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Service Women's Action Network

July 8, 2011



Dear Friends of SWAN,

Thanks to your support, we've made tremendous strides this year in getting a variety of legislation introduced to curb military sexual violence and discrimination against service women. As we push for national support for [these bills](#), a few critical issues remain.

Read more about SWAN's policy work [here](#).

Some of you have intimate knowledge about Question 21 on The National Security Clearance Questionnaire, [form SF 86](#). In fact, SWAN has received a handful of Helpline calls from troops who are sexual assault survivors, and who have been further harmed by this misguided and potentially damaging question.

"Infamous Question 21," as former Defense Secretary Robert Gates dubbed it, requires applicants to provide the dates and reason for mental health counseling. It grants government investigators full access to an individual's medical records. It also opens up the possibility that investigators will ask follow up questions about rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment or domestic violence committed against an applicant, and it threatens denial of a clearance if an applicant is not completely forthcoming.

Read more about how Question 21 harms sexual trauma survivors at [military.com](#).



The federal government [allows a few exceptions](#) to this rule, and decided in 2008 that service members receiving mental health counseling for combat-related mental health issues, including PTSD, do not have to report their treatment. That positive policy change was an attempt to reduce the stigma many troops attach to mental health counseling and the perception that it could threaten one's career.

In issuing the new policy, the DOD aptly stated, "Seeking professional care for these mental health issues should not be perceived to jeopardize an individual's

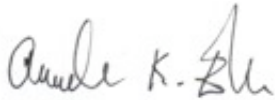
We are here to listen!

security clearance. On the contrary, failure to seek care actually increases the likelihood that psychological distress could escalate to a more serious mental condition, which could preclude an individual from performing sensitive duties. Thus, we encourage you to seek care when necessary, knowing that getting professional assistance as needed is the best way to sustain one's ability to perform well."

However, victims of military rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment or domestic violence who apply for or renew security clearances must report any counseling received for related trauma, revealing intimate details to background investigators, and risking their clearance status as a result of their answers.

SWAN is working hard to add rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and domestic violence to the list of exceptions to this policy. But we need your help to drive this change forward. Please know that SWAN understands the sensitive nature of communicating this information to us, and we will guarantee anonymity about any information you choose to provide. With that in mind, if you are a military rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment or domestic violence survivor and have lost or been denied a security clearance due to Question 21 on the SF 86, please contact SWAN's Policy Director, Greg Jacob at policy@servicewomen.org.

Thank you for your continued support,



Anu Bhagwati
Executive Director, Service Women's Action Network

Donate Now

Donate Now

SWAN is a 501(c)3 organization that urgently needs your financial support. Your tax deductible donation will help SWAN ensure equality, fairness, and justice for women in the military and dramatically improve resources for women veterans.



About Us

SWAN is a human rights organization founded and led by women veterans. SWAN's vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination, intimidation or assault. SWAN also seeks to reform veterans' services on a national scale to guarantee equal access to quality health care, benefits and resources for women veterans and their families. You can find the Service Women's Action Network on our [homepage](#), on [Twitter](#) or on [Facebook](#).

Please contact our [National Peer Support Helpline](#) at:

1-888-729-2089

or

peersupport@servicewomen.org

for support and referrals.

No one should have to struggle alone.

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