


Trauma-Informed Leadership Training to Address Military Sexual Trauma

April 24, 2025

CMWR
Conference



An aerial photograph of a calm lake surrounded by a dense forest. The trees on the right side of the lake show vibrant autumn colors, including shades of yellow, orange, and red, interspersed with green. The left side of the lake is more misty and the trees appear greener. The water reflects the surrounding forest and the sky.

McMaster University recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement.

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Anciens Combattants
Canada

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National
Defence

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nationale



Two weeks set aside for former top soldier Jonathan Vance's trial



Ex-CDS Art McDonald launches a public campaign to get his old command back

Murray Brewster · CBC News · Posted: Oct 15, 2021 5:31 PM ADT | Last Updated: October 15, 2021



Former chief of the defence staff Jonathan Vance is going to trial on a charge of obstruction of justice. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

CANADA

Former head of military personnel charged after sexual assault investigation



By **Amanda Connolly** · Global News

Posted December 7, 2021 4:41 pm · Updated December 7, 2021 6:46 pm

CANADA

Maj.-Gen. Dany Fortin cleared in military review of sexual misconduct allegation



By **Aaron D'Andrea** · Global News

Posted January 23, 2023 4:20 pm · Updated January 24, 2023 12:38 am

CANADA

Ottawa's appeal of CAF sexual misconduct class action extension 'troubling': law firms



By **Aaron D'Andrea** · Global News

Posted January 19, 2023 2:11 pm

CANADA

Former head of military personnel charged after sexual assault investigation



By **Amanda Connolly** · Global News

Posted December 7, 2021 4:41 pm · Updated December 7, 2021 6:46 pm

Investigation into sexual misconduct allegations against Admiral Art McDonald ends without charges



McDonald stepped aside in February when the investigation became public

Nick Boisvert · CBC News · Posted: Aug 06, 2021 7:28 PM ADT | Last Updated: August 6, 2021



Admiral Art McDonald was appointed Canada's top military commander in January. (Andrew Vaughan/Canadian Press)

Public Awareness of Military Sexual Trauma in Canada

- **1990s:** sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces entered the public consciousness when a national magazine published a story titled, “Rape in the Military”
- **2014:** national magazine published another article
- **2016:** Marie Deschamps, Canadian Justice, published report with 10 recommendations
- **2016 and 2018:** Statistics Canada conducted first national survey: “*The Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.*”
- **2016:** seven former members of the CF initiated class action lawsuits against the Government of Canada
- Operation HONOUR stood up in the CF and the creation of the *Sexual Misconduct Response Centre**
- **2021:** following a raft of new allegations, Operation Honour was ended, and the new *Chief Professional Conduct and Culture* was established
- **2021:** Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Madame Justice Louise Arbour, conducted a second review and makes 48 recommendations aimed at transformative change
- **2022:** Government of Canada makes official apology

Creation of Canadian Military Sexual Trauma Community of Practice



CANADIAN
MST CoP
MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Opening workshop

Introduce facilitators

Explain roles

Orientation to workshop

Ground rules



Introduce facilitators and explain roles

- People with Lived Experience of Military Sexual Trauma^{1,2}
- Clinician-academics experienced in psychological trauma, with cultural competency in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)

¹Tam-Seto, L., Garland Baird, L., Held, N., Heber, A., **Buchart, L.**, Ibbotson, A., Orchard Young, S., Lade, S., Millman, H., Brown, A., Imre-Millei, B., Lopes, J., **Samplonius, M.E.**, Chrysler, C., & McKinnon, M.C. (in press). Critical Conversations: A restorative engagement initiative for people with lived experience of military sexual trauma. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health Research*.

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Orientation to the workshop

- Trigger warning
- Introduce chaplain or other mental health support person (e.g., social worker)
- Used “thumbs up” rule
- External and post-session supports available, including from Canadian Armed Forces/ National Defence
- In person or virtual, no recording; requested confidentiality
- Discussed rank and downplayed its relevance in the session
- Voluntary participation (some people were “volun-told”)

Ground Rules

- Openness to learn
- Confidentiality of participants
- Respectful dialogue
- Autonomy over your own story
- Recognizing and setting your own boundaries
- Participate at your own comfort level



Icebreaker



Hands up if you have served. What is your relationship to the military (e.g., serving member, Veteran, family member, clinician, researcher?)



What is your interest in MST?



What do you hope to get out of today's session?

