



Sexual Assault

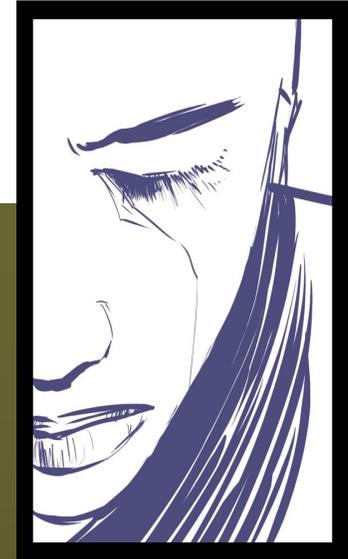
WVNG Coffey Break

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Welcome to the April 2010 edition of the WVNG Coffey Break, a monthly Wellness publication for all WV National Guard members and their families. The objective is to promote wellness, readiness and resiliency by providing information and resources on topics relevant to daily living.

Since April is Sexual Assault Awareness month, the topic is Sexual Assault. According to a 2008 report, women serving in the military today are “more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than to be killed by enemy fire.” In March 2009, a report by CBS news indicated one in three female soldiers will experience sexual assault in the military compared to one in six women in the civilian population. That same year, the Pentagon released a report stating more than 2,900 cases of sexual assaults were reported, up nearly 9 percent from the previous year. The Pentagon also acknowledged that 80 percent of rapes are never reported – making it the most under-documented crime in the military. Although the above mentioned information references female soldiers, sexual assault is not specific to the female gender. In a 2005 report in the Psychiatric Times, statistics indicated three percent of males have experienced sexual assault while serving in the military. In this month’s article we are going to define sexual assault, explore reasons for under-reporting, types of reporting, impact of sexual assault, steps to recovery, and resources. Perhaps this article does not pertain to your life situation. However, since it is an issue that impacts some of our service members, please take a few minutes to read the following article before hitting “Delete” on your computer.



**“Difficult things take a long time, impossible things a little longer.” -
Author Unknown**

The mission of the National Guard Psychological Health Program is to advocate, promote and guide National Guard members and their families by supporting psychological fitness for operational readiness. For contact information regarding the Director of Psychological Health in your state or territory or other resources, go to: www.jointservicesupport.org

Coffey Break

Break (brāk) definition
verb: To interrupt or stop
break a habit; *noun:* A respite or brief pause *taking a break.*



Sexual Assault

Sexual Assault is a crime defined as intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, physical threat, or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent. Sexual assault includes rape, nonconsensual sodomy, indecent assault (unwanted inappropriate sexual contact), or attempt to commit these acts. Sexual assault occurs without regard to gender, age, or marital status. As stated in the definition, the attacker does not have to use physical force to commit a sexual assault. The person may use intimidation or threats to make someone feel he or she can't say no. Sexual assault can occur when someone is too drunk, drugged, or unconscious to agree to sexual contact.

Reasons for Under-Reporting

Regarding the military, reasons for under-reporting are as follows:

- The belief that nothing will be done
- Fear of being ostracized or ridiculed for coming forward
- Concern about becoming the subject of gossip
- Fear that military career will be harmed

Two Types of Reporting

Restricted Reporting – This option is for victims who want to confidentially disclose the crime to specifically identified individuals and receive medical treatment and counseling without triggering the investigative criminal process.

Unrestricted Reporting – This option is for victims who want medical treatment, counseling, and an official investigation of the crime. Details regarding the incident will be limited to only those personnel who have a legitimate reason to know.

Independent Reporting – Occurs if news of the wrongdoing arises independently.

Victims are urged to contact the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) for further information regarding reporting options. Regardless of type, the priority is for an individual to be connected with resources.

Impact of Sexual Assault

We all cope with problems differently. The most important thing to know is that help from many resources is available. After an assault, a victim may feel overwhelmed by emotions such as anger, fear, or anxiety. These are common reactions to a traumatic event. Other reactions can include the following:

- Nightmares and flashbacks
- Changes in appetite
- Reduced concentration
- Feelings of shame and self-blame
- Excessive concern about security of your environment
- Mood swings
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and enjoyable activities
- Increased use of alcohol, nicotine and other drugs
- Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the incident
- Feeling sad, lonely, betrayed or hopeless about the future
- Fear of going to places that may cause disturbing memories of the incident
- Feeling numb or disconnected from others, physically and emotionally

“Despair is anger with no place to go.”

