

# Military Sexual Misconduct and Military Sexual Trauma Fact Sheet

## WHAT IS MILITARY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT?

Military sexual misconduct is defined, in Canada, as “conduct of a sexual nature that can cause or causes harm to others” and takes place within the military (Department of National Defence, 2019). For more information on the behaviours and actions included in this definition, please refer to the [Department of National Defence’s website](#). Military sexual misconduct can occur in your physical work location or in the greater work environment where work-related activities take place and work relationships exist. It can also occur while you are on or off duty, on or off base, deployed or not deployed (Department of National Defence, 2019).

## WHAT IS MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)?

Although there is currently no “official” definition of MST in Canada, there are generally accepted descriptions being used, which are largely based on the definition from the United States. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, MST refers to “experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment” experienced during military service, including sexual activity that you are involved with against your will (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a). MST is not a diagnosable condition, but rather a term that describes the psychological, physical and social impacts or “wounds” that people who experience or witness military sexual misconduct may feel.



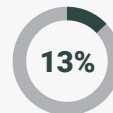
## HOW COMMON IS MILITARY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT?

Thousands of Canadian Armed Forces members experience or witness military sexual misconduct at some point during their career (Cotter, 2016). If you are among those impacted, it is important to know that you are not alone.

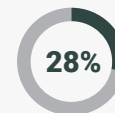
In 2016 and 2018, Statistics Canada was contracted by the Canadian Armed Forces to conduct “The Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.” Some of the data presented below is from this survey, which organizes sexual misconduct into three main categories: sexual assault, sexualized behaviour, and discriminatory behaviour (Cotter, 2019).

Anyone can experience military sexual misconduct. However, you may be more likely to be targeted if you identify with certain groups (Watkins et al., 2017; Hajizadeh et al., 2019). Young minority women are the most likely to experience sexual assault (Cotter, 2016; Cotter, 2019). Targeting behaviours are linked to imbalances in power, which may be situational,

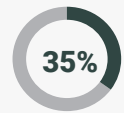
Over a 12 month period, approximately



of men



of women



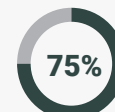
of gender diverse people

who are Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force members **experienced targeted sexualized or discriminatory behaviours** (Cotter, 2019).

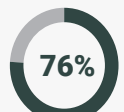
Over a 12 month period, approximately



of men



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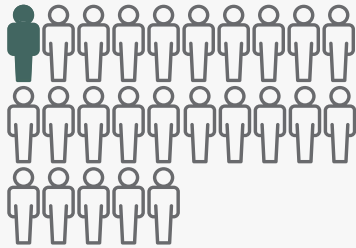
of gender diverse people

who are Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force members **witnessed or experienced sexualized or discriminatory behaviours** (Cotter, 2019).

Since joining the Canadian Armed Forces, approximately



1 in 4 women



1 in 25 men

have experienced **sexual assault** at least once (Cotter, 2016).

systemic (due to societal policies and practices that result in disadvantages, barriers, or harmful treatment of some people), or both. Not everyone who identifies with these groups will experience military sexual misconduct. Further, in no way do these factors suggest that you, as a person who has experienced military sexual misconduct, are responsible for these experiences. Responsibility for these incidents always falls on the perpetrator(s).



### Underreporting

Much of what we know about military sexual misconduct and military sexual trauma (MST) comes from what is reported.

However, many individuals choose not to report incidents of military sexual misconduct that occur during service for a variety of reasons (Deschamps, 2015; Bryant-Davis et al., 2009; Orchowski et al., 2018; Tillman et al., 2010; Murray, 2008). The “official figures” may be just the tip of the iceberg. In fact, over half (57%) of sexual assault incidents go unreported (Cotter, 2019).

## WHAT DOES MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST) LOOK LIKE?



If you have experienced military sexual misconduct, you may react in many different ways. There is no “right way” to respond or react. Your reactions may be influenced by your past experiences, current situation, and identity. Your reactions could be subtle or strong; they could present immediately following or take time to develop, and/or fluctuate in intensity overtime. You may also experience symptoms consistent with a number of diagnosable psychiatric or mental health conditions, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder, or major depression, as well as a number of physical diagnoses.