Use of the terms Military Sexual Trauma and Military Sexual Misconduct in Canada

Military Sexual Misconduct describes acts committed

Military Sexual Trauma describes both the misconduct and the traumatic effects of the misconduct

Sexual Misconduct Definition


- Conduct of a sexual nature that causes or could cause harm to others, and that the person knew or ought reasonably to have known could cause harm

Military Sexual Trauma: Canadian Definition

- Currently not a diagnosis in the DSM 5 or ICD 11
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST) includes any ***sexual or sexualized activity*** that occurs **without one's consent**, **during one's service** as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, and the ***traumatic impacts*** of this activity on the affected person

Unclassified / Non-confidential

Download the
Glossary of Terms on Psychological Trauma, V3.0



Published: November 2023

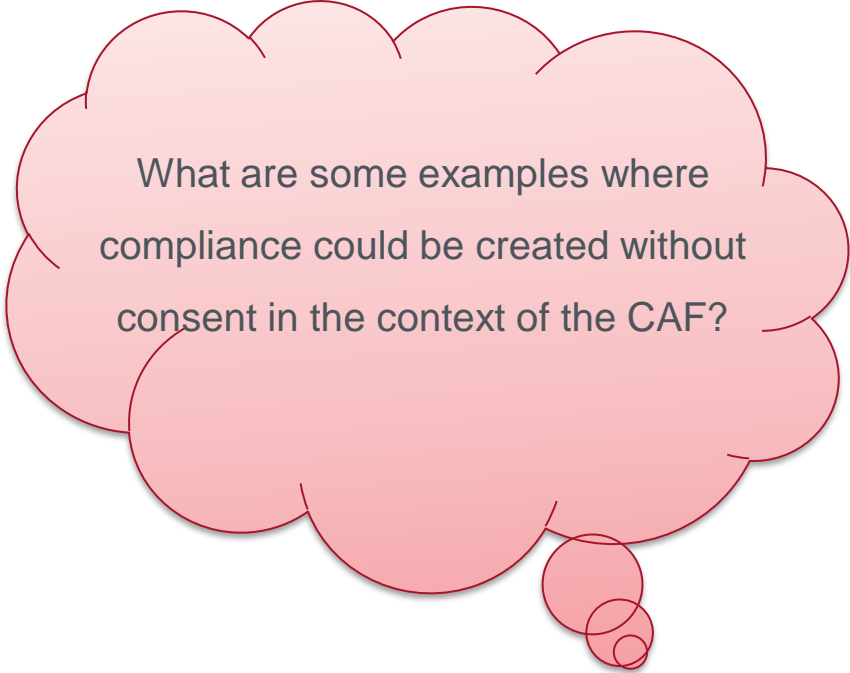
Heber A, Testa V, Groll D, Ritchie K, Tam-Seto L, Mulligan A, Sullo E, Schick A, Bose E, Jabbari Y, Lopes J, Carleton RN. Glossary of terms: A shared understanding of the common terms used to describe psychological trauma, version 3.0. Health Promot Chronic Dis Prev Can. 2023;43(10/11). <https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.43.10/11.09>

- **Examples of *sexual or sexualized activities* without one's consent or where one is unable to consent, may include (but are not limited to):**
 - Taking part in sexual activities because of coercion or threat (such as threats to one's career progression or other negative treatment if one refuses to comply)
 - Any situation involving comments, unwanted touching, grabbing, or sexual advances, including hazing activities or rituals
 - Sexual contact or activities while sleeping, unconscious, or any other circumstance where the person's capacity to consent is impaired by drugs or alcohol
 - Sexualized comments or displays of pornographic or demeaning materials in the workplace
 - Being subject to repeated requests for a sexual relationship, which is unwelcomed
 - Any unwanted sexual activity or display that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment

Consent vs Compliance

What is the difference?

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 are some examples where compliance could be created without consent in the context of the CAF?