- Mignon McLaughlin



Possible Impact on Relationships

Conflicts – Sometimes the sexual assault increases the potential for conflicts between the victim and those closest to him/her. Changes in mood or behavior may occur and friends/relatives may not know how to respond. They may be afraid of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing and make things worse. On the other hand, they may not understand the impact on the victim and have unrealistic expectations on how someone should go through the healing process.

Distancing - Some sexual assault victims feel numb, depressed, or isolated from people they love. Their feelings about what happened can make it hard for them to be close or "emotionally available" to others. This reaction may make victims appear cold or unfeeling to those who care about them. Sometimes alcohol and/or drug abuse becomes a problem for a victim of sexual assault. Friends, family, or co-workers may become angry or impatient with a sexual assault victim for not being his or her "usual self," so they may withdraw from the victim or seem to punish him or her in other ways. Others may try to make the victim "snap out of it," perhaps by smothering him or her with attention and well-intentioned suggestions.

Fear of Intimacy - Sexual assault can make it harder to achieve intimacy. Some victims prefer not to be touched for awhile. This can cause a partner or spouse to feel confused, sad, angry, or hurt. A partner or spouse may also become frustrated by the rejection of their desire to be physically close to the victim. It may take time and professional help for couples to work their way through the effects of the assault and reestablish intimacy.



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Next Month's Topic: Mental Health Awareness

The best way a victim can respond to reactions like these is to be as clear as possible about what is needed from others. Sometimes it helps just to let people know their support is appreciated and how they can provide support.

Steps to Recovery

One way to feel more in control after a sexual assault is to make your own decisions about what feels comfortable at each stage of your recovery.

You may want to consider making choices about the following:

Everyday routines – Some routines provide structure in a difficult time. Others find it more helpful to cut back on some activities and take things a little slower for a while.

Reporting option – As mentioned previously, the service member has two options regarding reporting. In order to preserve the right to choose what kind of a report is made, the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator for your installation must be contacted.

Medical care – A health care provider can treat medical conditions that may have resulted from the assault. It is also important to be tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Women may want to be tested for pregnancy. In addition, a sexual assault forensic examination can provide important evidence that can be used if charges are brought against the attacker. This kind of exam may not always be necessary, but it is an important consideration if you intend to participate in the investigation and court proceedings.

Mental health care - Research studies show that people usually have better and quicker recoveries when they seek counseling. Most treatments are solution focused and can speed improvement in coping. Counseling may reduce the risk of developing PTSD or another health condition after an assault. Support groups are also an option.

Legal action - Some people have a strong desire to avoid the loss of privacy involved with facing an attacker in court. Others find that participating in the investigation and subsequent legal action helps them recover because prosecution may keep the perpetrator from hurting others. The Sexual Assault Response Coordinator and/or Victim Advocate can assist in this process by providing guidance and resources.

Additional

Recommendations:

- Review your safety network. Walk or ride in the company of others. Arrange to have telephone check-ins with designated people so that they know you got home safely. Ask a trusted friend or relative to stay with you for awhile, or stay with one of them if that makes you feel safer.
- Take a self-defense class. The skills taught in self-defense classes can help you feel more in control. The workouts in these classes are also good for relieving stress. Connect with trusted friends or family members who can provide support.
- Consider meditation or yoga to help reduce stress. You might also set aside extra time for hobbies or activities. This can distract you from unpleasant thoughts and help to ease any stress you feel.
- Commanders play a critical role in the system. Their attitude and support may influence a guard member's decision to seek assistance. In addition, when they are not supportive, personnel under their command may have less information about sexual assault and prevention and response and less access to remedies.



Resources:**Sexual Assault Response Coordinators-**

CPT Bridge Saunders – 304-561-6681 (office); 304-541-0573 (mobile)

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“ I may not be there yet, but I’m closer than I was yesterday” -
Author Unknown

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Feedback on this article is welcomed. As always, if you have a concern about yourself or a family member, feel free to contact me. Services are free and confidential. I look forward to hearing from you. So.....Step Back, Take a Coffey Break, and Drink to Your Health!



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