Sexual Assault in the Canadian Armed Forces: Prevalence, Circumstances, Correlates, and Mental Health Associations

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Faculty/Presenter Disclosure

- **Faculty**: Kimberley Watkins

- **Relationships with commercial interests:**
  - Not applicable
Disclosure of Commercial Support

- No commercial support

- Potential for conflict(s) of interest:
  - None
Mitigating Potential Bias

- Not applicable
Background

- Certain military characteristics are sexual assault risk factors:
  - Younger than the general population
  - Living quarters often isolated and integrated
  - Men greatly outnumber and frequently outrank women

- Existing data on military work-related sexual assault (MWSA):
  - Vast majority U.S.-based
  - Inconsistency in methodology and prevalence estimates
Rationale

- **External review (Deschamps, 2015):**
  - Interviews and focus groups ($n = \sim 700$ volunteers)
  - Sexual misconduct appears to be a problem in the CAF

- **Aim:** Investigate the prevalence, circumstances, correlates, and mental health associations of sexual assault in the CAF, with reliable methodology
Method

Data source and population: 2013 Canadian Forces Mental Health Survey

→ stratified random sample of CAF Regular Force population ($n = 6,700$; 80% response rate)
→ face-to-face interviews conducted by Statistics Canada

Measures:
→ Sociodemographic and military characteristics
→ Lifetime and past-year PTSD and other mental disorders
→ Lifetime sexual assault (forced sexual activity and/or unwanted sexual touching)
Definition of non-MWSA and MWSA

- Participants who reported lifetime sexual assault (forced sexual activity and/or unwanted sexual touching) were asked:
  - “Did this ever take place while deployed on a CAF operation?”
  - “Did this ever take place in your CAF workplace (other than on deployment)?”
  - “Were any of the persons who committed this or these acts a CAF member or civilian DND employee at the time of this or these events?”

- Those who answered “No” to all: lifetime non-military work-related sexual assault (non-MWSA)
- Those who answered “Yes” to any: lifetime MWSA
Results

Prevalence of Sexual Assault by Sex

- **Any lifetime sexual assault**
  - Women: 39.8%
  - Men: 6.8%
- **Unwanted touching**
  - Women: 23.8%
  - Men: 5.7%
- **Forced sexual activity**
  - Women: 14.8%
  - Men: 2.6%
- **Any sexual assault**
  - Women: 24.3%
  - Men: 6.0%

Lifetime non-MWSA

- **Unwanted touching**
  - Women: 14.8%
  - Men: 0.8%
- **Forced sexual activity**
  - Women: 7.6%
  - Men: 0.2%
- **Any sexual assault**
  - Women: 15.5%
  - Men: 0.8%

Lifetime MWSA
## Results

### Context of MWSA among women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any sexual assault</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced sexual activity</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted touching</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Committed by a CAF member or civilian DND employee**
- **Occurred in CAF workplace (other than deployment)**
- **While deployed on a CAF mission**
Results

Key sociodemographic and military risk factors among women – Deployment status

Overall $\chi^2 = 7.89$, $p < 0.05$
Results

Mental health outcomes among women

![Bar chart showing mental health outcomes among women](chart.png)
Conclusions

- MWSA has occurred in a sizeable fraction of CAF women
- Deployment is likely a period of elevated risk for women
- Both non-MWSA and MWSA are associated with an increased risk of mental disorders among women
- The prevalence of lifetime sexual assault did not differ substantially from that of the Canadian general population or the U.S. military
Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations:

→ Lack of contextual and related (e.g., harassment) information
→ Could not distinguish between MWSA with and without other adult sexual assault
→ Cross-sectional data – causality cannot be determined

Next steps:

→ Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the CAF
→ DGMPRA research program in support of OP HONOUR
Questions?

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