- Examples of *traumatic impacts* on the affected person may include (but are not limited to):
 - Disturbed sleep or nightmares
 - Disturbing memories of re-experiencing the event
 - Difficulty feeling safe
 - Feeling guilt or shame
 - Feeling angry or enraged
 - Problems in intimate relationships
 - Difficulty parenting
 - Problems with alcohol or drugs
 - Physical injuries or pain conditions
 - Reluctance to report for duty or to wear one's uniform

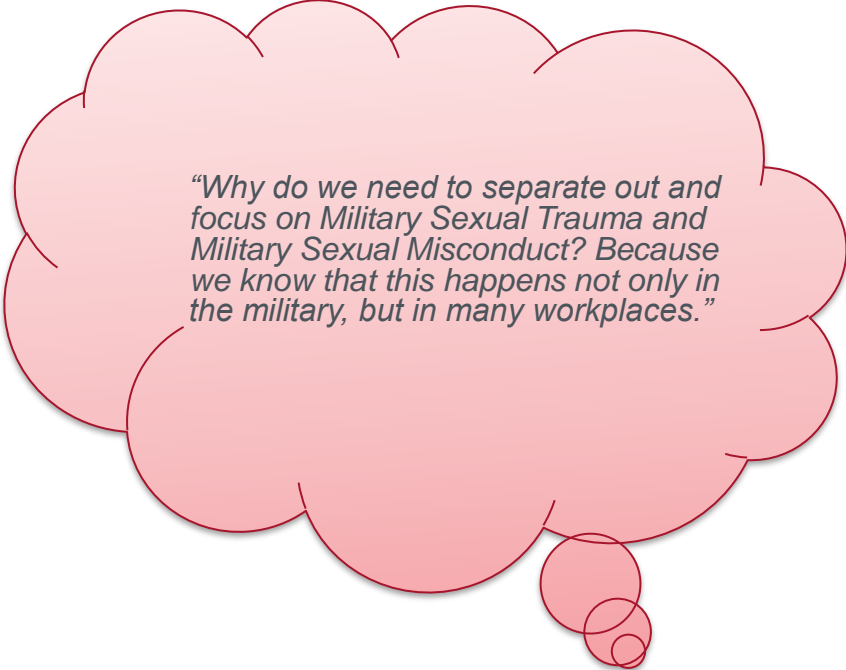
Myths and Questions





Why **military** sexual trauma?

Military Sexual Trauma



“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.”

Serving in the military
is:

**Not just a job, but a
way of life.**

The concepts of:


Unlimited Liability

Universality of
Service



Salt in the Wound

- Sanctuary Trauma
- Institutional Betrayal
- Moral Injury



How can leaders contribute to creating an environment where these impacts can be reduced?

MISCONCEPTION:

Men are perpetrators and cannot experience sexual misconduct

Since joining the Canadian Armed Forces, approximately

1 in 4 women



1 in 25 men



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



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



of women



of gender
diverse people

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

MYTH: Most people who experience sexual misconduct report it and many reports are false



Who is most vulnerable?

- Unique effects of sexual misconduct on people with disabilities, women, Indigenous people, racialized minorities, religious minorities, 2SLGBTQAI+ people, and more have been explored in academic and military studies.
- 'LGBTQ2S Purge' impact on Veterans
- Young minority women of lower rank are most likely to experience sexual assault in the Regular Force

Eichler, M. & Smith-Evans, K. (2018). Gender in Veteran reintegration and transition: A scoping review. *Journal of Military, Veteran, and Family Health*, 4, 1, 5-19.

Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the CAF (SSMCAF) – Statistics Canada | Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis – Defence Research and Development Canada

Eichler M. (2016). Learning from the Deschamps Report: Why military and veteran researchers ought to pay attention to gender. *Journal of Military, Veteran, and Family Health*, 2, 1, 5-8.

Who else does MST impact?

- MST impacts not only individual members but also:
 - Family
 - Military
 - Command
 - Recruitment and retention
 - Career progression
 - Life as a veteran
 - Wider society

Principles of a trauma-informed approach



Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

Principle	Details
Assume trauma is universal	Given the high prevalence of trauma and that trauma survivors often do not disclose their trauma history, leaders should treat every team member as though they have a trauma history
Be sensitive to impact of trauma	Leaders must be aware that a team members traumatic past can be activated by experiences in the here-and-now Leaders should be aware of the practices that have a higher likelihood of being triggers and should engage in ways that will mitigate their effect
Explore with your team member the best way to view or define their experience (e.g., hurt, injured, symptomatic, rather than sick or defective)	Leaders should view team members affected by trauma as someone who has had something done to them as opposed to viewing the person affected by trauma as somehow defective or the cause of their own difficulties. Take a strengths-based approach. Acknowledge what the person affected has done in order to survive. View “symptoms” as “solutions.”
Ensure safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment	Harris and Fallot (2001) identified these five principles as essential for trauma-informed approaches. Discuss trauma-informed approaches with your own team and reflect together on some ways you can all be more trauma-informed and how this could improve team dynamics, cohesion, and even productivity.

