Military Sexual Trauma

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**Introduction**

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is ‘the sexual assault or harassment that members of the military service experience at their tenure of the job'. Sexual harassment is constantly being observed in workplaces. Organizations are improving their environments to safeguard their employees from physical violence. The organizations provide training and capacity building seminars to bring awareness to their personnel. However, sexual harassment is still observed in a different department and the military is one of them. The sexual trauma refers to the forced encounters when the person is unwilling to indulge in such activities. Also, it includes inappropriate sexual jokes and comments on other coworkers. It is an unwanted activity that makes the other person uncomfortable in the work environment. Many people leave the job due to such behavior of their coworkers (Barth et al., 2016). Furthermore, it includes compensation in exchange for irrelevant favors that results in sexual harassment. This is high shame and inferiority for a military person to the victim of sexual assault, thus its strong impact on their mental health. Thus results in their mental damage and results in trauma. However, regardless of the legal laws against sexual harassment, the assault is still common in workplaces especially the military.

**Discussion**

MST is highly faced by the military forces of the United States. The sexual violence is not just limited to women but men experience the same amount of harassment. In 2016, 9600 women whereas 10,6000 men were reported to being sexually assaulted. Also, there are some victims whose data is not reported. The MST was more common in the veterans returning from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Researches also show that in Iraq, women are at higher risks of sexual assault compared to men. 1 in 4 veterans are victims of sexual harassment. Wheres 1 in 100 male veterans experience the MST, this shows that women are more vulnerable to physical assault. Also, 17 former military women also filed a lawsuit in 2010 accusing the Defence Department being failed in providing safety to a female member in Iraq. They have failed to maintain a culture that could prevent rapes within the department (Calhoun et al., 2018). Although the department knew the culprits well they donot take action against them. This makes them more confident committing sexual harassment.

**The Issues Related to Reporting**

The US military has a two-tier system, the one includes the restricted that is usually anonymous while the other is unrestricted reporting. The restricted is the group that allows help to the victims such as medical resources and counseling without disclosing the identity. They are not allowed to take legal action against the perpetrators. They are usually the weak group or the lower level in the military who wants to prevent social consequences of the MST. However, the second unrestricted group can charge the perpetrators with criminal charges. In 2016, there were 4584 cases of unrestricted reporting wheres 1900 restricted reports. The reason for their not reporting is also the fear of retaliation from the superior authority members. They want to save their careers in the military and mostly their image too (Holland, Rabelo, & Cortina, 2016).

There is a high fear of career impact and the reputation of them in the department. The subordinate thinks that no one will believe them and its better to not report. Also, many victims have confessed that reporting affects access to mental health treatment after being harassed. Those who usually reports are not provided with medical help and are further tortured by the military members. Many victims also do not disclose their trauma because they want to maintain their masculine personality and image in the military. It is highly observed that people who report MST are usually diagnosed with a mental disorder that results in their termination from the post. It reduces their benefits from the department thus, they do not disclose about the harassment. The military personnel feels great shame and insult in being called as sexual harassment victims thus they do not disclose it easily. They are also believed to be incompetent and are rejected for performing main roles in the forces.

**Symptoms Associated With MST**

**Psychological Health Issues**

MST survivors have high rates of psychological disorders. They experience a high tendency for stress disorders. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most common mental health concern experienced by the survivors. 65 percent of men wheres 49 percent of females have reported having PTSD due to the high pressure of maintaining a positive image. The survivors have been through a hard time, however, they are not allowed to show a weak personality in the military. They cannot discuss with someone and also not easily allowed to seek medical help from the authorities. This results in severe depression and substance use disorder that affect their personalities and their work. They also feel high anger towards the perpetrators and have a high tendency of violence. Their subordinate nature and work constantly trigger a feeling of anger and disobedience towards their supervisors (Kimerling, Makin-Byrd, Louzon, Ignacio, & McCarthy, 2016). However, some survivors get medical help and counseling that helps them to somehow/e maintain a positive value in the department.

**Difficulty in Social Functioning**

The veterans who are victims of MST have reported difficulties in maintaining relationships. They are far away from their families and have no close relation to whom they can discuss their issues. Thus they lost trust and believe in others and become isolated. The harassment brings trust issues in their personalities and they don't get easily engage in social activities. Most survivors do not want to work in another department after military services due to their trust issues. They experience negative challenges of shame and guilt that restrict them from functioning properly.

**Substance Use**

The substance use is common in survivors of sexual assault. They use alcohol and drugs including marijuana and cocaine to calm down their emotions and anger. The percentage of drug usage is up to 10 times higher in survivors of sexual assault than normal people. This also results in body pain and eating problems in the victims. They also experience difficulty in paying attention to their missions. They are not able to concentrate on their targets and have memory loss issues as well. They have trouble to stay focused and are frequently absent from their work. This consequently results in their termination from the job that results in further discouragement of the victims. They are not even able to work at other places and are strongly dependent on drugs (Carroll et al., 2018).

**Conclusion**

The MST is strongly prevailing in different militaries especially the veterans serving in other countries. However, the issue can be resolved with proper reporting of the sexual assault. Also, the veterans should be made aware that there is no shame and insult in seeking help from a specialist who can deal with sexual trauma. The responsibility first lies in the military to deal efficiently and with great care to the veterans. The need to provide them with a proper counseling session. Also, if there are issues with reporting, they should provide such training and seminars occasionally so that victims can relate to it. It will help them improve their lifestyle and not indulge in drugs. They should spend more time with their loved ones and contact them to be in a better position to cope with MST. It also requires to focus on the present and your career instead of overthinking about the harassment. The Veterans Health Administration is a department that is allocated to provide medical help to the veterans free of charge and work to bring them back to their normal routines. Still, there is a need for high strategies to improve the functioning of the military and discourage sexual harassment in the first place. Secondly, strong actions must be taken against such perpetrators so the incidence does not happen with others. Also, people would ultimately consider the military a safe working department.

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