

## Male rape survivors tackle military assault in tough-guy culture

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Updated 14 minutes ago

NBCNews.com

Amid the legislation and indignation sparked by the military's sexual abuse crisis, male rape survivors are stepping forward to remind officials that men are targeted more often than women inside a tough-guy culture that, they say, routinely deems male victims as "liars and trouble makers."

The Pentagon estimates that last year 13,900 of the 1.2 million men on active duty endured sexual assault while 12,100 of the 203,000 women in uniform experienced the same crime — or 38 men per day versus 33 women per day. Yet the Defense Department also acknowledges "male survivors report at much lower rates than female survivors."

"As a culture, we've somewhat moved past the idea that a female wanted this trauma to occur, but we haven't moved past that for male survivors," said Brian Lewis, a rape survivor who served in the Navy. "In a lot of areas of the military, men are still viewed as having wanted it or of being homosexual. That's not correct at all. It's a crime of power and control."

"But also, you're instantly viewed as a liar and a troublemaker (when a man reports a sex crime), and there's the notion that you have abandoned your shipmates, that you took a crap all over your shipmates, that you misconstrued their horseplay," he added.

Lewis, who was raped by a male superior officer aboard a Navy ship in 2000, spoke Thursday at a press conference introducing [a bill](#) that seeks to strip serious sex assaults from the military's chain of command. At that event, he said: "Too often male survivors are ignored and marginalized."

"The biggest reasons men don't come forward (with sex assault reports) are the fear of retaliation (from fellow troops), the fear of being viewed in a weaker light, and the fact there are very few, if any, services for male survivors," Lewis told NBC News.

### Men in the spotlight

All sexual assault response coordinators within the military are instructed to provide "gender-responsive, culturally competent and recovery-oriented" resources, said Cynthia O. Smith, a Pentagon spokeswoman.

"Based on that guidance, each of the services customizes its training and implementation specific to their service," Smith said. DOD offers a 24/7 "[safe helpline](#)" providing anonymous victim support, and its staffers "have been trained to assist male victims."

Still, the Defense Department acknowledges it must do more to help male victims.

"A focus of our prevention efforts over the next several months is specifically geared towards male survivors and will include (learning) why male survivors report at much lower rates than

female survivors, and determining the unique support and assistance male survivors need,” Smith said.

The Pentagon “has reached out to organizations supporting male survivors for assistance and information to help inform our way ahead,” she added.

“I applaud that stand on behalf of male survivors,” Lewis said. “However, I would be interested in hearing what organizations they are partnering with considering there are none especially geared for male survivors of military sexual trauma.”

### **'Critical' part of process**

At Protect Our Defenders, a leading advocacy group for male and female service members who've survived sexual assaults, president Nancy Parrish said she would welcome the chance to offer guidance to the Pentagon as it develops better programs to support male sex assault victims.

“As of yet, we have not been asked to participate in such an endeavor,” Parrish said. “For the success of the military efforts to end the ongoing epidemic of male and female military sexual assaults, it is critical that survivors are part of the process.”

An [annual DOD report](#) on sexual abuse, released May 7, described separate attacks on two male soldiers who were shoved down by fellow troops then sodomized with a plastic bottle or broom handle.

Next month, a documentary called “Justice Denied” — which explores sexual assaults against men in the military — premieres at the Albuquerque Film and Media Experience.

Assaults on men have been “carefully hidden from the public and covered up,” not only by the victims themselves but also by superiors within the chain of command, contends the film’s producer and co-director Geri Lynn Weinstein-Matthews. “It’s time for men to have their voices heard. It’s time for them to stand up against these vicious attacks and against the deception of some of their commanding officers.”