Practical application of trauma-informed approach: Role play

Role play: Making a disclosure of military sexual trauma to a supervisor

Opening an encounter: Practical tips re: space, focus, and demeanor

Active listening: Validation, repeating back, remember, people don't recall all the details; "This was not your fault"; "I am so sorry this happened to you."

Facial and body language

Offering support: "What can I do to help you?"; "What kind of support do you need right now?"; "I don't know the answer, but I will get back to you or make sure we get you the answer"; "I will make sure you receive support."

Persons with Lived Experience

PWLEs share their lived experience of military sexual trauma and its impact.

Respectful listening with questions.

Discussed value of military service and grief at loss of service. Ability to now teach others and make change.

World Café Questions

- How do you empower bystanders?
- How can supervisors be better supported?
- How do we reconcile old decisions made that would not pass today's expectations of behaviour?

Theme 1: Perceived Effects on the Institution

- I. “Humanizing” Military Sexual Trauma
- II. A show of effort
- III. Supporting organizational readiness

“[F]or the first time in twenty-five years, I felt like the institution had heard me.”

-Study participant

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Theme 2: Effects on the Individual

- I. Giving voice to those previously silenced
- II. Validation and empowerment
- III. Tackling guilt and shame
- IV. Reclaiming identity and community
- V. Emotional cost of participation

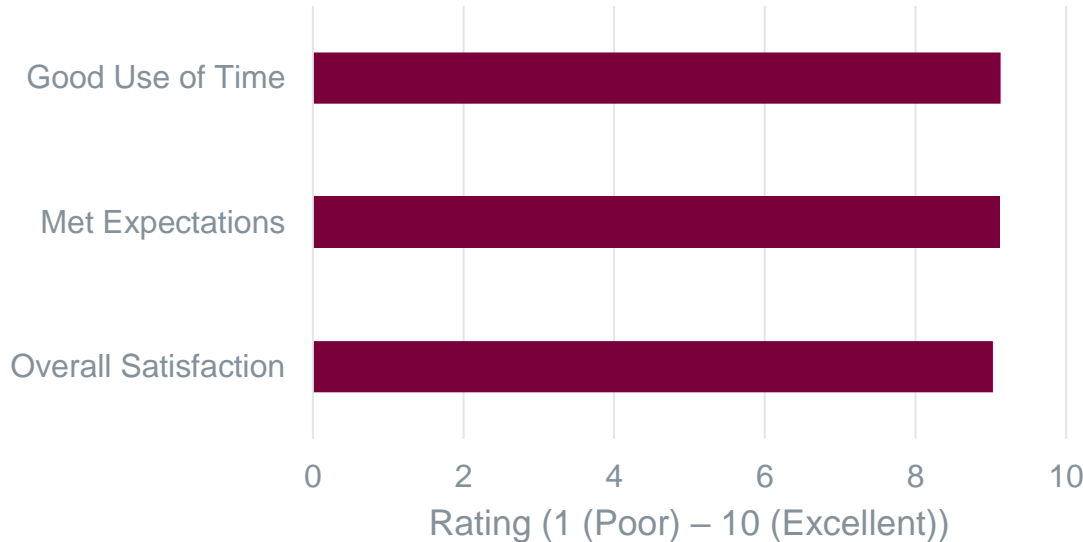
“It helps me feel unified and has helped me to start to be proud [of my service]. I’m not fully there yet [but] I’m surprised at how much my outlook has changed [...].”

-Critical Conversations study participant

Evaluation of Workshop

Participant Evaluation

N = 37



“This course surpassed my expectations. I appreciate to no end that this course was trauma informed. That it was delivered by veterans that continue to serve.”


“This was my second time and it was better than the first. I knew everyone in the room.”

Valuable Aspects of Training (Participant Responses)

- Delivered by people with lived experience who were open and authentic in sharing their experiences.
- Open discussion of ideas and experiences.
- Opportunity to practice skills (i.e., disclosures) through roleplay.

Opportunities for Improvement (Participant Responses)

- Training should be longer than a day.
- Didactic training (i.e., presentation portion) was not as effective as experiential components (i.e., group work, role-playing).
- More information regarding what to expect from the workshop would be beneficial.



What are your
key takeaways?