

# Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Monday, November 28, 2016

---

About 960 Regular Force members of the Canadian Armed Forces, or 1.7%, reported being victims of sexual assault during the previous 12 months either in the military workplace or in situations involving military members, Department of National Defence employees or contractors. Sexual assault includes unwanted sexual touching, sexual attacks and sexual activity to which the victim is unable to consent (see note to readers for key concepts and definitions).

Female Regular Force members were four times more likely than males to report being sexually assaulted in the past 12 months (4.8% compared with 1.2%). In total, this represented approximately 380 women and 570 men.

Among those serving in the Primary Reserve, which predominantly consists of part-time members, 2.6% reported that they were victims of sexual assault in the past 12 months. Female Primary Reserve members (8.2%) were more likely than their male (1.4%) counterparts to report having been victims of sexual assault in the past 12 months.

When measuring sexual assault in the general population, incidents are not limited to those that occur in the workplace or involve co-workers. That said, the prevalence of sexual assault is lower among the general working population than in the Regular Force and the Primary Reserve. Among working Canadians, 0.9% reported being victims of sexual assault in any situation.

Results from the 2016 Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, which surveyed male and female members of both the Regular Force and the Primary Reserve in Canada, are now available. Findings from this survey are included in the publication [Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016](#), and *Infographics* presenting an overview of results are available for the [Regular Force](#) and the [Primary Reserve](#). Results are generally consistent with previous research conducted in the military context in Canada and in other countries, which has found that women in the military are at greater risk than men of being victims of sexual assault.

## Majority of incidents of sexual assault involve unwanted touching

The most common form of sexual assault was unwanted sexual touching, with 1.5% of Regular Force members stating that they were victims. Other forms of sexual assault, sexual attacks (0.3%) and sexual activity to which the victim was unable to consent (0.2%), were less common. A similar breakdown was also observed among members of the Primary Reserve.

Regardless of the type of sexual assault, women in the Regular Force were more likely than men to have been victims in the past 12 months. Specifically, women were four times more likely than men to experience unwanted sexual touching (4.0% versus 1.1%), five times more likely to be sexually attacked (0.9% versus 0.2%), and six times more likely to be subjected to sexual activity to which they were unable to consent (0.7% versus 0.1%).

Just over one in ten (12%) Regular Force members who were victims of sexual assault stated that they were victims of more than one type of sexual assault in the past 12 months, while 77% stated that the only form they experienced was unwanted sexual touching.

## Reporting of sexual assault to authorities

Almost one in four (23%) victims of sexual assault in the past 12 months reported at least one incident of sexual assault to someone in authority, most often their military supervisor (20%). Less than 1 in 10 (7%) reported their victimization to the Military Police or the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service.



In instances where sexual assault took more severe forms, victims were more likely to report to military police. While 5% of those who were victims of unwanted sexual touching reported an incident to police, just over one in five of those who were sexually attacked (22%) or subjected to sexual activity to which they could not consent because they were drugged, intoxicated or manipulated (21%) reported at least once incident to police.

Among those who did not report their sexual assault to the authorities, resolving it on their own was the most common reason given for not reporting (43% of women and 41% of men). Women who were sexually assaulted were more likely (35%) than men (14%) to state that they did not report the victimization to anyone because they were afraid of negative consequences or because they had concerns about the formal complaint process (18% versus 7%). Men were more likely than women (40% versus 23%) to consider the behaviour not serious enough to report.

### **Female victims more likely to identify supervisor or higher-ranking personnel as perpetrator**

Women who were victims of sexual assault in the past 12 months were most likely to identify their supervisor or someone of a higher rank as the perpetrator of the assault (49%). In contrast, male victims most commonly identified a peer or peers as the person(s) responsible (56%) for the assault.

A smaller proportion of victims of sexual assault (6%) stated that the perpetrator was an intimate partner (dating partner, spouse or common-law partner) who was also a Canadian Armed Forces member or Department of National Defence employee or contractor, while 8% stated that the perpetrator was a stranger. These proportions were similar for men and women.

### **Sexual assault during military career**

In addition to asking about their experiences of sexual assault in the past 12 months, members were asked about sexual assault over the course of their military career. Overall, more than one-quarter (27.3%) of women reported having been victims of sexual assault at least once since joining the Canadian Armed Forces, significantly higher than the proportion of men (3.8%). As was the case among those who were victims in the past 12 months, unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced.

