

Experts: Males Also Are Victims of Sexual Assault

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TYSON'S CORNER, Va. --

Experts urged Army leaders to reach out to male victims of sexual assault, noting people should not view sexual violence as a crime perpetrated exclusively against women.

Jim Hopper, a psychologist and researcher, and Russell Strand, a retired Criminal Investigative Service special agent, spoke about an aspect of sexual violence not often discussed: sexual assaults on men.

Hopper and Strand spoke at the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response Program Summit held here yesterday.

The number of males sexually assaulted in the military is sobering, the experts said.

"[About] 10,800 men are sexually assaulted every year in the military," Strand said. "[Roughly] 8,000 women are assaulted."

Few military males report being victims of sexual assault, he said. Only 1,134 men reported attacks -- roughly 13 percent of those attacked. With women, 39 percent reported attacks.

Reluctance in Reporting Assaults

So about 87 percent of men attacked are not reporting it and "these are real men in real pain," Hopper said. The pain is compounded by shame. Being sexually assaulted brings additional feelings of shame to a man because it works against the ideal of what it means to be a man, he said.

And it brings fear. “There’s fear of those memories, there’s fear of being violated, there’s fear that someone might know what happened to them,” Hopper said.

Men who have been sexually assaulted believe they are not worthy of respect, Strand said.

The men who are assaulted are overwhelmingly heterosexual and so are their assailants, the officials said.

“Most people who sexually assault adult men are heterosexuals,” Hopper said. “And those same heterosexual men who are assaulting men are often the same men assaulting women.”

Fear of Being Ostracized

Many males won’t get help, he said, because they feel they won’t be believed, understood or supported.

“Part of that is they know most people don’t expect men to be assaulted, that this can’t really happen to ‘a real man,’” Hopper said.

They are also afraid of their friends or teammates finding out what happened to them, he said. They believe they will be looked at as less than a man, that they will be ostracized and shunned. And, many victims see the assault as the death-knell to their careers.

The military services need to begin reaching out to male victims of sexual assault, the experts said. A safe, anonymous helpline could be the beginning for getting many of these men the help they need, they added.

The services also need to market programs aimed at commanders, health care professionals, police investigators and prosecutors, informing them of the problem and assets available to help their service members, the experts said.

(Follow Jim Garamone on Twitter: @garamoneDoDNews)