

National Defence vows to get better at helping men who report military sexual misconduct

The number of male soldiers reporting sexual misconduct has been increasing

[Murray Brewster](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 08, 2024 5:00 AM AST |
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The Department of National Defence says it wants to improve training for counsellors and other professionals dealing with male soldiers alleging sexual misconduct in the military. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

The Department of National Defence (DND) says it's taking steps to improve training for staff at the military's sexual misconduct support centre, acknowledging that men who report being abused have not

always felt "safe, secure and supported."

The federal government issued a notice late in December saying it intends to award a sole-source contract to an Ottawa-based company to provide personnel training at the Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre (SMSRC).

The centre "has a requirement for the provision of training on how to best support men affected by sexual misconduct, particularly those who have lived experiences of sexual trauma," says the notice, posted online on Dec. 20, 2023.

"The SMSRC serves a large clientele of men and requires specialized training in this field from a subject matter expert(s)."

The request for outside help, specifically for counsellors and peer support facilitators, comes as the number of reported cases involving male victims in the Canadian Forces continues to rise.

Men accounted for almost half of all new case files opened on claims of sexual misconduct in the military during the latest official reporting period in 2022-23.

DND said that, during that reporting period, 1,431 new case files were opened over 12 months. Of those, "645 identified as women and 528 identified as men. The remainder identified themselves as gender diverse or the gender remained unidentified."

In previous years, men made up only about one-third of new reported cases, the department told CBC News.

The centre's programs and services are meant to be inclusive and open

to everyone, regardless of gender, but officials acknowledge shortcomings.

WATCH: Reports of military sexual assaults spike

Number of sexual assaults reported in military spiked last year: StatsCan

The percentage of military members who reported being sexually assaulted by another member of the military more than doubled between 2018 and 2022, says a new report from Statistics Canada. Canadian Armed Forces Chief of Professional Conduct and Culture Lt.-Gen Jennie Carignan addresses the concerns on Power & Politics.

"It is of prime importance that people feel safe, secure and supported. Unfortunately, that hasn't always been the case for many people identifying as men who have been historically faced with stigma in both the heterosexual and LGBTQ2S+ communities," DND said in a media statement.

"SMSRC understands that everybody can be affected by sexual misconduct and have designed all programming with this in mind."

The department said it does not currently offer services tailored specifically to men.

The company in line for the sole-source contract is Men and Healing, an Ottawa-based psychotherapy firm. No dollar figure was attached to the solicitation, which was intended to give other interested companies the opportunity to demonstrate they could do the work.

Percentage of males reporting sexual assaults soars

Charlotte Duval-Lantoine, a fellow with the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, said DND's admission that male victims of sexual misconduct have not been well served is significant.

Last month, Statistics Canada reported that the percentage of men in the military who reported having been sexually assaulted was 2.5 times higher in 2022 than it was in 2018.

"We know that men tend to under-report sexual assault," said Duval-Lantoine. She called for more research to determine whether the reported increase was driven by heightened awareness of sexual misconduct or by an actual spike in the number of assaults.

She said it's not surprising that men in the military reporting sexual misconduct generally don't feel safe or supported.

"When you look at such a masculine culture as the Canadian Armed Forces, you will tend to see that sexual assaults towards men [are] not really accepted, especially if the perpetrator is a woman," she said.

"It is not at all surprising that you see this type of situation where men are not being understood or not being listened to, or even being altogether dismissed."

Duval-Lantoine said that while women undeniably are more likely to face sexual misconduct in the military, an unconscious bias — an assumption that men are the abusers and women are exclusively the victims — is just starting to be recognized.

She noted that more than 40 per cent of the complainants taking part in recent class action lawsuits against the federal government over sexual misconduct in the Armed Forces were men.

"We have just been ... waking up to this issue," Duval-Lantoine said.

DND said that while the SMSRC does not have specific programs for men, it's funding 32 projects in the community non-profit sector across the country.

"Most of the funded projects provide services to those who identify as men, though some of them have projects uniquely for those who identify as women," the department said.

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Murray Brewster is senior defence writer for CBC News, based in Ottawa. He has covered the Canadian military and foreign policy from Parliament Hill for over a decade. Among other assignments, he spent a total of 15 months on the ground covering the Afghan war for The Canadian Press. Prior to that, he covered defence issues and politics for CP in Nova Scotia for 11 years and was bureau chief for Standard Broadcast News in Ottawa.