



Facts About Sexual Assault and Harassment in the Military



Sexual violence is among the most serious violations a person can experience. It is a criminal offense, punishable under military, federal and civilian law. Sexual assault and harassment impact mission readiness and undermine the military's core values. Sexual violence occurs to both men and women in the armed forces at least as often as it does to civilians. Sexual violence can cause psychological trauma having a negative impact on survivors that lasts for years after the event.

Definitions

Sexual assault is defined as intentional sexual contact made without consent and includes unwanted touching or grabbing and forced or non-consensual penetration of any kind with an object or body part. *Sexual harassment* describes unwelcome or threatening verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. *Military Sexual Trauma (MST)*, a term used by the VA, describes experiencing sexual assault or harassment while on active duty.

The Impact of Sexual Trauma in the Military

The DoD estimates that in fiscal year 2014, 25% of the service members who experienced unwanted sexual contact actually reported the matter to a military authority. Reporting of incidents of sexual assault has increased dramatically over the past ten years, with 6131 reported in 2014, up from 1700 incidents reported in 2004. Data on veterans shows about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 100 men report that they had experienced MST.² A recent study of active duty service members found that about 1% of men and 5% of women experienced a sexual assault, and 7% of men and 22% of women experienced sexual harassment during the year studied.³

The psychological trauma that can result from sexual assault or harassment is different from the kind of trauma service members may expect to face in the line of duty. Sexual violence in the military differs from that of the civilian world because military survivors often live, work, or rely on their perpetrators. Survivors often live and work with, and even rely on their attackers for basic needs. Survivors have reported that they were not believed, were encouraged to stay quiet, or were blamed for what happened, leaving them feeling ignored and alone.

¹ Sexual harassment under Article 93: Cruelty and Maltreatment; Sexual Assault under Article 120: Rape, Sexual Assault and Other Sexual Misconduct.

² Department of Veterans Affairs (2015) "Military Sexual Trauma" http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/mst_general_factsheet.pdf

³ Morral, Andrew R., Kristie L. Gore, Terry L. Schell, Barbara Bickler, Coreen Farris, Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, Lisa H. Jaycox, Dean Kilpatrick, Stephan Kistler, Amy Street, Terri Tanielian and Kayla M. Williams. Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military: Highlights from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015. http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9841.



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Some Effects of Sexual Violence

The consequences of sexual violence listed below are all normal reactions and usually go away within a few days or weeks. If these experiences continue for more than a few weeks get worse, or they interfere with daily functioning, relationships, or work, it is important to seek help from a health care professional. These common experiences include:

- Feeling disoriented or out of touch with reality
- Feeling afraid to leave home
- Drinking too much alcohol, taking more drugs than prescribed, using illegal drugs
- Extremely vivid memories of the event, like it's happening again
- Increased symptoms of a preexisting condition
- Hyperventilation
- Uncontrollable shaking
- No memories of periods of time

Men as Survivors of Sexual Violence

Men may face some unique challenges following an experience of sexual trauma. Men are often



less willing to seek support. Male survivors may they feel isolated, alienated from others, and emotionally vulnerable . Survivors are forced to submit, and often feel vulnerable and overwhelmed by intense emotions. Many sexual assaults of men involve more than one attacker, weapons, or forced participation—even if no immediate physical threat was involved.

For men, sexual assault can lead to much shame and self-doubt.

It may also trigger negative self-judgments and cause victims to question their masculinity.

Male survivors of sexual violence may contend with issues of:

- **Legitimacy** (“Men can’t be sexually assaulted”, “No one will believe me”)
- **Masculinity** (“I must not be a real man if I let this happen to me”; “My manhood has been stolen”)
- **Strength and Power** (“I should have been able to fend them off”; “I shouldn’t have let this happen”)
- **Sexual identify** (“Am I gay?”; “Will others think I’m gay and only pretended not to like it?”)

Signs of sexual arousal during an assault can occur due to involuntary body responses; they do not indicate pleasure or interest.



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Women as Survivors of Sexual Violence

Women survivors of sexual trauma in the military face unique challenges. Rates of sexual assault and harassment of female service members are higher than among civilians. This may be linked to the fact that there are fewer women than men in all the armed services.

Since there are fewer women than men in the military, women may feel they need to prove themselves. Female survivors may not feel comfortable seeking help. They may worry that others will see them as weak. They may fear that others may think they are just causing trouble or undermining the group's strength. Female survivors may also worry that speaking up will damage unit morale, especially if their attacker is a co-worker or fellow service member. And because many women find it hard to break into the military "boys club," they may worry that coming forward will interfere with social opportunities and career advancement. Finally, female survivors may simply fear they won't be believed or taken seriously. But, by remaining silent and resisting seeking support from others, they may become more isolated and have more difficulty healing.

GETTING HELP FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Seeking help from loved ones or professionals can help you overcome your shame and isolation. It takes courage and strength: courage to face what happened, and strength to admit and overcome your vulnerabilities. But with commitment, discipline, and the right support, you can recover from sexual trauma.

If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexual violence, there is help available.

- Call the **Safe Helpline** for 24/7 anonymous and confidential support (877) 995-5247
- Contact the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) **Outreach Center**
 - Call 866-966-1020
 - Online [Chat](http://www.realwarriors.net/livechat) (www.realwarriors.net/livechat)
 - By [email](mailto:resources@dcoeoutreach.org) (resources@dcoeoutreach.org)
- Visit **MyDuty.mil**, a website operated by the DoD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO)
- Visit [Military OneSource](#) for free, 24/7 counseling services (note: this is not an anonymous service, you will be required to identify yourself)
- Visit [Veterans Affairs online help](#) or call the VA crisis helpline: **800-273-TALK** (8255)