### **Inappropriate sexualized and discriminatory behaviours**

Beyond sexual assault, the study also explored a number of inappropriate sexualized and discriminatory behaviours, which can contribute to a broader sexualized culture within the workplace. Almost four in five (79%) members of the Regular Force saw, heard or personally experienced inappropriate sexualized behaviour during the past 12 months, which included inappropriate verbal or non-verbal communication, sexually explicit materials, unwanted contact or suggested sexual relationships (see note to readers).

Sexual jokes were the most common type of inappropriate sexualized behaviour, witnessed or experienced by 76% of Regular Force members. This was followed by inappropriate sexual comments (39%) and inappropriate discussion about sex life (34%).

One in three (34%) Regular Force members saw, heard or personally experienced behaviour that was discriminatory on the basis of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Stereotyping based on sex (that is, suggestions that an individual does not act the way a person of their sex is supposed to act) was the most common type of discriminatory behaviour witnessed in the workplace in the past 12 months, with 22% of Regular Force members reporting this behaviour.

---

## About one in five Regular Force members personally targeted by inappropriate sexualized or discriminatory behaviours

About one in five (17%) Regular Force members reported being the targets of inappropriate sexualized or discriminatory behaviour either in the military workplace or involving other military members within the past 12 months. Women were twice as likely as men (31% versus 15%) to report being personally targeted by these types of behaviour.

Regardless of the specific type of inappropriate sexualized or discriminatory behaviours, women were more likely than men to have personally experienced them at least once in the past 12 months. Women were considerably more likely than men to experience unwanted sexual attention (15% versus 2%) or repeated pressure from the same person for dates or sexual relationships (6% versus 0.4%).

Regular Force members generally considered discriminatory behaviours to be more offensive than sexualized behaviours. About 6 in 10 of those who witnessed (or experienced) someone being insulted, mistreated, ignored or excluded because of their sex (63%), sexual orientation (62%) or gender identity (58%) believed that this behaviour was offensive.

The proportion who considered sexualized behaviours to be offensive ranged from 10% among those who witnessed or experienced sexual jokes, to 51% of those who witnessed or experienced the offering of workplace benefits in exchange for sexual relationships. Additionally, for each type of behaviour measured, a greater proportion of women than men considered them to be offensive.

## Perceptions of the response of the Canadian Armed Forces to sexual misconduct

Despite the occurrence of inappropriate sexualized and discriminatory behaviour within the Canadian Armed Forces, most members had positive perceptions of the way sexual misconduct is or would be addressed in their unit. About 8 in 10 members strongly agreed that complaints about inappropriate sexual behavior are (or would be) taken seriously (81%) and that this behaviour is not tolerated (78%) in their current unit. Male Regular Force members (82%) were somewhat more likely than their female counterparts (74%) to strongly agree that complaints are or would be taken seriously and that inappropriate sexual behaviour is not tolerated in their unit (79% versus 72%).

While most Regular Force members reported believing that inappropriate sexual behaviour is not tolerated and is taken seriously in their current unit, 36% of men and 51% of women reported believing that inappropriate sexual behaviour is a problem within the Canadian Armed Forces as a whole. Those who were victims of sexual assault or who were targeted by inappropriate sexualized or discriminatory behaviour within the past 12 months were more likely to believe that inappropriate sexual behaviour is a problem in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Members were also asked about *Operation Honour*, which was implemented in August 2015 and is a Canadian Armed Forces-wide program designed to end inappropriate sexual behaviour in the workplace and provide support to members who have been affected. Nearly all (98%) Regular Force members stated that they were aware of *Operation Honour*. Overall, one-third (32%) of Regular Force members believed that *Operation Honour* will be very or extremely effective, 37% believed that it will be moderately effective, and 30% believed that it will only be slightly effective or not effective at all.