The following is a list of common feelings, reactions, and behaviours experienced by those with MST:

### EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE REACTIONS:

- Anxiety and panic
- Nightmares
- Self-doubt
- Sadness
- Shame or guilt
- Anger
- Betrayal
- Suspiciousness
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Numbness
- Denial
- Difficulty concentrating
- Distractibility
- Memory problems
- Loss of motivation
- Fear

## MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS:

- Anxiety disorders, including panic attacks
- Acute stress or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Mood disorders such as major depression
- Self-harm
- Suicidal ideation (thoughts) or behaviours
- Increased alcohol or drug use to cope with trauma symptoms (sleep disturbance, avoidance, change in mood, feelings of hypervigilance or decreased safety)
- Substance use disorder

## PHYSICAL HEALTH REACTIONS:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Chronic pain
- Change in sexual arousal, performance, and enjoyment
- Digestive or gastrointestinal problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Reproductive health problems
- Pain during sex

## RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL REACTIONS:

- Increased agitation, anger, or change in mood that affects your relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and others
- Difficulty trusting and feeling safe around others
- Changes or difficulty engaging in social activities
- Isolation or loneliness
- Loss of faith or confidence in authority figures
- Avoidance or increased dependence on certain individuals

## AVOIDANCE - YOU MAY BE AVOIDING:

- Places, people, or situations, that remind you of the traumatic event(s)
- Friends, family, and other individuals in your life
- Going to work
- Taking time off

## CAREER IMPACTS- YOU MAY:

- Feel forced to choose between your military career and continued contact with the perpetrator(s)
- Feel torn between loyalty to yourself, to your unit, and to the military
- Fear (or have experienced) negative repercussions on your career and career progression, including removal from your unit or release from the military
- Fear (or have experienced) retaliation by peers and supervisors
- Fear (or have experienced) negative perceptions of you, including perceptions that you are "weak" or a "trouble maker"
- Fear (or have experienced) financial difficulties, including loss of income
- Fear (or have experienced) that reporting what happened will not make a difference

(Dechamps, 2015; Alberta Health Services, 2021; Watkins et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020b; DAV, 2021; Make the Connection, n.d.; Cichowski et al., 2017)

## WHERE TO GET SUPPORT IF YOU HAVE BEEN IMPACTED BY MILITARY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN CANADA:

### **Sexual Misconduct Response Centre – 613-996-3900/1-844-750-1648**

If you are a Canadian Armed Forces member impacted by Sexual Misconduct, the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre can provide you with confidential support services. This Centre can also provide services to individuals who are supporting you. Their services include: supportive counselling; information and referrals to resources and services; advocacy to help you meet your needs; accompaniment to your appointments, meetings, and proceedings; assistance with workplace arrangements; and other practical assistance.

You can reach them 24/7 by phone. You can remain anonymous while accessing their services. If you wish the Centre counsellors to refer you to a civilian or Military health care provider, they can do so without passing on any personal information you have shared with them. Any information you share with them cannot be accessed by the Canadian Armed Forces chain of command, or anyone else outside of the Centre.

### **Canadian Armed Forces Member Assistance Program – 1-800-268-7708**

The Member Assistance Program is for Canadian Armed Forces Members and their families. You can reach them 24/7 by phone. They offer confidential, voluntary, short-term counselling. They can also provide you a referral to a longer-term counsellor.

### **Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service – 1-800-268-7708**

The VAC Assistance Service is for Canadian Armed Forces Veterans, former RCMP members, and their families and caregivers. You can reach them 24/7 by phone. They can provide you with confidential, immediate, free mental health counselling. They can also provide you a referral to a longer-term counsellor.

### **It's Not Just 20K (INJ20K)**

INJ20K is a volunteer run organization that advocates for those impacted by military sexual misconduct and MST in the Canadian Armed Forces. INJ20K provides an informal peer-to-peer support platform, a social network, and informational resources to their members (serving and Veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces) who have directly experienced the misconduct and subsequent trauma. The support provided is to assist those impacted by MST in their journey of recovery.

### **Sexual Misconduct Support Resources Search Tool**

The Sexual Misconduct Support Resources Search Tool allows you to browse through a list of resources that can support you. The list categories resources into those that are civilian, and those that are Canadian Armed Forces specific. Resources include 24/7 crisis lines, hospitals, sexual assault centres, shelters, local police, health lines, Military Family Resource Centres, health services, chaplain services, military police services, and OUTCAN. You can search for resources based on your location.



## COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

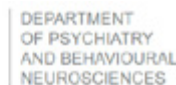
- If you experienced sexual harassment, assault, or discrimination while serving, you may be eligible for compensation from the [CAF-DND Sexual Misconduct Class Action Settlement](#)
- If you have a condition due to a service-related sexual trauma (e.g. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, anxiety, etc.), you can apply to Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) for [disability benefits](#). You may now be eligible for VAC disability benefits even if you have been denied in the past. Find out how to [review or appeal](#) a previous decision.

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**This resource is provided courtesy of the Canadian Military Sexual Trauma Community of Practice, a collaboration of scientists, members of intermediary organizations, government departments, and an MST stakeholder/peer support group. Major contributions to this resource were provided by the Centre of Excellence on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), McMaster University, Veterans Affairs Canada, and Its Not Just 700 (INJ700) (formerly known as It's Just 700 – IJ700). We would like to acknowledge Tara Leach (Royal Ottawa) for her contributions to the development of this resource.**

**The Centre of Excellence on PTSD does not provide mental health counselling or treatment. If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call 911 or refer to one of the resources above.**



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