez, 2015; Keller et al., 2017; Stiller & Harris, 2016; Svec, 2015). These articles also focus on assessing the current programming, which is rooted in policy and punitive efforts, rather than a comprehensive prevention strategy.

Perhaps the most robust assessment of hazing in the military is the 2015 RAND Report entitled *Hazing in the U.S. Armed Forces* (Keller et al., 2015). Keller analyzed the 1992 DOD hazing definition, presented practices for preventing and responding to hazing, and provided recommendations on the feasibility and usefulness of a centralized hazing database. Most notably, the report asserted that there are not enough comprehensive hazing prevention programs, recommending that the DOD undertake a thorough needs-assessment to evaluate this specific need.

In another effort in 2021, the GAO submitted a comprehensive report to Congress on military hazing, highlighting that the DOD had not yet evaluated the effectiveness of service member harassment prevention training, partly due to a lack of funding resources (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). Ensuring accountability requires assessing whether initiatives are achieving their intended outcomes, a point the GAO has emphasized on numerous occasions (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1992; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016, 2021, 2022).

Implementation

According to the HPF, implementation for hazing prevention refers to the use of specific strategies considered particularly promising for the prevention of hazing (Allan et al., 2018). Two articles discussed implementation and prevention efforts. One article focused on the effective approach to hazing prevention being the provision of education and training (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). Most training is designed to inform service members how to identify hazing and why they should notify the proper authorities if they are a victim of a hazing incident.

Another article briefly mentioned bystander intervention (Keller et al., 2017). Research shows that bystander intervention is an effective way of stopping hazing before it happens, as bystanders play a key role in preventing, discouraging, and/or intervening when an act of violence has the potential to occur (Banyard et al., 2007; Orchowski et al., 2022; Potter & Moynihan, 2011). DODs Prevention Collaboration Forum recommends bystander intervention as an effective prevention activity (U.S. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020).

Evaluation

The formal documentation process to determine impact of prevention strategies for hazing prevention is another key component of the HPF (Allan et al., 2018). Promoting strategies

with documented efficacy is vital for effective prevention. Two articles discussed evaluation. In 2018, the DOD established a comprehensive military harassment prevention and response program across all services. The policy also defines the various types of harassment to include Bullying, and Hazing (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020a). The goal of the *Review of the Army's Efforts to Prevent and Respond to Harassment of Soldiers* was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Army's measures in preventing and addressing harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, and hazing. The authors examined how Army brigade commanders used the Defense Organizational Climate Survey and command climate assessments to identify and tackle harassment within their units. The findings revealed that, although brigade commanders typically used these tools to address harassment concerns, there is potential for improvement in their response strategies. Furthermore, the review concluded that sexual harassment complaints from the eight brigades analyzed did not align with the reported risk of such behaviors in the Defense Organizational Climate Survey responses (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024b).

To institute evaluation as an effective tool for continuous improvement, the DOD commissioned the RAND Corporation to develop a prevention capabilities assessment process applicable across the military. *Novel Methods to Assess the Military's Evolving Prevention Capabilities* examines how military installations prioritize, prepare for, and promote integrated primary prevention efforts (Acosta et al., 2022). These efforts aim to foster healthy, protective environments and actively involve service members. In pilot tests, leaders from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, researchers, and some installation staff found the metrics effective for capturing detailed information about prevention practices and identifying areas needing improvement. The analyses generally validated the metrics' reliability, showing a significant positive correlation between protective percentile scores and capability ratings in three dimensions, while risk percentile scores were negatively correlated with capability ratings in four dimensions. As prevention efforts progress, the DOD should continue to validate and refine these metrics. These metrics, as part of a comprehensive risk identification and assessment process, will assist the DOD in monitoring and enhancing its prevention capabilities.

No identified articles included the remaining components of the HPF – cultural competency, planning, and sustainability.

4. Discussion

Hazing is not exclusive to the US military (Kim et al., 2019; McCoy, 1995; Østvik & Rudmin, 2001; Winslow, 1999). Several studies on hazing in foreign militaries reveal varied geographic contexts and methodological approaches, offering insights into its prevalence, cultural roots, and consequences but few proven prevention strategies (Kröger et al., 2023). In Norway, Østvik and Rudmin combined phenomenological and quantitative methods to study army personnel, finding that 12% reported being bullied, 53% had witnessed bullying, 22% had been hazed, and 19% admitted hazing others, noting blurred lines between bullying and hazing and suggesting untested interventions such as identifying high-risk groups, improving duty assignments, promoting shared goals, redesigning barracks, and training officers (Østvik & Rudmin, 2001). Collectively, these studies document hazing's psychological harm, cultural entrenchment, and symbolic roles in military identity yet fail to provide tested, evidence-based

prevention programs; while the Norwegian, South Korean, and Russian studies identify possible interventions, none offer measurable proof of effectiveness, and cultural-historical analyses from the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Philippines explain hazing's persistence without translating insights into evaluated strategies, leaving the literature strong in diagnosis but weak in validated solutions for reducing hazing or transforming military culture.