**Table 1**  
**Sexual assault of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Regular Force members in the past 12 months and since joining the CAF, by sex and type of sexual assault, 2016**

	sexual attacks		unwanted sexual touching		sexual activity where unable to consent		total sexual assault <sup>1,2</sup>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>In the past 12 months</b>								
Women	70	0.9*	320	4.0*	60	0.7*	380	4.8*
Men <sup>3</sup>	80	0.2	520	1.1	60	0.1	570	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>1.7</b>
<b>Since joining the CAF<sup>4,5</sup></b>								
Women	760	9.8*	1,890	24.0*	690	8.7*	2,120	27.3*
Men <sup>3</sup>	260	0.5	1,620	3.4	350	0.7	1,810	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>3,520</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>1,040</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>3,940</b>	<b>7.1</b>

\* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

1. Includes sexual assaults in the military workplace and outside the military workplace involving military members (CAF or foreign) and/or Department of National Defence employees or contractors.
2. Total does not equal the sum of the categories of sexual assault, as categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents were asked to indicate each type of sexual assault they experienced; total reflects the number of Regular Force members who reported being the victim of at least one type.
3. Reference category.
4. Includes incidents which occurred in the past 12 months. May include incidents that occurred since joining the CAF but prior to joining the Regular Forces (that is, while in the Primary Reserves).
5. Because of age restrictions on when an individual can join the CAF (16 years of age with parental consent) as well as a mandatory retirement at the age of 60, may include incidents which occurred as early as 1972.

**Note(s):** All estimates have been rounded to the nearest 10. Estimates are rounded independently; therefore, the sum of the rounded categories may not equal the rounded total. Percent calculations are based on unrounded estimates and exclude missing responses. Total includes a small number of respondents whose sex was not stated.

**Source(s):** Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016.

**Table 2**  
**Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Regular Force members seeing, hearing, or experiencing targeted sexual or discriminatory behaviours in the past 12 months, by type of behaviour, 2016**

	Seen, heard or experienced			Personally experienced <sup>1</sup>		
	Men <sup>2</sup>	Women	Total	Men <sup>2</sup>	Women	Total
	percent					
<b>Inappropriate verbal or non-verbal communication</b>	<b>77.9</b>	<b>81.0*</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>26.1*</b>	<b>15.1</b>
Sexual jokes	75.6	78.3*	76.0	11.9	18.9*	12.9
Unwanted sexual attention	16.9	27.4*	18.4	2.0	14.9*	3.8
Inappropriate sexual comments	38.1	44.7*	39.0	4.1	12.2*	5.2
Inappropriate discussion about sex life	32.6	40.0*	33.7	5.4	13.2*	6.5
<b>Sexually explicit materials</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>4.1*</b>	<b>2.5</b>
Displaying, showing, or sending sexually explicit messages or materials	12.7	12.7	12.7	2.2	3.9*	2.4
Taking and/or posting inappropriate or sexually suggestive photos or videos of any CAF members, without consent	3.2	4.3*	3.3	0.3	0.4*	0.3
<b>Physical contact or sexual relations</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>25.0*</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>15.6*</b>	<b>5.3</b>
Indecent exposure or inappropriate display of body parts	6.6	6.4	6.6	1.3	2.0*	1.4
Repeated pressure from the same person for dates or sexual relationships	2.7	8.2*	3.5	0.4	5.6*	1.1
Unwelcome physical contact or getting too close	8.8	20.0*	10.4	2.6	13.2*	4.1
Offering workplace benefit for engaging in sexual activity or being mistreated for not engaging in sexual activity	1.6	1.8	1.6	0.2	0.9*	0.3
<b>Discrimination on the basis of sex</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>42.2*</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>16.0*</b>	<b>5.4</b>
Suggestions that people do not act like a man or woman is supposed to act	20.9	28.2*	22.0	3.0	9.6*	3.9
Someone being insulted/mistreated/ignored/excluded because of their sex	9.3	23.6*	11.3	0.9	11.0*	2.3
Comments that people are either not good at a particular job or should be prevented from having a particular job because of their sex	16.0	27.4*	17.6	0.8	9.9*	2.1
<b>Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>16.3*</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>1.8*</b>	<b>0.7</b>
Someone being insulted/mistreated/ignored/excluded because of their sexual orientation or assumed sexual orientation	7.3	13.6*	8.2	0.5	1.7*	0.7
Someone being insulted/mistreated/ignored/excluded because they are (or assumed to be) transgender	4.7	8.7*	5.3	0.1	0.4*	0.2
<b>Total sexualized or discriminatory behaviour</b>	<b>79.4</b>	<b>83.8*</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>31.4*</b>	<b>17.2</b>

\* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

1. Include behaviours which the respondent indicated were directed at them personally. Percent calculations include those who saw or heard the behaviour but did not know if it was directed at them personally.

2. Reference category.

**Note(s):** Includes behaviours which occurred in the military workplace or outside the military workplace involving military members (CAF or foreign) and/or Department of National Defence employees or contractors. Percent calculations exclude missing responses. Total includes a small number of respondents whose sex was not stated.

