

Report shows women in UK military facing bullying, sexual assault



?British female soldier

London, October 27 (RHC)-- New research reveals that women in the British military are suffering widespread emotional bullying, sexual harassment, physical assault and long-lasting mental health problems.

The study, recently published in the BMJ Military Health journal, found that those most likely to have experienced such treatment were younger personnel.

Of the 750 female veterans surveyed, 22.5% said they had been sexually harassed, while 5.1% said they had been sexually assaulted. Emotional bullying was inflicted on 22.7% of those women, while 3.3% said they had been physically assaulted.

The study found that cases involving women in pain or fatigued due to the mental distress causes were "significantly" linked to sexual harassment. The researchers said that sexual assault was also leading to alcohol problems, while emotional bullying was triggering anxiety, depression and loneliness

The study by the University of Oxford, King's College London and the charity Combat Stress also said that "even women holding higher power positions may be at risk of victimization from their own superiors."

Since women are in the minority in the military, "it cannot be ruled out that victimization of women holding higher ranks may be perpetrated by their own peers as well as those in lower ranks."

The team of British-based scientists said that all types of bad treatment had left the women at higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, and different types of adversity had had specific impacts on women's mental health and well-being.

Approximately 16,500 women currently serve in the UK military. The researchers called for military women to be urgently provided with more support. It is very difficult to measure the true extent of violence against women as most incidences of sexual assault go unreported.

"Many women do not report adverse service experiences due to fear of the consequences of doing so and may continue to suffer from increased mental health distress during and after military service," the study says.

"It is essential to consider whether current reporting procedures may not provide sufficient confidentiality to encourage women to report adverse experiences and more appropriate disclosing procedures should be considered."

The researchers said that it might be worth considering whether organizational and leadership changes could be made to better protect military women. "Furthermore, it is essential to consider whether existing support is adequate to support the mental health needs of women who experienced military adversity," the report said.

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