

▼ Definitions: A Pathway to Understanding and Action ¹



Military Sexual Trauma Military Sexual Misconduct

by

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Purpose of this presentation:

- *Not to prescribe:*
- *Not* providing an “official” definition or description of these terms
- *Not* stating what will become the government of Canada definition, or official definition of any other group or organization

- *Instead :*
- Explore background of these terms
- Currently accepted definitions
- Considerations when defining MST, MSM, and related terms for the future

Military Sexual Trauma is Not a Diagnosis

- So doctors do not diagnose their patient with MST
- “Military Sexual Trauma” is a descriptive term
- Compare to “Operational Stress Injury”
- Those who experience MST may suffer from a number of diagnosable mental health conditions:
 - PTSD
 - Anxiety Disorder
 - Major Depression
- As well as diagnosable physical conditions

Although These Are Not Diagnoses, Military Sexual Trauma and Military Sexual Misconduct are Important Terms

Some Considerations:

- We need agreed-upon definitions so that when we discuss, we have a shared understanding
- For validation and acknowledgement
- To what and to whom are we referring when we use these terms?
- Questions of reporting, including after release from the military
- The use of terms like OSI and MST
- Who is the perpetrator?
- Situating MST within a larger understanding of violence in our culture and our society

Use of The Terms Military Sexual Trauma and Military Sexual Misconduct in Canada:

- Military Sexual Misconduct describes acts committed
- Military Sexual Trauma describes effects, outcomes or suffering, as a result of these acts
- In the US, the term “Military Sexual Trauma” used to describe both the misconduct, and the traumatic effects

- **Sexual Misconduct** is defined, in Canada, as “conduct of a sexual nature that can cause or causes harm to others”. Sexual misconduct includes:
 - Actions or words that devalue a person or group of persons on the basis of their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression;
 - Jokes of a sexual nature, sexual remarks, advances of a sexual nature or verbal abuse of a sexual nature in the workplace;
 - Harassment (DAOD 5012-0) of a sexual nature, including initiation rites of a sexual nature;
 - Viewing, accessing, distributing or displaying sexually explicit material in the workplace; and
 - Any *Criminal Code* offence of a sexual nature
- Government of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/conflict-misconduct/operation-honour/orders-policies-directives/operation-honour-manual/use-of-terminology.html>

Potential Service Offence



THE SPECTRUM OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT



- **Military Sexual Trauma**, defined by the USVA, refers to **sexual assault** or **harassment** experienced during military service. MST includes any sexual activity that you are involved with against your will. Examples include:
 - Being pressured or coerced into sexual activities, such as with threats of negative treatment if you refuse to cooperate, or with promises of better treatment in exchange for sex
 - Someone having sexual contact with you without your consent, such as when you were asleep or intoxicated
 - Being physically forced to have sex
 - Being touched in a sexual way that made you uncomfortable
 - Repeated comments about your body or sexual activities
 - Threatening and unwanted sexual advances
- USVA: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/msthome/index.asp>

Military Sexual Trauma: Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

- **Sexual Harassment: 2 types:**

- “*Hostile environment*” sexual harassment
- “*Quid Pro Quo*” sexual harassment

- **Sexual Assault:**

- Unwanted sexual contact involving some type of *coercion*
 - *Overpowered by physical force (the one we usually think of)*
 - *Unable to consent (eg intoxicated, unconscious)*
 - *Coerced by threats of harm—to one’s **body**, one’s **reputation**, one’s **career***

- **Coercion:**

- Individuals may *comply* for understandable reasons: to increase chances of survival, to prevent physical harm, to preserve reputation, to protect career longevity

Consent vs Compliance

Consent vs Compliance: To understand the issues of Military Sexual Misconduct and Military Sexual Trauma, we must clearly understand the difference between *consent* and *compliance*, and that in relationships where there is a power differential, *compliance* may occur, but true *consent* is not possible.

What CAF Reports starting to do wrt use of terms:

- From a statement released on April 29, 2021 entitled: “New Initiatives to advance culture change for Canada’s Defence Team”
- *It is important to name and acknowledge the harm that results from experiencing sexual harassment and violence during service and that this harm has distinct aspects. To clearly define sexual trauma in connection with military service, initial discussions are underway with stakeholders including survivors, academics, and the sexual misconduct response centre.*

One More Question on Terms

Another question related to use of terms, that is sometimes asked is:

“Why do we need to separate out and focus on *Military* Sexual Trauma and *Military* Sexual Misconduct? Because we know that this happens not only in the military, but in many workplaces.”

Why?

- To provide validation
- To provide forthright acknowledgement
- This is a **service-related condition**

In conclusion.....

Thank-you all so very much for your kind attention today. I hope you find benefit in the rest of our Symposium.

*And please everyone,
take good care of yourselves and each other*