Similar to other environments, hazing in the military involves initiations or perceived rites of passage where individuals aspiring to join or be perceived as legitimate members of the organization are subjected to behaviors and activities that can range from performing inconvenient, meaningless tasks to enduring physical beatings to achieve status or inclusion (Hernandez, 2015; Keller et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Defense, 2020b; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). Hazing spans a spectrum from dares, like pushing around a toy stroller, to experiencing physical violence (*StopHazing*, 2024). Junior service members are most likely to encounter hazing within military ranks (Allan et al., 2019; Allan & Madden, 2008; Owen et al., 2008; Salinas Jr & Boettcher, 2018). Overall, there is little information on military hazing prevention programs.

To analyze the literature about hazing prevention in the military we used the eight components of the HPF: Commitment, Capacity, Assessment, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation, Cultural Competence, and Sustainability.

Unique Military Considerations

While hazing in the military shares several similarities with other environments such as colleges and universities, there are important differences to consider when developing and implementing prevention, reporting, and educational programs. In the military, hazing offenders can be fellow service members, instructors, or leaders who have significant control over the service member's daily life, including when they eat, sleep, get off work, get promoted, and their work duties. Service members typically live and interact in much closer proximity to hazers, such as in the same barracks, training situations, or deployment, compared to college students. Additionally, military hazing victims often lack external support systems, such as parents, fraternity outsiders, or university authorities, who can intervene on their behalf. Identifying or proving hazing in the military can be challenging due to the necessity of developing resilient, tough service members for combat (Bourke, 2016; Kim et al., 2019; Metzger et al., 2022; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). These considerations must be accounted for when creating programming specific to this culture and its populations.

Because hazing is a multifaceted problem, solutions must continue to encompass leadership and stakeholders. Most hazing-related issues require consultation with numerous stakeholders, including unit leadership, Chaplain services, medical and behavioral health personnel, Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Program and the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) leaders, victim advocacy, law enforcement, and service members themselves. This intersectional approach is not clearly currently being implemented (Berry-Cabán et al., 2024a).

Current Strengths in DOD Prevention Efforts

There are notable strengths in the DOD prevention efforts. Using the HPF as a typology this review identified two areas where we believe the DOD has been successful in promulgating hazing prevention. The DOD has demonstrated a commitment to ameliorate hazing by outlining clear expectations of service members and has been effective in promulgating prevention policies. Major policy documents examined use the current definition of hazing and recommend prevention actions that include training, enforcement, and punitive actions (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020a; U.S. Department of the Army, 2020; U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2015). Sanctions and punishments play a critical role in the control of hazing (Komro, 2020; Richards III & Rathbun, 2003).

The DOD has invested considerable resources in leadership training. In college and university settings, this engagement has proven key to hazing prevention (Allan et al., 2019; Allan & Madden, 2008; Allan et al., 2018). Current DOD training is comprehensive, including hazing incident examples and punitive action discussions. However, while the DOD has approved training funding, the GAO found that refresher training was insufficient, and training effectiveness is not measured. Without accountability and evaluation, it is unclear that hazing training is currently broadly implemented and evaluated to ensure understanding of its content. Until these changes are implemented, the DOD will be unable to determine the true impact of training and need for continuance and modification (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021).

Current Limitations of DOD Prevention Efforts

There were no clearly identified comprehensive hazing prevention programs or guiding frameworks in the military comparable to the HPF. While the DOD has developed a precise definition of what constitutes hazing, many service members are unable to adequately define hazing (Manzanedo, 2013; Metzger et al., 2022).

Generally, educational efforts involving aspects of prevention, intervention, or social change emphasize three primary components: knowledge, attitudes and perceptions, and behaviors and skills (Driscoll, 2004). Thus, an antihazing training program or implementation strategy should address each of these elements (Kamarck, 2019). For example, based on assessment data, many participants may have little or no knowledge of the characteristics of hazing or policies on hazing, so planning programs or trainings to increase comprehension of these elements is a necessary first step (Metzger et al., 2022).