**Source(s):** Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016.

## Note to readers

This report is based on results from the Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces conducted by Statistics Canada in 2016 on behalf of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

From April to June 2016, active Regular Force and Primary Reserve members were invited to complete a voluntary survey conducted under the authority of the Statistics Act asking about their experiences and perceptions of inappropriate sexualized behaviour, discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and sexual assault within the CAF. This included witnessing or experiencing these types of behaviours within the military workplace, or outside the military workplace but involving other military members or Department of Defence employees or contractors.

Responses were received from over 43,000 active members of the CAF, including members of the Regular Force and Primary Reserve. Regular Force members had a higher response rate (61%) than those in the Primary Reserve (36%). As with all Statistics Canada surveys, respondents were informed that their individual responses would be protected under the Statistics Act.

As of February 2016, women accounted for 15% of the CAF.

### Regular Force and Primary Reserve

The analysis focuses largely on Regular Force members, who comprise the majority of the CAF. Members of the Regular Force serve Canada on a full-time basis when and where needed. Unlike the Regular Force, the Primary Reserve is predominantly composed of part-time members who serve in community-level units located throughout Canada and may consent to serve full time for a range of employment within the CAF, including operations for periods ranging from weeks to years.

### Military workplace

For the purposes of this survey, the military workplace was defined as anywhere on a base, wing or ship, including barracks and messes, as well as deployments, temporary duty/attached posting and training courses. The military workplace also included sanctioned events (events approved by the Chain of Command or someone in authority within a unit), such as parades, mess dinners, unit parties, unit sports activities, adventure training or course parties.

### Behaviours included in the definition of sexual misconduct

The development of the content of the survey questionnaire involved a review of international survey instruments designed and implemented to measure the prevalence of sexual misconduct in the context of the military environment. Furthermore, survey content was developed to ensure comparability with that of other Statistics Canada surveys, namely the General Social Survey on Victimization. This was particularly the case with the measurement of sexual assault.

Once the questions were developed, they underwent qualitative testing to ensure that respondents could comprehend the questions and to ensure that they were meaningful and would yield valid results.

Qualitative testing in the form of one-on-one interviews were conducted with male and female Regular Force and Primary Reserve members of different ages, ranks and environmental commands (for example, Air Force, Army or Navy).

### Behaviours measured by the survey were:

#### Sexual assault

- **Sexual attack:** Has anyone forced you or attempted to force you into any unwanted sexual activity, by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way?
- **Unwanted sexual touching:** Has anyone touched you against your will in any sexual way? This includes unwanted touching or grabbing, kissing or fondling?
- **Sexual activity where you were unable to consent:** Has anyone subjected you to a sexual activity to which you were not able to consent? This includes being drugged, intoxicated, manipulated or forced in ways other than physically.

#### Inappropriate sexual behaviours

##### Inappropriate verbal or non-verbal communication

- Sexual jokes
- Unwanted sexual attention
- Inappropriate sexual comments

- *Inappropriate discussion about sex life*

**Sexually explicit materials**

- *Displaying, showing or sending sexually explicit materials*
- *Taking and/or posting inappropriate or sexually suggestive photos or videos of any CAF members without consent*

**Physical contact or sexual relations**

- *Indecent exposure or inappropriate display of body parts*
- *Repeated pressure from the same person for dates or sexual relationships*
- *Unwelcome physical contact or getting too close*
- *Offering workplace benefits for engaging in sexual activity or being mistreated for not engaging in sexual activity*

**Discriminatory behaviours**

**Discrimination on the basis of sex**

- *Suggestions that people do not act like a man or woman is supposed to act*
- *Someone being insulted, mistreated, ignored or excluded because of their sex*
- *Comments that people are either not good at a particular job or should be prevented from having a particular job because of their sex*

**Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity**

- *Someone being insulted, mistreated, ignored or excluded because of their sexual orientation or assumed sexual orientation*
- *Someone being insulted, mistreated, ignored or excluded because they are (or are assumed to be) transgender*

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5235](#).**

The publication *Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016* ([85-603-X](#)) is now available.

The Infographic "[Overview of results from the Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016: Regular Force](#)," which is part of *Statistics Canada — Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)), is also now available.

The Infographic "[Overview of results from the Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2016: Primary Reserve](#)," which is part of *Statistics Canada — Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)), is also now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).