Despite the DOD promoting the reporting of all hazing incidents through its policies and having an extensive reporting process, actual reporting remains scarce. In 2019, only 183 hazing complaints were officially reported to the DOD. Given that hazing incidents are estimated to occur in 3% to 17% of cases, using the conservative estimate of 3% would suggest nearly 68,000 hazing incidents occurred among service members (based on an active force of 2,080,000) (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). Given these data, implementation strategies focused on increasing skills for identifying hazing and knowledge of reporting mechanisms for hazing incidents, are warranted.

There is both a lack of comprehensive prevention programming (e.g., such as the programming for substance abuse prevention or sexual violence prevention) (Acosta et al., 2022) and

comprehensive assessment of the current hazing training that is implemented. Given scarce resources, it is imperative to use them both efficiently and effectively (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1992; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016, 2021, 2022).

Notably, there were no articles identified that address the cultural competence, planning, and sustainability of components of the HPF. Most of the sources were reports, and while they are credible sources of information, they are not peer reviewed. Based on the HPF, a planning process based on available data is important for shifting hazing culture in any environment to ensure prevention efforts are comprehensive and sustainable (Allan et al., 2018). Likewise, interventions should be culturally competent or tailored to unique aspects of different military sub-groups and environments. Accordingly, researchers should document planning processes and cultural competence for hazing prevention in future studies. Finally, research on sustainability of hazing prevention would examine the systems in place, leadership commitment, and allocation of resources to support the continuity and growth of hazing prevention in the military (Allan et al., 2018).

In addition to a comprehensive approach, inclusiveness and transparency across the DOD can make a positive impact on prevention efforts. It is essential to expand the DODs capacity and assessment for hazing prevention. Strategies to improve capacity can include establishing uniform definitions, policies, reporting mechanisms, and training across the military that also allow a certain degree of adaptability for the unique needs of each branch of service (Allan et al., 2018). Assessment of hazing in the military can be improved by standardizing how it is measured and tracked across the DOD. Combined with shared reporting and evaluation of efforts between the services, these methods can improve transparency (Kamarck, 2019).

Standardization of data collection will require additional resources including leadership buy-in, funding, and collaboration across the services. The DOD does not have a centralized tracking database for hazing incidents but may benefit from adapting a model currently in use by the general public. Hazinginfo.org is a searchable database that tracks and compiles information on hazing incidents at colleges and universities in all 50 US states. The database is a partnership between founders Jolayne Houtz and Hector Martinez, whose child Sam died as a result of hazing in 2019, the University of Maine, the University of Washington Information School, and StopHazing.org. The database is free to the public and is searchable by state or name of school with the goal of increasing transparency and aiding students and families in their decision making. The database also includes information about individual school policies, hazing deaths, statistics, education and resources (StopHazing, 2024).

Adapting a model such as Hazinginfo.org for the military's use can increase transparency across the services and provide a wealth of information that can be used in prevention planning. Having a shared database and a larger volume of information to analyze can help identify trends in hazing that may be based on branch of service, type of unit, location, time of year, gender, age, rank, and many other factors. This can provide the necessary information to assist leaders in policy making, drive future research, and ultimately save lives.

5. Conclusion

Although many hazing prevention training workshops and courses are provided in the military, they have not been systematically evaluated, so their usefulness in reducing or

preventing hazing remains unknown (Keller et al., 2015). Despite high rates of hazing in the military, the present review found scant evidence of effective military hazing prevention efforts. While there are several comprehensive documents that outline potential programming, especially from the RAND Corporation (Keller et al., 2017; Keller et al., 2015; Matthews et al., 2015) and the GAO (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1992; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016, 2021, 2022), the DOD has yet to develop a cohesive program that targets hazing similar to past approaches for alcohol use and misuse and sexual assault prevention (Kazemi et al., 2013; Orchowski et al., 2018). Notably, the policies, training, and programs evaluated did not reflect proven hazing prevention efforts currently being implemented in college and university settings. Taken together, these findings suggest that more attention is needed to build the evidence base for hazing prevention in the military and to evaluate the prevention practices currently being implemented among service members.

Lastly, given the prevalence and impact of hazing among military populations, it is essential to understand the best practices for hazing prevention. More attention is needed to integrate best practices in prevention into existing intervention approaches and more rigorous methodological approaches to program evaluation are necessary to advance the state of the field.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. CSBC and Dr. EJA were responsible for study design, methodology and revising. Mr. AR and Ms. CP were responsible for reviewing articles and initial selection of articles. Ms. EM drafted the manuscript, and Dr. LNM and LMO revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. In this paragraph, also explain any special agreements concerning authorship, such as if authors contributed equally to the study.

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